



West Midlands Combined Authority

Housing & Land Delivery Board

Wednesday 16 November 2022 at 10.00 am

Minutes

Present

Councillor Mike Bird (Chair)
Councillor Adrienne Fitzgerald
Councillor Andy Mackiewicz
Councillor Charn Padda
Councillor Stephen Simkins
Jo Nugent
Suzanne Ward
Councillor David Welsh

Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
Cannock Chase District Council
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
City of Wolverhampton Council
Homes England
Environment Agency
Coventry City Council

In Attendance

Item No.

30. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Butlin (Warwickshire), Sarah Middleton (Black Country LEP) Councillor Overton (Telford & Wrekin), Kevin Rogers (WM Housing Association Partnership) and Dawn Ward (Greater Birmingham & Solihull LEP).

31. Notification of Substitutes (if any)

Councillor Gakhal (City of Wolverhampton Council) had nominated Councillor Simkins to attend the meeting in person on his behalf.

32. Minutes - 5 October 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 October 2022 were agreed as a true record.

33. Investment Zones & Devolution Deal : Update

The board considered a report of the Executive Director of Housing, Property and Regeneration that provided an update on the development of Investment Zone proposals in the West Midlands and the subsequent progress made following the submission of Expressions of Interest on 14 October 2022.

The Head of Strategy & Analysis, Rob Lamond, summarised the proposals and reported on the lack of clarity with regards to Investment Zones and Levelling Up following the many changes in Government and to Government policy in recent weeks.

Councillor Simkins commented on the intensive work undertaken by

Wolverhampton for the Investment Zones bid instead of other planned work and reported that he did not want the work to be abortive work as this would impact on the authority and partners.

The Executive Director of Housing, Property and Regeneration, Gareth Bradford concurred it had been a very intense nine days to submit the bid but reassured Councillor Simkins that the extensive evidence produced for the Investment Zones submission would enable the WMCA to utilise the data to unlock Government funding and put the region in a very strong position working with local authorities.

Councillor Mackiewicz reported of the need to give consideration to the key issues of employment (getting more people into work/utilising existing resources) and productivity (linked to other policies such as AMC etc.) if the Investment Zones are taken forward.

The Chair reported the employment issue was a 'two-way street'; the Government was not tackling the issue and as a result many people were better-off not working as a consequence of the benefit system. He proposed the Mayor of the West Midlands write to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Homes & Communities seeking certainty on Investment Zones.

The board agreed the Executive Director of Housing, Property and Regeneration requests the Mayor writes to Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Homes & Communities seeking clarity on Investment Zones so the region can be catalyst for economic growth.

The Executive Director of Housing, Property and Regeneration also advised the board that the WMCA was also continuing to lobby Government for flexibility on devolved housing and land funds to progress the difficult to deliver sites as well as looking at levelling up areas that were not included in the Investment Zone proposals.

Resolved:

1. The submission of the WMCA's Expression of Interest for Investment Zones on behalf of the region, submitted via the Government's online portal by the deadline of 14 October 2022 be noted;
2. The collaborative approach and collective effort of local authority teams and WMCA in developing Investment Zone proposals be noted and
3. The next steps for Investment Zone proposals and the Trailblazer Devolution Deal outlined in Section 5 of the report be noted.

34. Housing & Land Portfolio Funds : Update

The board considered a report of the Executive Director of Housing, Property and Regeneration that provided an update on the devolved Housing & Land funds in the region and a reminder of the purpose and requirements of these funds devolved in the region and the restrictions that come with them.

The Head of Strategy and Analysis, Rob Lamond, presented details of the Housing and Land Funds, the Housing and Land Fund conditions as applied by HM Government, applications for funding and performance updates.

The Executive Director of Housing, Property and Regeneration, Gareth Bradford explained the main reason for schemes not being taken forward was because they cannot prove market failure rather than the intervention rate and would look at providing a training session for board members that explains this in further detail.

Councillor Simkins reported on the need to deliver the worst sites first and to look at how local authorities could work with housing associations as arms-length companies to deliver new housing as well as improving the collaboration between this board and the Investment Board.

Gareth Bradford concurred with the need to give visibility to this board on housing/land fund schemes approved by Investment Board and undertook to provide the information going forward. With regards to the difficult to deliver sites, he reported some difficult schemes have been unlocked and would look to highlight to the board how the prioritisation process is applied to schemes in the pipeline including the difficult sites. He agreed there was a need for more partnership funding to deliver schemes similar to The Marches.

In relation to an enquiry from Councillor Padda as to whether there is a mechanism in place for prioritising housing where the need is greatest, such as Sandwell, the Chair advised there was a lack of available land in Sandwell and so consideration needs to be given to obtaining redundant land and office space and looking at permitted development to provide meaningful accommodation.

The Chair asked the Executive Director Housing, Property and Regeneration to explore the permitted development route and look to extend the Help to Own scheme to generate more housing for the region. He also asked that the board receive information on a quarterly basis that identifies the housing intervention rate for approved schemes and also those projects that do not qualify for funding.

Resolved:

1. The update on devolved Housing and Land Funds secured by WMCA since 2018 be noted;
2. The conditions set by HM Government relating to regional deployment of these funds be noted and
3. The performance reporting mechanisms in place for WMC Boards and HM Government audiences be noted.

The board considered a report of the Executive Director of Housing, Property and Regeneration that provided an update on progress in developing the Future Homes Strategy and an aligned technical standard.

Projects Officer, Rachel Atterbury, outlined the report and in particular the work being undertaken to develop a future homes technical standard.

In relation to an enquiry from Suzanne Ward as to whether water usage would be considered for housing development as well as materials, Rachel Atterbury confirmed this would be picked up with the carbon consultants as part of a 2025 route map.

[Councillor Mackiewicz declared a non-pecuniary interest in this item in working directly with a modular building company and working with another contractor]

Resolved:

1. The work to date to develop a Future Homes Strategy including specialist consultancy support and input from the Future Homes Taskforce and local authority partners across the region be noted be noted;
2. The proposed content of the emerging strategy, the research findings to date and the technical issues summarised in the report be noted;
3. The proposed technical basis of an aligned WMCA Future Homes Standards be endorsed.

36. Plan for Growth : Update

The board considered a report of the Executive Director for Housing, Property and Regeneration on the WMCA's Plan for Growth produced by the Economy, Skills and Communities Directorate that was launched July 2022 and highlighted the opportunities for alignment with the work of the Housing and Land Delivery Board.

The Head of Economic Development, Paul Edwards, presented the report and outline the focus of the Plan for Growth including how the plan would be used and the opportunities for aligning workstream with those areas where there is potential for high value growth. He reported that he would welcome dialogue with local authorities and partners on employment land, placemaking and town centre regeneration.

The Chair reported that the WMCA needs to look at where it can make a difference and in particular considered re-purposing of town centres/ regeneration needs to be top of the agenda.

Councillor Simkins reported of the need for a pipeline of projects that are taken forward with local authorities.

Gareth Bradford advised that the WMCA's Investment Prospectus could help in this regard.

Resolved:

1. The purpose and content of the West Midlands Plan for Growth be noted and
2. The WMCA's Economic Growth Board identified the need for interventions to be aligned and streamlined to catalyse additional growth in key clusters be noted.

37. Exclusion of the Press and Public

Resolved:

That in accordance with Section 100A4 of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items of business as they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information relating to the business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

38. Housing & Land Fund Dashboards

The board considered the Housing and Land dashboards that provided an updates on the Brownfield Housing Fund, National Competitive Fund and Land Fund along with a summary of all the funds.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

The meeting ended at 11.22 am.