



WEST MIDLANDS COMBINED AUTHORITY

Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday 30 January 2018 at 11.00 am

Minutes

Present

Councillor Peter Hughes (Chair)
Councillor Richard Brown
Councillor Rose Burley
Councillor Dean Carroll
Councillor Peter Douglas Osborn
Councillor John Glass
Councillor Rachel Harris
Councillor Diana Holl-Allen
Councillor Angus Lees

Councillor Simon People
Councillor Ian Shires (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Stephen Simkins
Councillor Claire Spencer (Vice-Chair)

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Joint Coventry / Solihull Representative
Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
Shropshire Council
Birmingham City Council
Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough Council
Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and
Wolverhampton Councils
Staffordshire Non-Constituent Authorities
Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and
Wolverhampton Councils
City of Wolverhampton Council
Birmingham City Council

In Attendance

Councillor Dan Barker

Councillor John McNicholas
Tim Martin
Sean Pearce
Sarah Sprung
Councillor Izzi Seccombe
Councillor Richard Worrall

Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and
Wolverhampton Councils
Coventry City Council
West Midlands Combined Authority
West Midlands Combined Authority
Sandwell MBC
Warwickshire County Council
Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council

Item Title

No.

10. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Dr Chris Handy (Black Country LEP) Mike Lyons (Greater Birmingham & Solihull LEP), Councillor Yvonne Mosquito (Birmingham City Council), Councillor John Mutton (Coventry City Council), Councillor John O'Shea (Birmingham City Council) and Sarah Windrum (Coventry & Warwickshire LEP).

11. Declarations of Interests

Councillor Stephen Simkins declared a personal interest in respect of agenda item no. 4 'Findings of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee in relation to the WMCA Draft Budget and Mayoral Council Tax Precept for 2018/19', as a student at Wolverhampton University.

12. Minutes of the meeting held on 21 November 2017

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 November 2017 were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

13. Budget Report - Recommendations and Outcomes

The committee considered a report of the Scrutiny Lead Officer, West Midlands Combined Authority on the findings of the scrutiny process and recommendations for the WMCA Board to consider both in terms of this year's budget and suggestions for ways in which the process could be improved for next financial year. The WMCA Board considered the draft budget on 12 January 2018. At this meeting, the Board was minded not to support the Mayor's proposed precept.

Overview & Scrutiny Committee held the first Question Time with the Mayor on 24 January 2018 and were able to question him on the Mayoral Precept and other elements of the proposed budget. A report on the findings of the committee would be submitted to the WMCA Board on 9 February 2018 for consideration.

Following the Mayor's Question Time, the committee requested additional information in relation to the Funding for Growth Programme (full membership, the project team supporting the programme and dates of meetings together with attendance, minutes and decisions made), which would help it to form its recommendations to the WMCA Board.

The committee noted the late submission of this information, which might otherwise have supported the justification for a Mayoral precept. The process in which constituent authorities had been consulted and the route in which it was agreed to have a Mayoral precept was considered by the committee to be lacking the proper levels of openness and transparency.

Councillor Izzi Seccombe provided an overview of the budget and the ambitions of the West Midlands Combined Authority. She shared the concerns of colleagues in respect of the late submission of information and noted that there were a number of lessons to be learned about the process and how it could be improved in future years.

Councillor Izzi Seccombe explained how the Funding for Growth Panel had been established, its membership and how this had been formed. The Panel had investigated a number of alternative funding sources, however there was an issue in respect of time constraints and the decision to have a Mayoral precept was the very last option considered.

Councillor Izzi Seccombe commented that the ability to come together as a West Midlands Combined Authority had already proved to be beneficial for the region and asked colleagues to recognise the benefits and ambitions of the WMCA Board.

As the committee considered that the budget process this year was unsatisfactory, it was proposed that Overview & Scrutiny Committee commission a lessons learnt report and establish a Task & Finish group to review the process.

The committee considered a response to transport queries that were raised at the Overview & Scrutiny Budget Task & Finish Group on 15 January. In respect of Transport for West Midlands (TfWM) branding and the capital investment of £1.8m that had been set-aside, Councillor Steve Simkins questioned whether this expenditure was a key priority for the citizens of the West Midlands.

The Director of Finance confirmed that the purpose of the £1.8m was for the future rebranding of TfWM and the money had been placed in reserves to be drawn down as and when required. He indicated that the amount expected to be used for the rebranding of TfWM was approx. £1m and the balance was to be used for future investment opportunities as they arise.

With regards to Brexit, it was considered that there was a need to understand the effect of Brexit on the West Midlands economy. The committee sought assurances that sufficient work had been undertaken on the risks of Brexit, and their impact on the work and ambitions of the West Midlands Combined Authority.

The committee also expressed concern at the level of resource to support the scrutiny function within the West Midlands Authority. A dedicated Scrutiny Officer post for the Authority had been incorporated into the draft budget for 2018/19, although it was considered that this level of resource was inadequate to undertake effective scrutiny. Councillor Richard Worrall considered that there should be a review of members' allowances and officer support to the Transport Delivery Committee, which included looking at member workloads, and possible re-distribution of staff support.

Resolved

- (1) The WMCA Board be recommended to commence budget discussions with Constituent Authorities much earlier in future financial years to allow sufficient time for open discussion and the development of proposals, with a suggestion, that these discussions commence in September of each year;
- (2) That the Chair and Vice-Chairs of the committee be delegated authority to review the information received from the Mayoral Office and agree the substantive report and recommendations to be submitted to WMCA Board on 9 February 2018.

14. Devolution Deal 2 Update

The committee received a verbal update from the Head of Governance on the progress being made in respect of Devolution 2.

The committee considered a short written submission received from the Police and Crime Commissioner for the West Midlands Police that expressed his concerns on the implications of the devolution deal and highlighted the importance of his involvement in the consultation process on the future policing governance across the West Midlands.

The Head of Governance provided an update on his recent telephone conference with officials from the Home Office and confirmed that the Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner would be involved in discussions. He noted the proposed way forward in respect of consulting with the Police and Crime Commissioner for the West Midlands.

The committee noted the submission received from the Police & Crime Commissioner and asked the Chair of their Governance Task & Finish Group, Councillor John McNicholas, to meet with the Chair of the Police & Crime Panel to discuss this matter further.

Resolved

- (1) That the update be noted.
- (2) The Chair of the Governance Task & Finish Group, Councillor John McNicholas to meet with the Chair of the Police & Crime Panel to discuss the future governance of policing in the West Midlands.

15. General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) Update

The committee agreed for this item of business to be deferred to its next meeting.

Resolved

- (1) The Head of Governance to provide an update on General Data Protection Regulation at the next meeting of the committee.

16. Forward Plan

The items of business for consideration at future meetings of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee were noted.

The meeting ended at 1.30 pm.