



Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Monday 4 September 2023 at 10.00 am

Minutes

Present

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
Councillor Emma Marshall	Worcestershire Non-Constituent Local Authorities
Councillor Lauren Rainbow	Birmingham City Council
Councillor Jamie Tennant	Birmingham City Council
Amanda Tomlinson	Business Representative

In Attendance

Deborah Casey	Homes England
Dan Essex	Governance & Scrutiny Manager
Linda Horne	Executive Director of Finance and Business Hub
Rob Lamond	Head of Strategy & Analysis (Housing)
Lyndsey Roberts	Statutory Scrutiny Officer
Jaspal Seehra	Performance Manager
Laura Shoaf	Chief Executive
Councillor Vera Waters (joined via MS Teams)	Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council

**Item Title
No.**

144. Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Paul Moore (Sandwell).

145. Chair's Remarks

(a) Oversight & Monitoring of Arm's Length Companies

The Chair reported that the WMCA had now established a formal process to monitor the activities of its arm's length companies and the outputs delivered for the region. The Audit, Risk & Assurance Committee and the Executive Board would receive activity reports on a regular basis.

(b) Challenging Year for Scrutiny

The Chair reminded the committee that although it was going to be a challenging year for scrutiny with the forthcoming Mayoral election in May 2024, the committee needed to remain impartial whilst continuing to hold the Mayor and the WMCA to account on its aims and objectives.

146. Minutes - 10 July 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 July 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

147. Matters Arising

(a) Social Housing Fund (minute no. 136(b))

The Chief Executive confirmed that the Task & Finish Group that comprised of officers from the seven local authorities had proposed that the Social Housing Fund of £14.9m was to be devolved to local authorities in an equal share. In response to a question raised by Councillor Jamie Tennant, she agreed to confirm the officer representing Birmingham City Council on the Task & Finish Group.

(b) Grant Register (Wolverhampton Metro Extension) (minute no. 141)

The Chief Executive confirmed that passenger tram services to Wolverhampton railway station would commence shortly, subject to driver training. Councillor Phil Bateman emphasised the need to be kept apprised on potential opening dates and any issues so that he could address these matters directly with the City of Wolverhampton Council.

148. English Devolution Accountability Framework - Scrutiny Protocol Progress Update

The Governance & Scrutiny Manager reported that the Department for Housing, Levelling Up & Communities had convened a small working group to help develop the contents of the scrutiny protocol, which was expected to be published in October. Members sought assurances that an opportunity to review and comment on the protocol as soon as it was published would be provided and that a full report would be presented to the committee.

The committee also noted the progress being made with the development of the terms of reference for the region's MPs and Mayoral Q&A sessions and the practical arrangements with regards to hosting the session within the region.

Resolved:

That the latest position regarding the development of the scrutiny protocol and the terms of reference for the forthcoming MPs and Mayoral Q&A sessions be noted.

149. Affordable Homes Programme

The committee considered a report of the Interim Executive Director of Housing, Property & Regeneration on the trailblazer approach to delivering the affordable homes programme in the West Midlands, as set out in the Deeper Devolution Deal agreed by WMCA and the Government in March.

Within the Deeper Devolution Deal, the Government committed to piloting a new, two-phase trailblazer approach to the Affordable Homes Programme in the West Midlands. The Affordable Homes Programme was the Government's flagship programme for delivering affordable housing in England, providing grant funding towards the supply of new social and affordable housing.

The committee discussed and shared comments on estate regeneration, the proportion of housing tenures to be delivered through the affordable programme, including affordable and social rents, the opportunities available to utilise the investment to deliver more social and affordable homes by 2026 and the proportion of affordable homes to be delivered as part of the Ladywood estate regeneration scheme.

[Amanda Tomlinson declared an interest in this item, as a member of the West Midlands Housing Association Partnership]

Resolved:

- (1) The progress following the announcement of the Deeper Devolution Deal in March 2023, specifically on the joint working of the Homes England and WMCA teams relating to the Affordable Homes Programme, be noted;
- (2) The ongoing engagement with local authorities and other partners be noted, and members of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee be encouraged to contribute to the ongoing engagement within local authorities and provide links where necessary; and
- (3) The observations and comments of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee regarding the need to be kept apprised on the use of the grant to regenerate estates, together with examples as to where local authorities were seeking to work with the WMCA to regenerate estates, resource and funding post 2026, be noted.

150. Affordable Housing Supply Strategy

The committee considered a report of the Interim Executive Director for Housing, Property & Regeneration that provided a progress update on the emerging Affordable Homes Supply Strategy.

Since the last report to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee in January 2023, the agreement of the Deeper Devolution Deal and the significant implications for the delivery of affordable housing in the region had resulted in a pause for the development of the strategy in order to focus on the short-term mobilisation and implementation of joint working with Homes England.

