



Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Monday 6 November 2023 at 10.00 am

Minutes

Present

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| Councillor Cathy Bayton (Chair) | Association of Black Country Authorities |
| Councillor Naeem Akhtar (Vice-Chair) | 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 Ewan Mackey | Birmingham City Council |
| Amanda Tomlinson | Business Representative |
| Councillor Adrian Warwick | Warwickshire County Council |
| Councillor Vera Waters | Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council |

In Attendance

Item Title

No.

161. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Emma Marshall (Worcester); and Councillor Paul Moore and his substitute (Sandwell).

162. Chair's Remarks

The Chair gave her remarks for the meeting covering three particular areas. She stated that The Police and Crime Commissioner's request to present at the to the committee had been denied. She confirmed that the Q&A was with the mayor only and the minutes would be available to the public as usual. She continued and shared with the committee that the Levelling Up Bill had received royal assent. This meant that the bill was now law. Constituent members would receive their allowances at the end of November, backdated to June. Finally, she stated that the Future Homes paper has been pulled due to the time it was received. The CEO commented that papers need to be acceptable for public consumption and that the information needs to be verified before being released. The Chair acknowledged that there was awareness of this issue and that the process should be sought to be improved.

163. Minutes - 4 September and 19 October 2023

The minutes from 4 September were agreed as correct record. The Governance & Scrutiny Manager clarified matters arising over item 104. He

stated that the Scrutiny Protocol remained deferred but confirmed that it would be published 22 November 2023 and would be presented for the committee to action following publication. In regards to matters arising on item 174b, the CEO of the WMCA confirmed that she would look into the break down in communications wherein Councillors had received information after, or at the same time as, the public.

The minutes from 19 September 2023 were agreed as a correct record with no matter arising.

164. WMCA Homelessness Taskforce: Update and Key Priorities

The Chair of the Homelessness task force and the Senior Programme Manager presented a report on the homelessness taskforce. They shared that the Homelessness Taskforce was working to reframe how homelessness is viewed, emphasising the concept of "ultimate exclusion." They shared statistics around the current homelessness picture and updated the committee on how they were working across sectors and regions to address the issue. They stated that priority members had been identified which had assisted in the formation of a members' advisory group, chaired by Councillor David Welsh.

Gratitude was expressed to the team and the efforts of the taskforce to eradicate homelessness were commended. The homelessness taskforce raised one of their proposals to raise the local housing allowance (LHA) to reduce the use of temporary accommodation and the long-term economic benefits of increasing this, eliminating the right to purchase social housing, and expanding the availability of affordable homes were discussed. The committee also explored collaboration with the private sector, the difficulties of assisting people experiencing homelessness and concerns about rent-to-buy programs.

The importance of breaking down silos was emphasised as the committee discussed the issue of families facing disadvantages due to the limited availability of exempt accommodation was raised. Suggestions around investigating more effective resource allocation were explored as plans at Walsall to acquire vacant properties were shared. The financial strain on local authority homeless services was raised as the need for a collective effort and problem-solving was emphasised. In response to a question from the chair the Homelessness Taskforce representatives confirmed that collaborative efforts are underway with other regions, but the picture was similar across the country.

Recommended:

- (1) It is recommended that it be noted that the homelessness being experienced by vulnerable citizens across the WMCA region is actively inhibiting our ability to create a more prosperous, fairer and inclusive region for all, and that the Homelessness Taskforce

has been one of the means by which the WMCA and its partners have collaborated to address this.

- (2) To be noted that the Overview & Scrutiny Committee considered how the WMCA, and its partners could align efforts to accelerate progress towards the joint aim of designing out homelessness in all its manifestations, including by continuing to embed homelessness prevention into the mainstream strategies, processes, and programmes of the WMCA through cross-directorate activity and endorse the Taskforce's adoption of a broader focus on all forms of homelessness.
- (3) Endorse the Homelessness Taskforce's identified priorities for 2023/24 and beyond, including specific actions to commission a suitably experienced and qualified organisation to help investigate and articulate an evidenced based economic case; and note that the committee to considered how government could be lobbied to improve the current Local Housing Allowance (LHA) model.

