



Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Date	22 October 2019
Report title	Feedback from Overview & Scrutiny Committee Mayor's Question Time: Policy
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Recommendation(s) for decision:

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:

- (1) Note the Mayoral Q&A event held with members of the Overview & Scrutiny committee, joined by members of the new Young Combined Authority on 9 October.
- (2) Note the conclusions arising out of the event as set out in paragraph 4.2.
- (3) Note that a further Mayoral Q&A event to be held in February 2020, with a specific focus on Transport.

1. Purpose

- 1.1 A Mayoral Q&A session was held on 9 October where members of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee questioned Andy Street on the delivery and impact of the WMCA policies. This report details the Overview & Scrutiny Committee's feedback from that Q&A session together with recommendations for the WMCA Board to consider.

2. Background

- 2.1 On 9 October, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, joined by three members of the new Young Combined Authority, held a public Mayoral Q&A session, where the Mayor was questioned for nearly two hours on the delivery and impact of WMCA policies in areas as varied as housing, skills, economic development and 5G. This is an important part of providing public accountability and decision making transparency for the WMCA's only directly elected politician.

- 2.2 At its first meeting the Overview & Scrutiny Committee had identified its objective for 2019/20 as:

“Commissioning and undertaking an effective, clear and accountable programme of scrutiny reviews that improve the outcomes for residents of the West Midlands, ensuring that the committee and its members engage fully with the region’s constituent and non-constituent authorities and its local enterprise partnerships”

3. Mayoral Q&A

- 3.1 The committee pursued a number of general lines of enquiry with the Mayor including governance, economic development and the impact on the region, skills, housing and 5G:

(a) Governance Structure

- There was a discussion as to whether the governance structure of the WMCA was fit for purpose three years after it had been established, given the rapid growth of its remit and influence.
- The committee were also keen to understand how the WMCA could ensure that through the application of Devolution “left behind” communities were strengthened and prosperity and inclusive growth was felt across the region.

(b) Economic Development

- The WMCA was moving into a delivery phase within the three key areas of transport, housing and skills that would be the main drivers of inclusive economic development. The role of the Local Industrial Strategy in balancing the need to attract high skilled jobs into the region whilst expanding key manufacturing industries would be pivotal.
- There was a discussion on Brexit and the potential impact on the region's economy of various scenarios together with the operation of the proposed Shared Prosperity Fund.

(c) Skills

- There was significant discussion on the delivery of skills training in tackling the number of younger people within the region not in education, employment or training ('NEETS'), as well as the economic impact that a reduction in the number of children not considered to be 'school ready' would have. Discussions were also held regarding the Apprenticeship Levy and lifelong learning opportunities.
- The Mayor was asked for his views about the best way to ensure that the benefit of attractive high quality jobs to the region were felt by all sectors of the workforce and those not currently in work.
- The Mayor was also asked about spending by the West Midlands Combined Authority on redundancies and consultants at a time when apprenticeship numbers were going down.

(d) Housing

- The supply and availability of affordable housing occurred throughout discussions, and the Mayor stressed the need to ensure greater powers were devolved from the Government that allowed the region to specify and ensure affordable housing quotas within larger developments were delivered.
- The Housing First programme to provide accommodation to people who found themselves homeless was also discussed, including the disparity within local authorities in putting housing units into the scheme. The Mayor was asked about the number of individuals who had already been helped by the scheme.
- The need to tackle the causes of homelessness through appropriate support for those in the programme was also discussed.
- Concerns over the private rented sector were also raised but the limitation of the Mayoral Combined Authority to influence that market was highlighted.

(e) WM5G

- The importance of the Mayor being able to leverage private sector investment into the region was recognised as a key determining factor in successfully delivering the 5G trial project.

(f) Brexit

- The implications and timescales of Brexit ran through much of the discussions, particularly in respect of the delivery of the Local Industrial Strategy. More detail was needed on the proposed Shared Prosperity Fund, and the consultation on how that fund was to be regionally allocated was of significant importance.

4. Conclusions

4.1 The Mayoral Q&A sessions are one of the mechanisms by which the committee scrutinises the work of the WMCA. A further Q&A session is already planned for December when the 2020/21 draft budget will be discussed.

4.2 In respect of this session, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee noted the following conclusions:

- The Mayor undertook to provide further information in response to questions on non-constituent authorities accessing the housing and land development fund, the transitioning of support for younger people once they reach the age of 25, and the use of a disabled travel pass on the Metro.
- The potential for Overview & Scrutiny Committee to look at whether the WMCA was appropriately structured to engage properly in matters relating to public health within its areas of competency.
- The potential for Overview & Scrutiny Committee to look at the extent to which the WMCA's policies were reaching marginalised communities, and the extent to which the WMCA was improving their lives.
- The need for an additional Mayoral Q&A session to be held in February 2020 to focus specifically on transport-related matters.
- A request from the Young Combined Authority for suggestions as to what areas it should be considering, so as to ensure that the views of younger people in the region is fed into the issues that the WMCA is considering.

Financial Implications

5. There are no direct financial implications arising out of the recommendations contained within this report.

Legal Implications

6. There are no direct legal implications arising out of the recommendations contained within this report.

Equalities Implications

7. There are no direct equality implications arising out of the recommendations contained within this report.

Inclusive Growth Implications

8. There are no direct inclusive growth implications arising out of the recommendations contained within this report.

Geographical Area of Report's Implications

9. The Overview & Scrutiny Committee comprises 12 members appointed by constituent authorities and seven members appointed by non-constituent authorities.

Other Implications

10. There are no further specific implications arising out of the recommendations contained within the report.