



West Midlands Combined Authority

Housing & Land Delivery Board

Monday 24 April 2023 at 10.00 am

Minutes

Present

Councillor Mike Bird (Chair)
Councillor Charn Padda
Jo Nugent
Councillor Stephen Simkins
Councillor Richard Smith

Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Homes England
City of Wolverhampton Council
Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council

In Attendance via MS Teams

Councillor Matthew Dormer
Councillor Bhupinder Gakhal

Redditch Borough Council
City of Wolverhampton Council

Item Title No.

58. Inquorate meeting

It was noted that the meeting was inquorate and therefore the recommendations contained within the minutes would be submitted to the next meeting for formal approval and adoption.

59. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Butlin (Warwickshire), Councillor Fitzgerald (Cannock), Councillor Overton (Telford & Wrekin), Kevin Rodgers (West Midlands Housing Association Partnership), Dawn Ward (Greater Birmingham & Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership) Suzanne Ward (Environment Agency) and Councillor Welsh (Coventry).

60. Notification of Substitutes

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

61. Minutes - 22 March 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 March 2023 were agreed as a true record.

62. Deeper Devolution Deal Update

The board considered a report of the Executive Director of Housing, Property & Regeneration that provided an update on the implications for the Housing and Land Portfolio of the Deeper Devolution Deal agreed by the WMCA and HM Government in March 2023.

The Head of Strategy & Analysis, Rob Lamond highlighted the key outcomes from the Deeper Devolution Deal which included:

£100m West Midlands Regeneration Funding which WMCA plans to deploy using the fund's inherent flexibilities to support projects including housing, commercial, mixed-use and estate renewal; the criteria under which the fund will operate is being discussed with HM Government.

Land Reform and Public Land – there is a firm commitment from the Cabinet Office to have a joint plan relating to land owned by HM Government, the first such agreement by HM Government with any region. The proposed agreement allows for joint working on the disposal of public land in the region, building on work currently being undertaken in the Place Pilots Programme. The agreement also commits WMCA and HM Government to discuss powers relating to Compulsory Purchase and Local Development Orders.

Affordable Homes Programme - (Phase 1: 2023-2026 and Phase 2: post 2026). The first phase will see WMCA working with Local Authorities, Registered Providers and Homes England to accelerate delivery and unlock a minimum of £200m for the region in the current Affordable Homes Programme, potentially rising to a maximum of £400m. From 2026 (Phase 2) the new Affordable Homes Programme will be fully devolved to the region.

West Midlands Levelling Up Zones – six key corridors were identified in the Deeper Devolution Deal. These have been led by Local Authorities and supported by WMCA. All parties are currently working collaboratively on how the zones will be agreed and delivered, and how all bodies will work together going forward. The Deeper Devolution Deal also makes provision for a Strategic Place Partnership with HM Government which is wider than that with Homes England which is focused on affordable homes.

In relation to the £100m Single Regeneration Fund, the Chair commented that he understood funding would be drawn down in three tranches.

The Executive Director of Housing, Property & Regeneration, Gareth Bradford, reported that he intended to speak further with HM Government on their proposal to make payment in tranches. He added that there is no fixed intervention rate for the fund but that there is a minimum target output of 4,000 new homes.

The Chair asked that a list be compiled of the best brownfield sites that could be developed/taken forward, including those sites where WMCA funding could make a difference, but the landowner is currently unwilling to sell. He asked also that this list should include sites where 'Red Book' land valuations are too high that prevent land from being purchased for development.

Councillor Simkins expressed his concern regarding a number of issues relating to the implementation of the Deal. He also stated that there is a need for housing providers, local authorities and local authority Leaders to be involved in the decision-making process in determining affordable housing, Levelling Up Zones and negotiating the detail of the single regeneration fund.

The Chair stated that he had already written to WMCA's Chief Executive to ensure that the Deeper Devolution Deal is on the agenda for the next Mayor and Leaders' meeting.

The Executive Director of Housing, Property & Regeneration, Gareth Bradford advised further guidance was awaited from Government on Levelling Up Zones. In relation to affordable housing, he reported that the definition to be used with the Affordable Homes Programme up to 2026 (Phase 1) would be the national definition used by Homes England and determined by Government. Beyond 2026 (Phase 2), there will be a discussion about the definition to be used, the national version or one determined locally. In relation to land reform, he reported that the proposal in the Deeper Devolution Deal relates only to land owned by HM Government departments. In relation to funding for CPOs, he said that he would be raising the need for revenue funding. In relation to the devolved housing and land funds, he reported that local authorities would need to comply with Government tests for these funds, and schemes would often fail to meet the test of being the funder of last resort and/ or having difficulty proving market failure.

In relation to decision-making more generally, Gareth Bradford stated that as detail emerges from HM Government, the matters will be reported to the Deeper Devolution Deal Senior Officers' Group for discussion and then to Members for decision. The Chair added that the Government requires accountability for public money.

Resolved:

1. The inclusions in the Deeper Devolution Deal relating to the Housing and Land Portfolio in the West Midlands be noted; and
2. That an Implementation Plan for the Deeper Devolution Deal be submitted to the WMCA Board in Summer 2023 and work is ongoing to partners for mobilisation of the Housing and Land Programmes set out in the Deal be noted.

