



# West Midlands Combined Authority

## Housing & Land Delivery Board

Monday 10 July 2023 at 3.00 pm

### Minutes

#### Present

Councillor Ian Courts (Chair)  
Councillor Steve Evans  
Councillor Jayne Francis  
Councillor Andy Mackiewicz  
Councillor Richard Overton  
Councillor Richard Smith

Portfolio Lead for Housing & Land  
City of Wolverhampton Council  
Birmingham City Council  
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council  
Telford and Wrekin Council  
Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough  
Council  
Coventry City Council

Councillor David Welsh

#### In Attendance via MS Teams

Councillor Matthew Dormer  
John Mather  
Councillor Wayne Little

Redditch Borough Council  
Homes England  
Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council

#### Item Title No.

##### 1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Bird (Walsall), Jo Nugent (Homes England), Kevin Rodgers (West Midlands Housing Association Partnership), Councillor Rollins (Sandwell) and Councillor Marshall (Shropshire).

##### 2. Notification of Substitutes

Jo Nugent (Homes England) had nominated John Mather to attend on her behalf.

##### 3. Chair's Remarks

The Chair expressed his thanks to the previous Chair, Councillor Bird, for chairing the board over the last 5 years and all his work on the housing and land portfolio. The Chair also conveyed thanks to the Executive Director of Housing, Property and Regeneration, Gareth Bradford who was leaving the WMCA at the end of the week, for all the successes achieved during his time with the organisation.

##### 4. Terms of Reference

The terms of reference for the board were noted.

##### 5. Minutes - 24 April 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 April 2023 were agreed as a true record.

## **6. Quarterly Report on 2023/24 Housing and Land Portfolio Deliverables, and Progress on Housing and Land Annual Business Plan**

The board considered a report of the Executive Director of Housing, Property and Regeneration that provided a quarterly update on progress in delivering the high-level deliverables for the Housing and Land Portfolio as co-developed by the Housing & Land Delivery Steering Group and Delivery Board throughout 2023 and agreed by the WMCA Board in February 2023.

The Head of Strategy and Analysis, Rob Lamond, outlined the key activities on the housing and land deliverables to date and reported that the deliverables reflected the 4 main asks agreed in the devolution deal.

In relation to an enquiry from the Chair regarding whether the WMCA had any intelligence on the property market as the press was talking this down, the Executive Director of Housing, Property and Regeneration, Gareth Bradford, reported that there was still a strong market in the West Midlands and strong housing demand across the region. He added that companies were looking to invest here and referred to the new partnership with SEGRO that includes a commitment of £2bn worth of investment in the West Midlands. It was agreed that market intelligence would be included in this report for future meetings.

In relation to an enquiry from Councillor Francis regarding housing and regeneration projects that are coming forward, the Head of Strategy and Analysis undertook to circulate a list of projects to board members for information.

Resolved that:

1. The positive achievements against each of the Housing and Land Portfolio's approved Annual Deliverables in Q1 2023/24 be noted;
2. The key performance highlights as set out in Section 3 of the report be noted;
3. The positive performance and effective deployment of WMCA's devolved housing and land funds illustrated by the schemes summarised in the confidential annex to this report (many of these schemes are now in delivery phase, having progressed through to the end of the process which shows the role of the WMCA in unlocking, accelerating and problem solving on 'difficult to deliver' schemes be noted.

## **7. Future Housebuilding Strategy**

The board considered a report of the Executive Director of Housing, Property & Regeneration that summarised the work to date on the Future Housebuilding Strategy, sought comments on the summary document, '*Future Housing Building Strategy, West Midlands- A Leading Region for Future Housebuilding*' (attached as Annex 1) and sought endorsement to the formation of a task and finish working group to develop the full strategy.

The Executive Director of Housing, Property and Regeneration, Gareth

Bradford, outlined the context to Future Housebuilding Strategy including the work undertaken to date around advanced manufacturing in construction (AMC), zero carbon homes, the planned regulatory changes by the Government to building regulations in 2025 and the need for strong leadership regionally and locally to support the industry through these challenges. He advised that the full strategy document would be submitted to the board for consideration in October.

The Chair of the Future Homes Taskforce, Mark Farmer, highlighted key areas in the report including the overarching approach to the initial draft strategy and the reasons why change is needed. He also reported that London and Manchester are both already moving in this direction and the West Midlands needs to show leadership and go ahead of the national standards in 2025.

The Chair put forward the following points.

- 1) Housing is market driven, how are you engaging with the building industry and, have you the support of major developers or builders?
- 2) Are we clear on the specific outcomes of the strategy. What will we change? Net Zero/ decarbonisation is done for a reason, what are we getting out of this? Energy efficient homes is not new.
- 3) A holistic approach to carbon is needed; need to look at components and whether these are UK or regional based. House building is a carbon intense industry.
- 4) The West Midlands is at the centre of the UK, a mini prospectus is needed to promote how it is best connected to industry and technology.
- 5) The National Brownfield Institute; need to ensure this is fully utilised.

Councillor Mackiewicz (Solihull) reported of the need to utilise technology for housing building noting 3D printing of houses and to consider what is happening in the United States.

