
West Midlands Combined Authority
Overview & Scrutiny
Committee
Annual Report 2019/20



West Midlands
Combined Authority

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Foreword

Chair – Councillor Lisa Trickett

Can I welcome you to the annual review of the West Midlands Combined Authority's Overview & Scrutiny Committee for 2019/20, my first as its Chair. Whilst we all entered the year without any sense of the unprecedented challenges the WMCA, the wider West Midlands region or indeed the whole country would be facing by the time 12 months was out, the members of the committee were clear in the key role they were tasked with in holding the Mayor, Portfolio Leads and the combined authority's wider political leadership to account.

The themes the committee identified at the start of the year as running throughout its workplan - accountability, connectivity, investment – set out clearly its focus on how the WMCA would make a difference to the communities across the region, how investment decisions would actually improve people's lives, and ensuring that aspirational ideas were followed up with identifiable actions. I hope the annual review gives a sense of the work undertaken to do this.

I would like to thank the Mayor, Portfolio Leads, officers of the WMCA and others who willingly gave their time to meet with the committee in an open and reflective way, and who acknowledged the constructive challenge of scrutiny members in the spirit it was offered. Can I also thank those officers who supported and facilitated the work of committee, much of it behind the scenes but of no lesser importance.

The significance of the work undertaken by the WMCA during the next 12 months cannot be overstated. The post-Covid-19 recovery plan, as it seeks to address the economic and social impact of this awful pandemic, must ensure investments and interventions are targeted at closing the region's inequalities and fulfilling the WMCA's ambition of inclusive growth and tackling climate change. The Overview & Scrutiny Committee stands ready to play its part in these endeavours.

Can I finish by thanking all the members of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee for their countless hours of hard work during the last year. They have much to be proud of, and I look forward to working with them again in the coming year to further build on the vital role the committee undertakes.



Committee Members 2019/20



Councillor Lisa Trickett
Birmingham
Committee Chair and Scrutiny
Champion for Public Service
Reform & Social Economy



Councillor Dean Carroll
Shropshire



Councillor Cathy Bayton
Dudley
Committee Vice-Chair



Councillor Mike Chalk
Redditch
Scrutiny Champion for
Productivity & Skills



Councillor Lynnette Kelly
Coventry
Committee Vice-Chair



Councillor Brian Douglas-Maul
Walsall



Councillor Richard Brown
Coventry
Scrutiny Champion for Culture &
Digital



Councillor Peter Fowler
Birmingham
Scrutiny Champion for
Environment, Energy & HS2



Paul Brown
Black Country LEP



Councillor Angus Lees
Dudley
Scrutiny Champion for Transport



Councillor Chris Cade
Rugby



Mike Lyons
Greater Birmingham & Solihull
LEP

Committee Members 2019/20



Councillor Simon People

Tamworth
Scrutiny Champion for Housing
& Land



Councillor Paul Sweet

Wolverhampton



Councillor Lucy Seymour-Smith

Birmingham



Councillor Kate Wild

Solihull



Councillor Stephen Simkins

Wolverhampton
Scrutiny Champion for Economy
& Innovation and Inclusive
Communities



Sarah Windrum

Coventry & Warwickshire LEP

A Year of Overview & Scrutiny in Numbers

1

Overview &
Scrutiny
Committee

19

Members

8

Scrutiny
Champions

2

Task & Finish
Groups

3

Mayoral Q&A
Sessions with
Scrutiny

7

Scrutiny Training
Events

6

Committee
Meetings

3

Spotlight
Sessions

Introduction

Overview & Scrutiny is a statutory function within the West Midlands Combined Authority, undertaken by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee that has responsibility to review the work of the Mayor and the WMCA and hold decision makers to account.

It may make recommendations to the WMCA Board and other committees, and call in decisions for further scrutiny and challenge that have already been made. The committee acts as an advocate for residents of the West Midlands by investigating issues that are important to local people and by looking further into matters brought to its attention by the public. From improving the economy to tackling mental health inequality, from delivering new modes of public transport to enabling the construction of new housing, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, comprising the region's local councillors, is the body that scrutinises how all this is done.

While the committee's membership includes local councillors nominated by the WMCA's 18 member councils, it also has three representatives from the region's local enterprise partnerships. This brings a private sector perspective to discussions and ensures that the views of the region's local industries are heard at the highest levels of decision making.

The committee performs two functions: 'overview' and 'scrutiny'. 'Overview' focuses on the development of policy and 'scrutiny' that looks at decisions that have been made or are about to be made.

