

## Transport Delivery Overview & Scrutiny Committee

<b>Date</b>	18 March 2024
<b>Report title</b>	The Effectiveness of Member Engagement and Development - Final Report of the Task & Finish Group
<b>Members Undertaking the Review</b>	Councillor John McNicholas (Chair) Councillor Pervez Akhtar Councillor Cathy Bayton Councillor Carol Hyatt Councillor Timothy Huxtable Councillor Mary Locke Councillor Martin McCarthy Councillor David Stanley Councillor Ian Ward
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<b>Report has been considered by</b>	n/a

### Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

### The Transport Delivery Overview & Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:

- (1) Endorse the conclusions and recommendations of the task & finish group, as set out within paragraph 4.1 of the report below, for submission and consideration by the WMCA Board on 14 June 2024.

## **1. Purpose**

- 1.1 To consider the recommendations arising out of a review undertaken by a task & finish group established by this committee to look into the effectiveness of member engagement and development within the WMCA.

## **2. Background**

- 2.1 Following a Q&A session with the Portfolio Lead Member for Transport on transport policy and delivery related matters, and feedback received from visits to local authority scrutiny committee meetings, at its meeting on 11 December 2023, this committee agreed to establish a task & finish group to review the effectiveness of member engagement and development within the WMCA and to make recommendations as to how this could be further developed and improved. The task & finish group was chaired by Councillor John McNicholas, and included the following members:

Councillor Pervez Akhtar  
Councillor Cathy Bayton  
Councillor Carol Hyatt  
Councillor Timothy Huxtable  
Councillor Mary Locke  
Councillor Martin McCarthy  
Councillor David Stanley  
Councillor Ian Ward

- 2.2 The task & finish group met on six occasions, principally to hear evidence from a wide range of stakeholders as to the current engagement and development that was undertaken with councillors currently sitting on a WMCA committee, as well as with those councillors who were not currently participating in WMCA decision making, but still wished to be informed and engaged in the WMCA's activities.

- 2.3 The following individuals were interviewed as part of this evidence gathering phase of the review:

Councillor Matthew Dormer, Leader, Redditch Borough Council  
James Hughes, Member Relationship Manager, WMCA  
Laura Shoaf, Chief Executive, WMCA  
Councillor Stephen Simkins, Leader, City of Wolverhampton Council  
Councillor Bob Sleigh, Deputy Mayor, WMCA

- 2.4 The task & finish group also reflected on their own experiences of sitting on WMCA committees and how the authority had engaged with them. The evidence presented to the group, along with their own experiences, could subsequently then be grouped into a number of key areas.

## **3. Findings of the Review**

- 3.1 The evidence presented to the task & finish group could be summarised in the following thematic groups:

### Member Induction/Training

- Focus is currently on providing induction to the Mayor and Leaders, and this needed to be broadened out to all members appointed to sit on WMCA committees.
- Member training provided by the WMCA needs to compliment and add to training already provided within local authorities, rather than duplicate.
- Consideration should be given to WMCA-facilitated member seminars covering powers, functions, structures, decision making, finance, scrutiny etc.
- Were there opportunities for the WMCA to participate in local authority-organised induction training for its new members?

### Member Engagement

- Most 'backbench' councillors not directly involved in WMCA committees do not have a clear understanding as to what the WMCA does.
- Local councillors could be used more as the conduit through which the WMCA shared information with local residents.
- Should members sitting on WMCA committees have a more clearly defined role within their own local authorities to facilitate a two-way flow of information?
- Engagement with local councillors not sitting on WMCA committees requires a different approach than for those members who attend WMCA meetings.

### Council Engagement

- The WMCA should continue to develop the principle of producing tailored annual reports to each constituent authority following their trialled introduction this year.
- Is there opportunity for the WMCA to participate more widely in 'marketplace' type events before constituent member full council meetings?
- What should be the realistic expectation for WMCA officers to attend local authority meetings?
- The WMCA can do a better job in updating councils with its latest activity and scheme progress.
- Should the WMCA consider establishing more structured engagement with non-constituent authorities outside of formal committee meetings? Is the WMCA clear what it wants from its non-constituent members?

### Governance

- Is it sufficient for governance arrangements outside of formal meetings to exist on a 'custom and practice' basis, or should they be codified within the constitution?
- Is there sufficient consistency in the WMCA's engagement across local authorities?
- Is it beneficial to mirror the arrangements for Strategic Transport Board, whereby the Portfolio Lead for Transport meets with transport cabinet members from the seven constituent authorities, across all the other portfolio areas?
- Does the WMCA have adequate formal and informal political structures (outside of those that exist for the Mayor and Portfolio Leads) to help facilitate good decision making?
- Are local authority cabinet members appropriately involved in the WMCA decision making processes?
- Frequent inquorate meetings negatively impact on the legitimacy of a committee and greater effort should be made to challenge non-attendance.
- There should be closer alignment between local authority and WMCA scrutiny activity, enabling more targeted scrutiny activity.

- Should all members considering sitting on WMCA committees be provided with a role profile to ensure they properly understand the commitments required of the role?
- Should there be greater accountability and public visibility as to attendance of members at WMCA meetings, and a greater willingness by local authorities to remove members with persistent non-attendance?
- The appointment processes operated by local authorities is key to ensuring that councils maximise their involvement in WMCA activity.
- Should local authorities consider appointing its members to sit, in principle, on WMCA committees for multiple years to reflect the Government's Scrutiny Protocol's ambition for combined authorities to operate overview and scrutiny arrangements to the highest possible standards?
- Special recognition needs to be given to the different relationship non-constituent authorities have with the WMCA and how their involvement at a member-level in WMCA activity can be better utilised.
- Do local authorities provide sufficient opportunities for their members to ask questions relating to the council's engagement with the WMCA at council meetings?
- Comprehensive oversight and scrutiny of the Mayor and other political decision makers strengthens the legitimacy of the WMCA and need to be acknowledged.