165. WMCA Air Quality Framework and Implementation Plan

The Head of Environment and the Air Quality Framework Programme Lead presented the WMCA Air Quality Framework. They reported that it would be going to WMCA Board on 10th November 2023 and provided the committee with an update, shared an immediate committee with an immediate plan and the history and aims of the framework.

The Air Quality Framework Programme Lead shared the methodology and process of developing the framework including consultation. The Head of Environment updated the committee on the implementation plan and shared how the framework would align with strategic objectives and WMCA Governance before closing with funding wins and other activity to date including funding successes and survey results.

The committee discussed concerns about the potential health risks associated with log burners and the need for stricter regulations. The success of Walsall in requiring a full assessment of the impact of log burners within permitted regulations was highlighted and raising public awareness of the dangers of log burners was also emphasised. Various strategies to improve public awareness of air quality issues, including road signs, air quality alarms for homes, and incorporating air quality information into weather forecasts were suggested.

The group discussed the environmental mitigations and their consideration within the air quality framework. The Environment Lead confirmed that a local nature recovery strategy and an appendix to the framework being developed by WSP.

It was confirmed that the Air Quality Framework and Implementation Plan would include the Overview & Scrutiny Committee within its governance structure.

Resolved:

- (1) The draft Air Quality Framework Implementation Plan for

approval at the November 2023 WMCA Board be endorsed.

(2) This paper be endorsed for presentation to the WMCA Board in November 2023.

(3) The recommendation, made by the Transport Delivery Overview and Scrutiny Committee: Air Quality, Congestion and Environmental Impact Members Engagement Group to identify a stretch target for more ambitious air quality limits in the WMCA area than currently set out through the Environment Act 2021, was noted and supported.

166. Levelling Up Zones, Investment Zone, and Place-based Strategies

The partnership and strategic engagement lead and the head of policy and public affairs presented a paper to the committee on Levelling Up Zones, Investment Zone, and Place based Strategies. They shared the work had been undertaken by local authority officers in conjunction with wmca around levelling up zones and the west midlands investment zone. They requested the committee's insight into developing integrated place-based strategies across the region.

They explained the growth zones, investment zones and the single settlement. The aim of the Levelling Up Zones would be to focus the efforts of local, regional and central government to align diverse policy, funding and fiscal measures to support outcomes bespoke for each area. The government has also launched an Investment Zone Policy Prospectus, which aim to drive economic growth in 8 combined authority areas in England. The single settlement would be for transport, skills, housing and regeneration, net zero and local growth projects. The concluded and shared that the WMCA was working with local authorities to develop a new approach to place-based investment.

The committee discussed the retaining of business rate incentives for businesses located in the identified growth zones. They discussed the potential benefits and challenges of such a policy, and it was highlighted was working on how this could be implemented. He stressed that the scheme would be based on the principle of "fairness". The committee concluded by recommending that the paper be noted. Officers agreed to continue to monitor the situation and to work with the government to develop a scheme that is fair and effective.

Recommended:

It is recommended that the WMCA Board note the development of Levelling Up Zones and Investment Zone propositions and the opportunity available through the single settlement to develop 'place-based strategies' and make recommendations for their future development as the Committee considers appropriate.

167. Grant Register

The Head of Finance Business Partnering and Strategic Planning presented the Grant Register. The committee received an update on new grants that

had been awarded to the WMCA since the last report. In response to a question from the chair, the Head of Finance Business Partnering and Strategic Planning, confirmed that the biodiversity fund was allocated into regional spend.

Recommended:

The committee noted the Grant Register.

168. Work Programme

The Work Programme was presented by the WMCA Scrutiny Officer.

Recommended:

It was agreed that the Work Programme be noted.

169. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting would be held Thursday 14 December at 2:00pm. It would be a Mayoral Q&A on the Proposed Draft Budget 2024/25. The chair confirmed that the meeting would be held in a hybrid capacity and encouraged attendance for quoracy.

The meeting ended at 12.00 pm.