Overview & Scrutiny Committee

The committee has continued to build on the work of previous years in developing a programme that gives broad oversight to the policies of the WMCA and reviews the effectiveness of its key decisions. It has an important role in reviewing and scrutinising the Mayor, portfolio lead members and the wider WMCA about plans, priorities, corporate governance arrangements and financial affairs.

Overview & Scrutiny's Core Objective

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee had identified its core 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”

Overview & Scrutiny's Key Themes

Underpinning this core objective, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee's work programme had a particular focus on three key themes:

- **Accountability**

The committee wished to see that high standards of governance underpinned how the WMCA made its decisions. This scrutiny area sought to ensure that those governance structures were fit for purpose, effective, encouraged transparent decision making and had adapted to new responsibilities for the WMCA. Wider public engagement was also looked at to ensure that the WMCA was hearing views of marginalised voices as well as those of experts. An appropriate understanding of the relative areas of responsibility of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the Audit, Risk & Assurance Committee was of relevance to this theme.

- **Connectivity**

The committee wished to see how the WMCA's services provided improved connectivity which benefited all areas across the region to ensure Inclusive growth targets were met. This covered not just traditional transport issues but new and emerging types of connectivity and the environment/energy and HS2 initiatives. This scrutiny area challenged the strength of these connections, as well as how the WMCA was addressing the digital divide within the region and making sure new technologies were delivered in a timely and inclusive way.

- **Investment**

Inclusive growth was at the heart of what the WMCA sought to do, and the WMCA was responsible for, or had influence over, significant funding streams. Its value as an organisation relied on the effective targeting of this funding. This scrutiny area sought to establish whether the ambitions and policies of the WMCA were realistic to the levels of funding it had, whether funding streams were being effectively targeted, and whether communities could feel the benefit of the WMCA's involvement.

Young Combined Authority Board

This year representatives from the newly established Young Combined Authority Board have joined the Overview & Scrutiny Committee to challenge and scrutinise the Mayor, portfolio lead members and the WMCA on matters relating to the delivery and impact of the WMCA's policies, financial affairs, transport, digital initiatives and the developing agenda to address climate change from a young person's perspective.

It is important that the voices of the young people are brought to the forefront and issues and concerns are brought to light at the ultimate decision-making board of the West Midlands.

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The world around us continues to change rapidly and decisions that are made, the policies that are passed through - whether existing or new - impacts and transforms many aspects of our daily lives. As a generation, we are passionate to support causes we believe in and to be able to make a positive difference, not just for ourselves but the people we represent. It is then, when given the opportunity and flexibility, that young people can effectively offer unique insight on a broad range of issues.

As a Young Combined Authority (YCA), when we were presented with the opportunity to be part of the committee, we embraced it with open arms. The WMCA's Overview & Scrutiny Committee serves as a platform to challenge and question the Mayor of the West Midlands on policies and decision-making on a range of different topics. It has allowed members, serving as representatives of the YCA, to directly address the Mayor on the decisions and actions that affect our community and issues that are important to us.

Scrutiny's willingness to include the YCA and let us play an active role in partaking with in-depth reviews on specific issues has allowed for a more diverse perspective and valuable new insights they may not have received otherwise. It is these diverse perspectives that are needed in any board room to pursue its fundamental purpose, to add value. Ultimately, as young representatives we are best placed to express and address matters that affect us and ensure decisions are more appropriate and relevant.

As a member of the YCA, whilst serving on the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, I was also offered the opportunity to be a part of the WMCA governance review. I felt empowered, and by having access to decision making processes it further motivated me to participate in sessions and offer my contribution.

As one of my personal highlights, the governance review really demonstrated scrutiny's strengths in permitting young people to take on valued roles and influencing real outcomes. Through this review, I followed up on a connection with the Greater Manchester Youth Combined Authority and as a result, it has led to further engagements with officers at the GMYCA and positive dialogue has begun. This has been extremely worthwhile as it provides the YCA a chance to learn and adopt methods that have worked well for our older like establishment and vice versa.

I am keen to harness the connections made and engage in positive collaborative ideas going forward. It's not rocket science that young people are more likely to act on decisions if they have been involved in making them, and though some may be skeptical, there are clear benefits in having them involved.

