



Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Monday 10 July 2023 at 10.00 am

Minutes

Present

Councillor Cathy Bayton (Chair)	Association of Black Country Authorities
Councillor Naeem Akhtar	Coventry City Council
Councillor Philip Bateman MBE	City of Wolverhampton Council
Councillor Andrew Burrow	Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Ian Kettle	Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Nigel Lumby	Shropshire Non-Constituent Local Authorities
Councillor Emma Marshall	Worcestershire Non-Constituent Local Authorities
Councillor Paul Moore	Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Jamie Tennant	Birmingham City Council
Amanda Tomlinson	Business Representative
Councillor Vera Waters	Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council

In Attendance

Dan Essex	Governance Services Manager
Clare Hatton	Interim Director of Employment & Skills
Lyndsey Roberts	Statutory Scrutiny Officer
Laura Shoaf	Chief Executive

Item Title
No.

130. Appointment of Chair

The committee noted that at the WMCA Board meeting held on 9 June 2023, Councillor Cathy Bayton had been appointed as the Chair of this committee for 2023/24.

131. Appointment of Vice-Chair

The appointment of Vice-Chair was the responsibility of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and had to be a member from a different political group to the Mayor. The Chair proposed that Councillor Naeem Akhtar be appointed as Vice-Chair of this committee for 2023/24.

132. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Lauren Rainbow (Birmingham) and Councillor Ken Wood (Birmingham).

133. Chair's Remarks

(a) New Members

The Chair welcomed new members to the first meeting of the year and thanked former and returning members of the committee for their work and contributions during last year.

(b) Councillor Ian Brookfield

The Chair expressed her sadness at the recent death of Councillor Ian Brookfield, Leader of the City of Wolverhampton Council, and member of the WMCA Board. Members of the committee observed a minute's silence in his memory.

134. Terms of Reference

The committee considered its Terms of Reference.

Resolved:

- (1) The committee's Terms of Reference be noted.

135. Minutes - 13 March 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 March 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

136. Matters Arising

(a) Site Visit to Green Square Accord

In preparation for the next meeting of the committee on 4 September, the Statutory Scrutiny Officer agreed to arrange a site visit to Green Square Accord's LoCal Homes facility in Walsall.

(b) Grant Register

At the last meeting, it was reported that the Mayor and Portfolio Lead Members were in dialogue as to how the Social Housing Fund of £14.9m would be devolved to local authorities. The Chief Executive agreed to provide a further update at the next meeting of the committee.

137. Scrutiny within the WMCA

The committee received an introduction to Overview & Scrutiny within the WMCA that was supported by a joint presentation from the Governance Services Manager and Statutory Scrutiny Officer.

The presentation included information on the overview and scrutiny function, pre-development and pre-decision scrutiny, the different ways in which scrutiny could be undertaken, the power of call-in, the difference between local and combined authority scrutiny, work programming and the role and expectations of a scrutiny member.

With the announcement of the WMCA's Deeper Devolution Deal, the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill and the forthcoming additional powers and responsibilities, the committee highlighted the importance of governance and accountability and the important role of scrutiny within the decision-making process.

Resolved:

(1) That the introduction to Overview & Scrutiny within the WMCA be noted.

138. An Introduction to the West Midlands Combined Authority

The committee received a presentation from the Chief Executive on the WMCA's vision & values, the role of the WMCA and its six aims based on the key challenges within the region. Members welcomed the presentation and considered the simple and clear explanation helpful to understand the role and responsibilities of the WMCA and how it worked in partnership with local authorities.

With regards to Warwickshire County Council becoming a constituent member of the WMCA, the committee discussed the wider implications of councils applying to become a constituent member of the WMCA. The Chief Executive added that, in accordance with the law an application to become a member of the WMCA would be considered by the WMCA Board. However, the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill as proposed, would change the way in which this decision could be made. The Chief Executive assured the committee that, if Warwickshire County Council were to explore becoming a member of the WMCA, it would examine the wider implications and would ensure that there was no financial detriment to local authorities.

To improve the partnership arrangements with constituent and non-constituent authorities, the committee emphasised the need to strengthen the links and communication arrangements between the WMCA and local authorities. During discussion, members shared the different ways in which the work and activities of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee was reported into their respective authorities.

Resolved:

- (1) The presentation be noted;
- (2) A regular update on Warwickshire County Council becoming a member of the WMCA to be provided to future meetings of the committee.
- (3) The WMCA to explore options as to how communication between the WMCA, constituent and non-constituent authorities could be improved.

139. Scrutiny Review: The impact of the delivery of local skills training following the devolution of the Adult Education Budget to the WMCA

The committee considered a report from members of the Skills Scrutiny Panel outlining the findings of the scrutiny review that examined the impact of the devolution of the Adult Education Budget on the delivery of local skills training within the region, and identified the challenges and ways in which the WMCA and local authorities could most effectively use skills development to address short- and longer-term challenges in the region.

