



Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Monday 29 January 2024 at 10.00 am

Minutes

Present

Councillor Cathy Bayton (Chair)
Councillor Naeem Akhtar (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Andrew Burrow
Councillor Ian Kettle
Councillor Nigel Lumby

Councillor Ewan Mackey
Councillor Paul Moore
Councillor Jamie Tennant
Councillor Adrian Warwick

Association of Black Country Authorities
Coventry City Council
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Shropshire Non-Constituent Local
Authorities
Birmingham City Council
Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Birmingham City Council
Warwickshire County Council

In Attendance

Dan Essex
Linda Horne (MS Teams)

Councillor Emma Marshall (MS Teams)
Lyndsey Roberts
Laura Shoaf
Mark Smith (MS Teams)

Kieran Stockley

Governance & Scrutiny Manager
Executive Director of Finance & Business
Hub
Redditch Borough Council
Statutory Scrutiny Officer
Chief Executive
Chair of Audit, Risk & Assurance
Committee
Head of Legal Services

**Item Title
No.**

170. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Amanda Tomlinson (Business Representative) and Councillor Vera Waters (Walsall).

171. Minutes - 6 November and 14 December 2023

The minutes of the meetings held on 6 November and 14 December were agreed as a correct record, subject to the minutes of 14 December, to include reference to a question raised by Councillor Andrew Burrow in relation to Balsall Common Relief Road, financial cost, and potential impact on the budget.

172. Matters Arising

(a) Letter received from the Police & Crime Commissioner (minute no. 163 (a) refers)

The Chair reported that a further letter had been received from the Police & Crime Commissioner seeking an invite to attend a meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee to give evidence with regards to the amalgamation of the Police & Crime Commissioner's role into that of the Mayor.

A response had been sent to the Police & Crime Commissioner explaining that, in November 2018 the Overview & Scrutiny Committee considered the potential transfer of the functions, however at the time the request to transfer the powers required a decision of the WMCA Board. The legislation had now changed and WMCA Board consent was not required. Therefore, there was currently not a role for the committee at this time, but it could, at an appropriate time, consider the impact of the transfer of the functions on the current WMCA functions.

(b) WMCA Air Quality Framework and Implementation Plan (minute no. 167 refers)

The Chair questioned whether local authority lead officers had received the Air Quality Framework and Implementation Plan following its approval at the WMCA Board in November 2023. The Chief Executive agreed to liaise with the lead officer within the WMCA to ensure that the report had been shared with local authority lead officers.

(c) Joint Overview & Scrutiny Committee – Mayoral Q&A on the Proposed Draft Budget 2024/25.

In addition to the current workshops provided by the WMCA to help its scrutiny members to prepare for the Mayoral Q&A sessions on the draft budget, members considered that it would also be helpful to receive additional training from an external provider to help formulate specific questions.

173. **Mayoral Question Time: Policy - Response to Observations Presented to the WMCA Board on 17 November 2023**

The committee received a response in respect of the observations it had identified following the Mayoral Q&A session on 19 October 2023, based on WMCA policy related matters. The committee thanked the Mayor for his informative response to their observations presented to the WMCA Board on 17 November 2023.

Resolved

The response be noted.

174. Homes for the Future: Final Consideration

The committee considered a report of the Interim Director of Housing, Property & Regeneration on the work undertaken on Homes for the Future, including the Homes for the Future Implementation Plan, Communications Strategy and launch event.

In relation to airtightness and the use of passive house regulations, the Programme Support Officer referred to the comparative information within the report and explained that the use of passive house was the easiest way for the WMCA to compare against the Government's standard, but it was one of many methods that could be used, as the WMCA allowed flexibility in how its standard could be achieved.

Councillor Andrew Burrow enquired about the WMCA's standard and the exclusion of retrofit and non-domestic dwellings. The WMCA's Housing Team specifically looked at new builds and therefore retrofit was not included within the standard, however there was a separate piece of work ongoing by the retrofit team. In relation to non-domestic dwellings, the residential element received the most amount of funding, but both non-residential and retrofit would be considered in the future.