Mark Farmer reported the scale and experience was diverse in the United States but concurred that technology needs to drive a different housing building process as the current house building model was not sustainable. He agreed that the National Brownfield Institute needs to be exploited further, de-carbonising homes is needed for better outcomes and to address carbon in homes.

The Chair reported that engagement is needed with the industry to ensure there is 'buy-in' to modern methods of construction and to the retrofitting of homes.

Councillor Evans (Wolverhampton) commented that he supported the direction of travel but wanted to see a concise strategy document submitted in October. He also expressed concern regarding any extra costs resulting from the Future Housebuilding Strategy and the need to ensure cost assumptions are as accurate as possible.

The Executive Director of Housing, Property and Regeneration, Gareth

Bradford, reported that a lot of work has been undertaken with the industry and local authority teams on the technical standard and agreed accurate costs were vital along with the need to provide certainty to the market. He advised that industry and investors were aware of the legal requirements for housebuilding that would have to be met by 2025 along with net zero standards.

Councillor Welsh (Coventry) cautioned against putting forward a standard that cannot be met and considered this was a shared challenge and business also needs to find a solution. He also reported that he did not want housing numbers to be reduced because of increased costs.

The Executive Director of Housing, Property and Regeneration, Gareth Bradford, advised that there would be a phased implementation of the standards (referred to in the strategy) and he was very mindful of the cost implications. He reported that industry was responding now to the likely standard requirements.

In relation to follow-up question from Councillor Welsh as to how the standard would be enforced, the Executive Director of Housing, Property and Regeneration, Gareth Bradford reported that the 2025 standard would be implemented through building regulations and whilst the WMCA is not a planning authority, it could attach conditions to its funding.

Mark Farmer reported that the industry was also having to change as a result of the skills crisis, the labour force challenge and the zero carbon regulations.

The Chair concluded the discussion by stating that he wanted the West Midlands to be in a better competitive position as a result of the Future Housebuilding Strategy.

Resolved that:

1. Progress on the work to date to develop a Future Housebuilding Strategy for the West Midlands (a Housing and Land Portfolio Deliverable) be noted;
2. The wide-ranging input from the Future Homes Taskforce, Commercial Property Taskforce, local authority partners and other stakeholders across the region to the development of the strategy be noted;
3. The key messages and direction of travel set out in the summary document (Annex 1) to inform the development of the full strategy over the Summer/Autumn 2023 be noted and
4. The formation of a task and finish working group to develop and refine the future housebuilding strategy document in line with the summary document be endorsed.

## **8. Town Centres: Update and Direction**

The board considered a report of the Executive Director of Housing, Property and Regeneration that provided an update on the latest thinking regarding producing a specific prospectus/guide to support locally led town centre

projects (in accordance with the objectives of the Housing & Land Delivery Board).

The Executive Director of Housing, Property and Regeneration, Gareth Bradford, reported that the proposal to produce a prospectus or equivalent (in collaboration with local authorities and stakeholders) would support the delivery of, and investment in, locally led projects in town centres. The WMCA would seek to add value by looking at how to overcome obstacles with regards to the regeneration of town centres and land ownership issues and seek to improve investment opportunities.

Councillor Evans (Wolverhampton) reported that he was happy to support the proposal but wanted to see examples of intervention/ where money has been spent, noting that every town was different and town centre regeneration was more than just the buildings. He also enquired as to who decides where the WMCA money is invested.

The Executive Director of Housing, Property and Regeneration, Gareth Bradford, reported that the Portersfield Scheme, Dudley; Bull Street, West Bromwich and schemes in Shrewsbury and Telford were examples of where intervention has made a difference and underlined the need to unlock private sector investment in town centres. He added that the prospectus for town centres would be similar to that produced for the Investment Prospectus which has attracted significant capital investment into the region since it was first launched in 2018.

In relation to who determines the funding decisions, Gareth Bradford advised that decisions are taken by the Investment Board following receipt of funding applications that comply with the funding criteria.

Councillor Overton (Telford & Wrekin) reported the environment for town centres has been very challenging since the pandemic, with people continuing to work from home, and reported of the need to attract people into town centres for leisure activities.

Councillor Welsh (Coventry) reported that he was unsure of the benefits of producing a prospectus for town centres but was open-minded on the matter.

The Executive Director of Housing, Property and Regeneration, advised that the Investment Prospectus does make a difference in attracting investment to the region and could discuss with Councillor Welsh any concerns he might have to ensure the prospectus adds value.

Resolved that:

1. The proposal for the WMCA to produce in collaboration with local authorities and other stakeholders, a prospectus or equivalent supporting guide to support the delivery of, and investment in locally-led projects in town centres, helping those projects make the case to access public and private funds and ultimately support delivery on the ground be endorsed;
2. The proposal for the WMCA to work with the Town Centres Taskforce

and Delivery Steering Group to consider the precise nature and form of the prospectus or guide, to be brought to a future meeting of the Housing and Land Delivery Board for consideration.

**9. Exclusion of the Press & Public**

Resolved:

That in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business as it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

**10. Housing & Land Funds Dashboard**

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

The Head of Strategy & Analysis, Rob Lamond reported that he would outline the application process for housing and land funds at the next meeting along with the funding rules. He also undertook to circulate the application forms to the board for information.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

**11. Wednesday 18 October 2023 at 10.00am**

The meeting ended at 4.30 pm.