Following the findings of the 2020/21 review to ascertain whether the regional economic recovery proposals were meeting the needs that had been identified within the Black Country sub-region, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee considered that now was an appropriate time to undertake a further scrutiny review to assess the impact and outcomes that had been delivered through the Adult Education Budget since its devolution to the WMCA in 2019.

In terms of the gaps highlighted within the review, it was recognised that an area of focus for the forthcoming year could be in relation to employer behaviour and how the Adult Education Budget could assist in terms of training their employees.

In addition, members were informed of the various products and services available through the Adult Education Budget as an alternative to exam-based courses including community learning and skills bootcamps.

The Chair enquired about the levels of worklessness and age profile within the region and questioned whether this was currently measured and monitored through key performance indicators. The Interim Director of Employment & Skills confirmed that an outcomes framework was currently being developed and would be shared with the committee at a future meeting.

Resolved:

- (1) The conclusions and recommendations of the scrutiny review group be endorsed for submission to the next meeting of the Skills Advisory Board on 25 September 2023.

140. Deeper Devolution Deal - Scrutiny Implications

The committee considered a report of the Governance Services Manager on the activity and developments relating to the WMCA's Deeper Devolution Deal negotiations with the Government since the matter was last reported to the committee on 13 March.

On 15 March, as part of its Spring Budget statement, the Government announced that it had agreed with the WMCA a Deeper Devolution Deal that would provide for wide ranging provisions to devolve policy making and control over spending decisions to the region.

In announcing the Deeper Devolution Deal, the Government had highlighted the importance of governance and accountability and these enhanced accountabilities had been framed within the English Devolution Accountability Framework, which was published in March. The accountability framework would seek to ensure that mayors and other local leaders were subject to robust and effective scrutiny by local politicians.

To help build a culture of greater scrutiny and accountability, the WMCA was currently in dialogue with the Government on the development a scrutiny protocol that would set out the relationship between the mayor, the Combined Authority and its scrutiny and audit functions. It was envisaged

that the protocol would be published prior to the next meeting of the committee and that a further report would be submitted for consideration.

Forming part of the WMCA's wider accountability and scrutiny framework, the Deal also introduced the idea of the region's Members of Parliament scrutinising the Mayor in four public sessions a year. The committee discussed and shared comments on the importance and critical role of scrutiny within the WMCA, the benefit of it being non-party political and the requirements for scrutiny to evolve to address the new challenges.

In response to comments regarding the region's Members of Parliament scrutinising the Mayor and the possibility of these overshadowing the work of the combined authority and local authority scrutiny functions, the WMCA was currently working with the Government to develop the Terms of Reference for these public sessions and members were assured that the committee would be kept abreast of developments.

Resolved:

- (1) The announcement of the Government's Deeper Devolution Deal with the WMCA, along with its expected ratification by constituent authorities during September and by the WMCA Board at its meeting on 13 October, be noted;
- (2) The publication of the English Devolution Accountability Framework and the forthcoming scrutiny protocol, setting out the Government's expectations for local accountability within institutions exercising devolved powers be welcomed;
- (3) A further report be submitted to the committee when it meets on 4 September setting out in more detail the content of the scrutiny protocol and how the WMCA intended to apply it to its overview & scrutiny function be agreed; and
- (4) The Overview & Scrutiny Committee be kept abreast on the development of the Terms of Reference for the region's Members of Parliament and Mayoral public sessions.

141. Grant Register

The committee considered a report of the Executive Director of Finance & Business Hub that provided an update on the grant register which contained all current 'live' grants where the WMCA was the accountable body and captured a comprehensive total of grants, awarding body, time period for delivery and a description of what the grant delivered.

Councillor Phil Bateman enquired about the opening of the Wolverhampton Metro extension. It was agreed that a response would be provided to Councillor Phil Bateman following the meeting.

Resolved:

- (1) The grant register be noted.

142. Work Programme

The committee received a draft work programme of items that were to be considered at future meetings of the committee.

In addition to the Mayoral Q&A sessions, the Chair indicated that she would also like to explore how the Overview & Scrutiny Committee could hold the WMCA's statutory and senior officers to account.

With regards to the regeneration of brownfield land, Councillor Andrew Burrow proposed that a deep dive could be undertaken to review the cost benefits of brownfield land projects, how brownfield strategies affected and connected the region, and whether the sites identified would have been developed without the contributions from the WMCA.

The committee enquired as to whether a transport officer could also attend its next meeting to help support discussions with housing colleagues when reviewing the Affordable Homes Strategy, as transport also needed to be considered when building homes.

In terms of its focus for 2023/24, the committee agreed to focus on the performance of the WMCA and would examine the outcomes delivered against its Annual Business Plan, aims and objectives.

Resolved:

- (1) That the draft work programme be noted.
- (2) The observations and contributions regarding the draft work programme be considered.

143. Date of Next Meeting

Monday 4 September at 10:00am

The meeting ended at 12.00 pm.