In addition, the Programme Support Officer assured the committee that the WMCA's Homes for the Future Standard would not impact the pace of delivery of homes being built on decontaminated sites. As part of its implementation plan, the WMCA would support and work with SMEs and smaller developers within the region on adopting and understanding the standards, sourcing appropriate manufactures, understanding how to apply for WMCA funding and how to access support from the WMCA if required.

With regards to skills, labour shortages and the potential impact on the strategy, the issues within the labour market were also addressed in the strategy, and it was envisaged that the WMCA could facilitate a skills base to encourage individuals into this specific type of construction.

Resolved

- (1) The work to date to develop the Homes for the Future programme for the West Midlands, and wide-ranging input from the Future Homes Taskforce and local authority partners across the region, among other relevant stakeholders be noted;
- (2) The comments made on the final draft of the Homes for the Future strategy be noted;
- (3) The feedback provided from the Homes for the Future event be noted; and
- (4) The Overview & Scrutiny Committee endorsed the official release of the WMCA's Homes for the Future proposals, subject to assurances sought in relation to retrofit, the commercial sector, the pace of delivery of homes on decontaminated sites and support provided for SMEs and

smaller developers.

- (5) The release of the Government's Future Homes Standard consultation be noted.
- (6) The progress on the work to date on the Homes for the Future Communications Strategy and Implementation Plan be noted; and
- (7) The WMCA's response to the Government's 'The Future Homes and Buildings Standards: 2023 Consultation; Approved Document L - Conservation of fuel and power and minimisation of greenhouse gas emissions Volume 2: Buildings other than dwellings' which considered the standard in relation to non-domestic dwellings, be noted.

175. West Midlands State of the Region 2023/24

The committee considered a report of the Executive Director, Strategy, Economy & Net Zero on the region's performance and the opportunities and challenges in the region.

The West Midlands State of the Region was a high-level report that brought to attention the most important trends in the West Midlands. It was an annual review that considered data relevant for comparison at yearly or longer-term basis.

The committee reviewed the key messages identified within the report and shared comments in relation to the inclusive growth framework, the use of doughnut economics, transparency, access to latest data figures and deprivation areas within the West Midlands.

The Chair enquired about the increase in in-work claimants and asked whether this could be measured and captured within the State of the Region report. The Head of Research, Intelligence & Inclusive Growth agreed to capture this information in future reports and agreed to review the information available in relation to the increase in home schooling caused by the pandemic.

Resolved

- (1) The key messages and recommendations set out in the State of the Region report be noted;
- (2) The areas identified by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee that it wished to review as part of its 2024/25 work programme including, areas around connectivity, commuting, air quality and retrofit skills be noted; and
- (3) The Overview & Scrutiny Committee welcomed the report and noted that information in relation to in-work claimants' figures and home schooling should be included within the report for consideration.

176. Employment & Skills Strategy for Deeper Devolution

The committee considered a report of the Interim Executive Director, Employment, Skills, Health & Communities that provided an update on the development of an Employment & Skills Strategy for the WMCA area.

Following a review undertaken by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee seeking to understand the impact of the devolution of the Adult Education Budget and to identify challenges and ways in which the WMCA and its constituents could most effectively use skills development to address short and longer-term challenges in the region, further consideration had been given by the WMCA's Employment, Skills, Health & Communities directorate to the emerging themes and considerations identified within the scrutiny report.

The committee discussed and shared comments in relation to skills and qualifications, an increase in youth unemployment, attainment of maths and English qualifications, common largest challenges for people to learn and upskill, benchmarking against other combined authority areas, the provision of training linked to the current and future labour market opportunities and how devolution had helped to accelerate progress on skills and employment.

The Chair enquired about the ability, through the devolution deal, to incentivise employers to invest in upskilling and training their employees. The offer to employers was provided via Business Growth West Midlands in addition to other programmes, incentives and support for businesses.

