



West Midlands Combined Authority

Joint Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Thursday 14 December 2023 at 2.00 pm

Minutes

Present

Councillor Cathy Bayton (Chair)	Association of Black Country Authorities
Councillor Naeem Akhtar	Coventry City Council
Councillor Pervez Akhtar	Coventry City Council
Councillor Robert Alden	Birmingham City Council
Councillor Philip Bateman MBE	City of Wolverhampton Council
Councillor Andrew Burrow	Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Amo Hussain	Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Timothy Huxtable	Birmingham City Council
Councillor Ian Kettle	Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Narinder Kaur Kooner OBE	Birmingham City Council
Councillor Ewan Mackey	Birmingham City Council
Councillor Martin McCarthy	Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Miranda Perks	Birmingham City Council
Councillor Josh O'Nyons	Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Lauren Rainbow	Birmingham City Council
Councillor Gurmeet Singh Sohal	Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor David Stanley	Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Alan Taylor	Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Amanda Tomlinson	Business Representative
Councillor Antony Tucker	Coventry City Council
Councillor Adrian Warwick	Warwickshire County Council

In Attendance

Councillor Bob Sleigh	Portfolio Lead for Finance
Andy Street	Mayor of the West Midlands

Item Title No.

1. Inquorate Meeting

This meeting was inquorate and therefore any decisions taken at the meeting would be submitted to the WMCA Board on 12 January 2024.

2. Welcome and Introductions

The Chair welcomed the Mayor, Deputy Mayor and members of the committee.

3. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillor Carol Hyatt (Wolverhampton), Councillor Mary Locke (Birmingham), Councillor Nigel Lumby (Shropshire), Councillor John McNicholas (Coventry), Councillor Saddak Miah (Birmingham), Councillor Paul Moore (Sandwell), Councillor Jamie Tennant (Birmingham), Councillor Ian Ward (Birmingham) and Councillor Vera Waters (Walsall).

4. Questions to the Mayor and the Portfolio Lead for Finance from Members of the Committee

The Chair initiated the question-and-answer session by asking whether the decision not to set a precept during the entire existence of the WMCA had impacted the stability of the budget. The Mayor confirmed that no precept had been set thus far, and that it had not been the view of the WMCA Board to date that a mayoral precept should have been set. However, he did consider that in the next mayoral term this issue would need to be revisited, given the Government's view as to further fiscal devolution to the region when it considered the WMCA was not making use of revenue raising powers it already had.

The committee explored questions regarding Network North funding and the acknowledgement of the need for subsidy for public transport in urban areas, an increase in the transport levy and support for this across the local authorities to sustain the current offer to residents and financial pressures experienced by local authorities. In addition, the Mayor explained the WMCA's position with regards to Birmingham City Council's highways PFI deal.

The committee sought assurances regarding the financial risk register and risk assurance underpinning the proposed budget. The Mayor explained that the WMCA Board received regular budget monitoring reports and also considered risk mitigation measures. Further topics discussed included the impact of concessionary fare cuts on members of the public who did not have access to a car, and business resilience support contained within the Government's Autumn Statement. Efforts to enhance this support, including the development of a shared pot, were discussed, along with initiatives to simplify access for businesses.

Questions were asked about funding for active travel, the capital budget's effect on the Midlands Rail Hub, and challenges related to transport investment. The Mayor highlighted successful efforts in securing Government funding, investments in clean transport, and plans for a bus franchising assessment in July 2024. Concerns about concessionary fares, bus reliability and accessibility issues were also discussed.

The discussion concluded with insights into the impact of business rates retention, lessons learned from the WMCA's funding approach, and reflections on the cycle hire scheme's financial viability and sustainability.

Resolved:

The draft WMCA 2024/25 budget be noted.

The meeting ended at 4.00pm.

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