#### Other Considerations

- Because the WMCA has grown organically since 2016, its structures and practices may not have kept up with the organisational growth that it has undertaken.
- The role and value that the WMCA can play in facilitating engagement between local authorities and learning from best practice should not be understated.
- Is there sufficient clarity and shared recognition of the boundaries and limits of WMCA activity? Does the WMCA communicate what is and is not its responsibilities?
- WMCA engagement with local authorities is a two-way process and does require a willingness to engage from councils.
- There needs to be an understanding and recognition that members need to commit time to having a better understanding of WMCA functions and activity.
- Does the WMCA adequately communicate to local authorities who its key points of contact are?
- The WMCA's website is not being utilised to the full extent that it could be in providing public information on its role, activities and achievements.
- Can the WMCA do a better job attaching its name to projects and schemes it is facilitating delivery on in order to give more public visibility to its activities?
- Direct comparison with other combined authorities is difficult given the different responsibilities being exercised and different political arrangements.
- Recognise that much of this requires additional officer resources and time. There is currently only one officer who is focussed on member engagement and development to 470 constituent authority councillors and 440 non-constituent authority councillors, totalling 910 across all members of the combined authority. There are also 140 councillors who sit on the various WMCA boards who must be engaged alongside their role as a local authority councillor role. It is recognised that if many of the recommendations are agreed more resource would be required.
- Recognise that overview and scrutiny is an authority-wide responsibility that needs to be supported and encouraged throughout the organisation.

3.2 After considering the written and oral evidence it received, the task & finish group concluded that a number of recommendations should be considered by the WMCA Board to strengthen the current level of engagement and development activities with local authority members appointed onto the WMCA's committees, but also with those members within local authorities that were seeking a greater understanding and knowledge of the WMCA and its activities. In making these recommendations, the task & finish group would like to thank all those councillors and officers who gave their evidence in an open and collaborative spirit. Scrutiny members saw a clear willingness from all those involved to further strengthen current arrangements and to help the WMCA continually improve.

#### **4. Recommendations of the Task & Finish Group**

4.1 The task & finish group made nine recommendations, grouped into four main themes arising out of the review:

##### **Member Induction/Training**

- (1) Develop a comprehensive induction programme / onboarding arrangements for new and returning members to help embed a collective understanding of the role of the WMCA and how it complements the work of local authorities.
- (2) Develop a comprehensive training / seminar programme for all WMCA members that complements the training already provided by local authorities and is tailored to the activity of the WMCA.

##### **Member/Council Engagement**

- (3) Look to create further opportunities to engage with all constituent and non-constituent authority members, including attending pre-council 'marketplace' events, joint training sessions and member briefings in order to increase the understanding and engagement local councillors have with the WMCA.

##### **Governance**

- (4) Consider establishing portfolio-specific political structures involving cabinet members from constituent authorities and the corresponding WMCA portfolio lead to discuss strategy and delivery matters, ensuring greater engagement with constituent authority decision makers and improved co-ordination in activity.
- (5) Consider establishing political structures involving non-constituent leaders and the political leadership of the WMCA in order to improve engagement and awareness in WMCA activity.
- (6) Local authorities be encouraged to consider making multi-year appointments to WMCA committees aligned to the mayoral term of office to enable the development of subject matter expertise.

- (7) A role profile be developed for members appointed to all WMCA committees setting out the expectations and commitment requirements of the role, as recommended by the Scrutiny Protocol. To help increase attendance at meetings, the Monitoring Officer should continue to ensure that attendance is published online and that this is shared with council leaders on a monthly basis. Where there is persistent non-attendance, the chair of the relevant committee should bring this to the attention of WMCA Board and the relevant leader of the council/political group.
- (8) Engagement mechanisms and governance processes be codified within the constitution to provide clarity as to these arrangements.

## **Resources**

- (9) Further consideration be given to strengthening the WMCA's financial and non-financial resources to support scrutiny and member engagement improvements highlighted by this review.

## **5. Next Steps**

- 5.1 If this committee is minded to endorse the recommendations set out above, they will be submitted to the WMCA Board on 14 June 2024 for consideration and support. Officers would then be asked to respond to the committee at a future meeting how it intends to implement the recommendations of the review.

## **6. Strategic Aims and Objectives**

- 6.1 Improving member engagement and development helps the WMCA develop itself as a good regional partner (strategic aim 6).

## **7. Financial Implications**

- 7.1 Some of the recommendations highlighted above can be met within existing resources. The extent of any additional financial investment associated with delivering these recommendations will be evaluated at a later stage once there is a clear action plan of how the recommendations are to be implemented. Any additional resources are likely to be a call on WMCA local funding.

## **8. Legal Implications**

- 8.1 There are no direct legal implications arising out of this report.

## **9. Single Assurance Framework Implications**

- 9.1 There are no direct implications arising out of the recommendations contained within this report.

## **10. Equalities Implications**

- 10.1 There are no direct implications arising out of the recommendations contained within this report.

## **11. Inclusive Growth Implications**

- 11.1 There are no direct implications arising out of the recommendations contained within this report.

## **12. Geographical Area of Report's Implications**

- 12.1 The report relates to members appointed onto WMCA committees from all constituent and non-constituent authorities.

## **13. Other Implications**

- 13.1 There are no other implications arising out of the recommendations contained within this report.

## **14. Schedule of Background Papers**

- 14.1 Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities - Scrutiny Protocol - November 2023