A younger generation brings a fresh eye and innovative approaches to the mix and with that being said, I'm certain that the Young Combined Authority will only continue to add value. I would like to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt gratitude to the Chair and Vice Chairs, as well as members of the scrutiny committee, for their warm welcome and embracing us wholeheartedly. To be part of such an important and integral function of the West Midlands Combined Authority has been remarkable and it has genuinely been rewarding both professionally and personally.

Aisha Masood, Young Combined Authority Board

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Overview & Scrutiny Holding Decision Makers to Account

The committee has undertaken a number of public Mayoral Q&A sessions. These were structured around the committee's three core themes (accountability, connectivity and investment) with questions focusing on the key challenges for the WMCA.

In October, the committee questioned Andy Street on the delivery and impact of the WMCA policies in areas including:

- **Affordable housing**
- **Skills**
- **Economic development**
- **WM5G**

In December, the committee held its second Q&A with the Mayor and questioned him on financial matters relating to the developing budget for 2020/21, with a particular focus on:

- **financial transparency between proposed and actual spend**
- **measures to achieve inclusive growth outcomes**
- **targeting investments and outcome-based funding**
- **the future funding arrangements for the Young Combined Authority,**
- **future intentions for a mayoral precept and a WMCA business rate supplement; and**
- **the outcomes that the WMCA had achieved.**

The Mayor was also joined by the Portfolio Lead for Finance, Councillor Bob Sleight, who was questioned on matters relating to the Investment Programme.

For the first time this year in February, the committee held a third Q&A session with the Mayor, the Managing Director of Transport for West Midlands and the Managing Director of WM5G Ltd that had a specific focus on connectivity issues. The lines of enquiry covered not just transport issues but new and emerging types of connectivity and the environment/energy and HS2 initiatives. Members challenged the strength of these connections, as well as how the WMCA was addressing the digital divide within the region and making sure that new technologies were delivered in a timely and inclusive way.

Scrutiny members felt that these public Q&A sessions were an important part of providing public accountability and transparency of decision-making for the WMCA's only directly-elected politician.

Mayoral Q&A Sessions

Key Findings

Question Time One: Delivery and Impact of the WMCA's Policies

The conclusions and recommendations of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee have led to:

- A scrutiny review that looked at whether the WMCA was appropriately structured from a governance perspective to discharge its functions and responsibilities, given the rapid growth of its remit and influence.
- Clarification on the housing funding available to non-constituent members of the WMCA and how to apply.
- A deeper understanding of the support available to young people with disabilities beyond the age of 25.
- The development of a set of questions for future Mayoral Q&A sessions that enabled the committee to look deeper at the extent the WMCA's policies were reaching marginalised communities and the impact on their lives.
- An additional Q&A session held in February 2020 that focussed specifically on connectivity-related matters.

Question Time Two: WMCA's Draft Budget 2020/21

The following matters were submitted for consideration by the WMCA Board as part of its approval of the 2020/21 budget:

- The development of a mechanism for assessing the impact of the WMCA's Investment Programme on new projects coming forward, which was to include an evaluation of carbon counting, social impact and value-added assessments.
- The consideration of an environmental impact assessment to be undertaken before any new WMCA policy was introduced so that its direct impact on the environment was assessed as part of wider policy considerations.
- The continued promotion of an approach to addressing current skills needs that actively engaged employers and skills providers in understanding and responding to the future and projected skills needs of the region.
- The development of new practices and reporting to strengthen and consolidate performance information.

Question Time Three: Connectivity

The committee had reached a number of conclusions arising out of the responses it had received from the Mayor, and had a clear sense that public transport provision needed to respond to and reflect modern travel needs, recognising that existing transport planning might not always be addressing these needs. The conclusions reached included:

- Further consideration on how public transport connected with communities across the West Midlands. Were 'old' solutions still being applied to 21st century problems?
- Further clarification from the Government regarding its announcement of £5bn of funding for bus services. How much funding would be allocated to the West Midlands?
- Consideration to be given to the wider benefits of making the 16-18 photocard travel pass available for use at any time, including the funding implications that this would have.
- An acknowledgement of the tensions created by the use of different funding streams relating to capital and revenue expenditure.
- Transport for West Midlands should continue to be minded of the impact that affordability had on passengers' ability and willingness to use public transport.
- The full range of regulatory powers available to the Mayor/WMCA to give greater control and oversight over the public transport network should be more fully considered to address market failings.