Members welcomed the development of zero carbon homes but also highlighted the importance of the creation of green spaces. In addition, the provision of information to enable benchmarking to be undertaken in future years was also considered to be important. The Head of Strategy & Analysis provided an overview of the development of the strategy, together with the ongoing work with local authorities and assured the committee that Transport for West Midlands was involved in the development of the strategy, as the provision of transport infrastructure was key when building homes.

[Amanda Tomlinson declared an interest in this item, as a member of the West Midlands Housing Association Partnership]

Resolved:

- (1) The work on developing an 'Affordable Homes Supply Strategy', as commissioned by the Housing & Land Delivery Board, which was progressing in light of the additional remit for Affordable Homes Programme in the region as confirmed in the Deeper Devolution Deal, be noted;
- (2) The work to co-develop an integrated strategy with partners, directly supporting key policy agendas of the WMCA and local authorities through enabling affordable housing delivery and addressing issues of affordability in a co-ordinated and holistic way, be noted;
- (3) The observations and comments of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee on the creation of green spaces in addition to zero carbon homes and the importance of key performance indicators and the provision of information to undertake benchmarking in future years, be considered further; and
- (4) The Overview & Scrutiny Committee to have sight of the draft Affordable Housing Supply Strategy when available for consideration.

151. Affordable Housing Pilot

The committee considered a report of the Head of Strategy & Analysis on the ongoing work of the WMCA and housing association partners to establish a more comprehensive collective approach to the delivery of additional affordable housing across the region.

The Chair welcomed the report but expressed concern at the pace of delivery and sought assurances that the delivery of modular builds had been considered by the housing association partners. The Head of Strategy & Analysis confirmed that within the current negotiations there was a recognition of his type of build, with a view to use a local supplier.

The Head of Strategy & Analysis agreed to keep the committee apprised on next steps and timescales.

[Amanda Tomlinson declared an interest in this item, as a member of the West Midlands Housing Association Partnership]

Resolved:

- (1) The continuing progress of collaboration between WMCA and registered providers of affordable housing, including the ongoing work to establish a pilot project, between the WMCA and a consortium of West Midlands housing associations as part of testing the strategic intent of a joint approach to deliver additional affordable housing, be noted; and
- (2) This work in the context of the emerging 'Affordable Homes Supply Strategy' and the Deeper Devolution Deal implications for the Affordable Housing Programme with Homes England to improve the collaboration and co-investment in the region and to enable more social and affordable housing delivery to meet local needs, be noted.

152. Performance Reporting against Annual Business Plan Deliverables

The committee considered a report of the Executive Director of Finance & Business Hub on the monitoring and reporting of the Annual Business Plan, which set out all activity to be delivered in-year.

In terms of July's performance, there were seven red and amber high-level deliverables, of which one red was currently at risk that was in relation to the establishment of the 'Life Chances Commission'. The commission was a Mayoral commitment to better understand the barriers for young people within the region and the targeted initiatives that could be developed by the WMCA to address these barriers.

Resolved:

- (1) That the performance of the WMCA against the Annual Business Plan deliverables be noted; and
- (2) The observations and comments of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee on the need for future reports to include additional information on the amber risks and consideration be given to the possibility of a holistic dashboard that identified the outcomes considered by the WMCA's respective committees and boards, be considered.

153. Grant Register

The committee considered a report of the Executive Director of Finance & Business Hub that provided an update on the grant register which contained all current 'live' grants where the WMCA was the accountable body and captured a comprehensive total of grants, awarding body, time period for delivery and a description of what the grant delivered.

In relation to the capital funding for the Pothole Fund announced as part of the 2023 budget, the detail on the allocation of the fund was set out within the current WMCA's Financial Monitoring Report, in which the funds would be 'passported' through to the individual local authorities.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

154. West Midlands Combined Authority Loan to Woking Borough Council

The Chair reported that a focus for the committee for this year was to involve the WMCA's Statutory Officers in scrutiny and had invited the Executive Director of Finance & Business Hub to provide an update on the WMCA's loan to Woking Borough Council and the action taken as a result of the council issuing a Section 114 Notice.

Resolved:

That the update on the WMCA's loan to Woking Borough Council and the action undertaken by the WMCA, as a result of Section 114 Notice, be commended.

155. Work Programme

The committee considered its work programme of items that were to be considered at future meetings of the committee.

With regards to the regeneration of brownfield land, the committee agreed to undertake a scrutiny review to assess how the WMCA exercised its powers and funding in respect of brownfield land redevelopment and assess how the region's communities have benefited from this.

Resolved:

That the work programme be noted.

156. Date of Next Meeting

Thursday 19 October 2023 at 10:30am.

The meeting ended at 12.00 pm.