



West Midlands Combined Authority

Housing & Land Delivery Board

Monday 24 April 2023 at 10.00am

Minutes

Present

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

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

Councillor Stephen Simkins

In Attendance via MS Teams

Councillor Matthew Dormer

Redditch Borough 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 Gakhil (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 in Government in March 2023.

The Head of Strategy & Analysis, Rob Lamond highlighted the key outcomes from the Deeper Devolution Deal which included West Midlands Regeneration Funding, Land Reform and Public Land, Affordable Housing (phase 1: 2023-2026 and phase 2: post 2026) West Midlands Levelling Up Zones and Strategic Place Partnership.

In relation to the £100m Single Regeneration Fund, the Chair commented that he understood funding would be drawn down in three tranches after the WMCA had proven its outputs and enquired whether this was the case.

The Executive Director of Housing, Property & Regeneration, Gareth Bradford reported that he was intending to push back to Government on the payment in tranches as he considered the funding should be deployed to spend on brownfield sites in accordance with the funding's original intention, noting that the WMCA has already proven its ability to deliver on the first housing deal. He added that the minimum target output of 4,000 homes would enable the WMCA to provide a much higher intervention rate than what it could previously offer.

The Chair asked that a list be compiled for the next meeting of the best brownfield sites that could be developed/taken forward including those sites where WMCA funding could make difference, but the landowner is currently unwilling to sell. He asked also that this 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 including the need for local authorities and Leaders to be involved in the decision-making process in determining affordable housing, Levelling Up Zones and the need to move away from the 'Begging Bowl Culture' with regards to obtaining Government funding as stated previously by the Mayor.

The Executive Director of Housing, Property & Regeneration, Gareth Bradford advised that no decisions would be taken today with regards to funding allocations and advised that further guidance was awaited from Government on Levelling Up Zones. In relation to affordable housing, he reported that the definition was a national one, determined by Government and was not the regional definition. 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.

The Chair added that the Government requires accountability for public money and more money means the WMCA is subject to additional rules and regulations.

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 Employment Sites Study and the next steps 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.

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

The Head of Policy and Planning reported that the work of the Future Homes Taskforce on producing a Future Homes Strategy 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 involving universities.

The Chair concurred with Councillor Simkins on the need to close the skills gap between the region and the rest of the country.

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 latest contents of the West Midlands Investment Prospectus and its delivery programme that sought comments and endorsement on the draft document.

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 build 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.

Gareth Bradford added that the investment successes in the region can be judged by those schemes that were promoted as 'coming soon', 'ones to watch' in the first prospectus that are now being delivered.

Councillor Simkins considered the Investment Prospectus was a key advert for the region but was interested to learn whether investment was evenly split between the north and south of the region (Met Area) to understand whether more investment was needed in the north.

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 considered that retailers should only be allowed to open an out-of-town store in an area where they had a town centre presence. He added that living above shops should also 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 to also be strengthened in this area.

In relation to a comment from Councillor Simkins regarding the need to ensure town centres are safe rather than 'No go areas', 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 development and to highlight those areas that have established a town centre taskforce.

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.