63. Plan for Growth: Update

The board considered a report of the Executive Director for Housing, Property & Regeneration that provided an update on progress with regards to the work on the Plan for Growth and the proposal to establish a working group to ensure widespread engagement across the region on this work.

The Head of Policy and Planning, Pat Willoughby, outlined the report which set out the background to the Plan for Growth; current activity with regards to the work on the West Midlands Strategic Employment Sites Study; the proposal to establish a working group to look at employment land supply from a regional perspective; and to take a deep dive into key clusters identified in the Plan for Growth. She highlighted the work being done on the Future Homes Strategy with a focus on the supply chain.

The Chair re-iterated that he would like an advanced manufacturing in construction company based in the West Midlands to bring opportunities for young people in the use of advanced manufacturing for housing in the West Midlands.

The Head of Policy and Planning reported that progress on 'Future Homes Strategy' (linking advanced manufacturing methods in construction and zero carbon homes) would be submitted to the next meeting of this board for consideration.

Councillor Simkins commented on the need to address the skills gap in the region by ensuring the right skills are in the right place and to involve universities.

The Chair concurred with Councillor Simkins on the need to address the skills gap.

Resolved:

1. The work relating to the West Midlands Plan for Growth and its alignment and relevance to the work being done under the Housing and Land Board be noted;
2. The potential for the WMCA to commission an additional study, as requested by local partners to explore the challenges and barriers experienced by growth clusters, providing evidence that could be used to support local plans and business cases to Government be noted;
3. This work could be developed to support the continued identification of future pipeline projects which, subject to consideration, might access WMCA's devolved funds, both existing and new funds secured through the Deeper Devolution Deal be noted; and
4. The proposal to Delivery Steering Group for representatives to join a working group to progress the work be noted.

64. Exclusion of the Public and Press

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 person (including the authority holding that information).

65. West Midlands Investment Prospectus 2023

The board considered a report of the Executive Director of Housing, Property and Regeneration that provided an overview of the West Midlands Investment Prospectus and its delivery.

The Head of Business Development & Partnerships Colin Clinton and the Programme Support Officer, Lauren Rigby-Hopkins outlined the report and presented an advanced draft of the Investment Prospectus. Colin Clinton reported that the Prospectus was a 'refreshed' version of the 2022 Prospectus that had been co-developed across the WMCA's directorates and with regional partners. He advised that a number of responses on the document had been received from members of the Housing and Land Delivery Steering Group as well as the Investment Board.

It was noted that the Prospectus seeks to build on the successes of previous years and builds on the powers on the Deeper Devolution Deal. The document would be launched by the West Midlands Mayor on 17 May at the UK's Real Estate Investment and Infrastructure Forum (UKREiiF) in front of developers, funders, investors and others.

Colin Clinton also advised the board of how the investment opportunities in the region had increased from £5bn in 2018 (the first Midlands Investment Prospectus) to £20bn in 2023. It is important to note that public funding is leveraging private sector investment in the West Midlands.

Gareth Bradford suggested that that the investment successes in the region can be judged by those schemes that are coming through the system: he stated that schemes that were previously promoted as 'coming soon' and 'ones to watch' in the first Prospectus are now being delivered. This is evidence of the region's ability to leverage private sector investment from public sector funds.

Councillor Simkins considered the Investment Prospectus was a key advert for the region but was interested to learn more about the spatial distribution of investment.

The Chair reported of the need for investment in town centres and for town centre living to be promoted to help regenerate town centres. He also considered that there is a need to challenge internet and added that living above shops should be promoted. The Chair asked for an update report on town centre living to be submitted to a future board meeting and for the Investment Prospectus also to be strengthened in this area.

In relation to a comment from Councillor Simkins regarding the need to ensure that town centres are safe places, the Chair highlighted that in Walsall he had allowed the police to access local authority buildings in the town centre following the closure of the police station to provide a police presence and suggested other local authorities could do the same.

The Executive Director of Housing, Property and Regeneration undertook to submit a report to a future meeting on town centre investment and implementation. He remarked that a number of schemes, currently in development and being discussed with local authorities, are in town centres. A number of local authorities have taken up the offer of an in-depth workshop with WMCA's Town Centres Taskforce, several have secured substantial funding from HM Government and there is the potential for WMCA to support local authority action in this area.

Resolved:

1. The positive progress and substantial engagement with local authorities and other partners in the West Midlands in developing this year's 'refresh' of the West Midlands Investment Prospectus which as with previous years will play a significant role in attracting additional private sector investment into the region be noted and endorsed;
2. The design and contents of an advanced draft of the Prospectus based on a similar format to that of the previous years, as it nears public and launch at the UK's Real Estate Investment and Infrastructure Forum (UKREiif) in May 2023 be noted;
3. An advanced draft of the West Midlands Investment Prospectus presented to the Housing and Land Delivery Board on 24 April be endorsed; and
4. Authority be delegated to the Executive Director of Housing, Property and Regeneration, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Land to agree the final version of the Prospectus on the board's behalf.

66. Housing & Land Fund Dashboard

The board considered a report on the Housing and Land Fund dashboard that provided an update on performance on the Brownfield Housing Fund, National Competitive Fund and Land Fund since the last meeting.

The Head of Strategy & Analysis, Rob Lamond and the Executive Director of Housing, Property and Regeneration, Gareth Bradford reported on progress on committed schemes.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

The meeting ended at 11.06 am.