Councillor Andrew Burrow explored questions in relation to the construction industry and a Level 2 qualification, workforce planning across the region and the availability of data to demonstrate that the activities undertaken by the WMCA had an impact on the skills deficit across the key job opportunities within the West Midlands.

Resolved

- (1) The progress being made on the development of an Employment & Skills strategy for WMCA area and the development and implementation of an ESHC Benefits Realisation and Outcomes Framework be noted;
- (2) The approach being adopted through the strategy to ensure the integration of employment and skills across the region, and in establishing an overarching Outcomes Framework to ensure regional benefits were maximised through programme delivery activity be endorsed;
- (3) The key areas of focus set out in the strategy and the indicative benefits set out in the ESHC Benefits and Outcomes Framework be noted;
- (4) The implementation of an ESHC Directorate Performance Panel be noted; and

- (5) The next steps in implementation of the Employment & Skills Strategy and the Benefits & Outcomes Frameworks be endorsed.

177. Q3 Performance Reporting Against the Annual Business Plan

The committee considered a report of the Executive Director of Finance & Business Hub that set out the context to the monitoring and reporting of the Annual Business Plan and provided year-to-date performance, including trends and comparisons.

In September 2023, it was agreed that performance against the Annual Business Plan would be shared twice a year with Overview & Scrutiny Committee, to provide members with assurance of Executive Board responses, particularly to the red and amber indicators.

In response to a question raised by Councillor Jamie Tennant, the Executive Director of Finance & Business Hub explained that the red indicators related to transport were reviewed by the Transport Delivery Overview & Scrutiny Committee through regular capital programme monitoring reports considered by the committee.

Following a review of the report, members considered that HDL 72 (One Public Estate and Place Pilots Programme) and HDL 114 (Investment and Modernisation of 16 Summer Lane – 10 Year Property Maintenance Plan), should form part of its work programme for 2024/25.

Resolved

- (1) The approach on how the WMCA monitored the Annual Business Plan and the assurance it provided be endorsed; and
- (2) The areas identified in relation to One Public Estate and the Investment and Modernisation of 16 Summer Lane be included in the committees work programme for 2024/25.

178. Scrutiny Protocol

The committee considered a report of the Governance & Scrutiny Manager that provided an update on the publication of the Scrutiny Protocol that set out the next steps that would be undertaken to ensure that a sustained culture of scrutiny was embedded within the WMCA to ensure transparent and accountable decision-making and delivery of value for money on devolved funds.

The Governance & Scrutiny Manager provided an overview of the Government's protocol that was 'non statutory guidance' and therefore was to be considered as best practice in scrutiny, particularly for institutions like the WMCA that had Level 4 devolution and single funding settlements. It was a reflection of the existing strength of scrutiny within the WMCA that a significant part of the protocol set out activity that was already undertaken by its scrutiny committees.

The committee discussed and shared comments on the 18 key principles of good governance and the areas members considered activity needed strengthening in order to meet the aspirations of the protocol.

Further to discussions held at a recent meeting of the Combined Authorities Scrutiny Chairs Forum, the Chair reported that a consistency of membership and quoracy were issues highlighted across all combined authorities.

It was reported that the arrangements for the Mayor and MPs Q&A sessions were currently under development and a report would be presented to the WMCA Board in March.

Resolved

- (1) The publication of the Department for Housing, Levelling Up & Communities Scrutiny Protocol on 22 November 2023, be noted; and
- (2) A working group be established consisting of the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of both scrutiny committees, the Chair of Audit, Risk & Assurance Committee, and an additional member from the respective committees, to further strengthen and develop the WMCA's scrutiny function to meet the standards set out within the protocol's 18 key principles.

179. 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.

Resolved

The Grant Register be noted.

180. Work Programme

The committee noted a work programme of items that were to be reported to future meetings of the committee and WMCA Board.

Resolved

That the work programme be noted, subject to the inclusion of items identified during the meeting, and an item on investment zones and governance arrangements to be considered during 2024/25.

181. Date of Next Meeting

Monday 4 March 2024 at 10:00am.

The meeting ended at 12:10pm