The Impact of Scrutiny & Effectiveness

The committee has made a total of 17 recommendations to the WMCA Board, all of which were accepted, in relation to:

- WMCA's budget for 2020/21
- Connectivity within the region
- Transport governance
- Adult Education Budget

Transport Governance Scrutiny Review

Overview & Scrutiny Committee has recommended the strengthening of the Authority's Transport Delivery Committee and the wider transport governance arrangements within the West Midlands Combined Authority and across the region.

The acceptance of the recommendations by the Portfolio Lead for Transport and the WMCA Board led to a clear understanding of where transport policy, delivery and scrutiny should sit. The WMCA is therefore developing a mechanism:

- to improve the development of transport policy within the region.
- to provide a solution to strengthen transport scrutiny that would hold those charged with policy making and delivery responsibilities to account, and helped to align the transport scrutiny work undertaken within the constituent authorities together with the WMCA; and
- to commit to undertake a regular 'health check' of its governance within each mayoral cycle.

The committee will review how effective its recommendations have been in January 2021.

WMCA Governance Arrangements Scrutiny Review

Overview & Scrutiny Committee has reviewed the WMCA's governance arrangements to determine whether they were currently appropriate to deliver its aims and policy objectives, given the growth of its remit and influence.

The review group sought a range of written and verbal evidence to help inform its conclusions and recommendations. Face-to-face interviews were held with:

- Andy Street, Mayor of the West Midlands
- Deborah Cadman, Chief Executive, WMCA
- David Lane, Independent Chair, Audit, Risk & Assurance Committee
- Julie Connor, Assistant Director Governance & Scrutiny, Greater Manchester CA
- Linda Horne, Director of Finance, WMCA
- Martin Reeves, Chief Executive, Coventry City Council
- Councillor Ian Brookfield, Leader, City of Wolverhampton Council
- Tim Martin, Head of Governance, Clerk and Monitoring Officer, WMCA

The committee is producing a briefing note based on its findings that will be shared with the Mayor and the Strategic Leadership Team in due course.

Adult Education Budget Scrutiny Review

Overview & Scrutiny Committee has undertaken a review of the Adult Education Budget in conjunction with Portfolio Leads for Productivity & Skills from each of the constituent authorities.

The adoption of the recommendations by the Skills Advisory Board and the WMCA Board has led to:

- the development of a method for tracking learner destinations to demonstrate the impact of devolution.
- work to establish a set of impact measures for the Adult Education Budget to include wider social outcomes such as improved confidence and improved health.
- the commissioning of an independent four-year evaluation of the impact of the Adult Education Budget and the impact of devolution.
- funding training and education that leads to jobs and to improvements in employment and income for individuals.
- improvements in ensuring that all Adult Education Budget employability courses added value to an individual's journey into employment.
- the development of a discussion paper to understand the potential role of the Adult Education Budget in supporting learners with learning difficulties and disabilities aged post-19



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Overview & Scrutiny Committee's recommendations have really helped us to drive a different approach with AEB

Director of Productivity & Skills, WMCA

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Spotlight Sessions

An agile and lighter touch approach to scrutiny reviews

WM5G

In the autumn of 2019, the committee held its first spotlight session with WM5G to discuss and challenge the delivery of the programme, its objectives and impact.

The committee questioned Andy Welch, Technical Director, WM5G Ltd on areas as varied as:

- investments (real, secured and guaranteed money)
- measures and metrics used to seek the outcomes and achievement of the programme within three years
- the projection of jobs created across the region, for both private and public sectors, as a result of 5G
- barriers to delivery
- alleged health concerns and data security implications.
- Implications of Brexit to the delivery programme

In the spring of 2020, a further session was held with Robert Franks, Managing Director, WM5G Ltd. Questions focused on:

- how 5G could benefit SMEs
- the role 5G would play in delivering innovative new projects
- funding structures that underpinned the trial
- the need to establish awareness of the difference between 5G consumer and 5G core.
- investments
- the need to ensure that all communities should be able to benefit from the delivery of 5G

#WM2041: Actions to Meet the Climate Challenge

In the summer of 2019, the WMCA Board declared a climate emergency.

A spotlight session was held with the Director of Public Sector Reform on the proposals of the WMCA's Carbon Reduction Action Plan that was used to inform the #WM2041 climate green paper.

The committee asked questions that focused on:

- the robustness of the transition plan
- timescales for delivery
- the need for additional investment to deliver such a crucial agenda by 2041
- affordability for those already marginalised
- the delivery of eco-friendly housing
- transport initiatives to help reduce car use and encourage the use of public transport



Training & Development

Members Induction Session

In the summer of 2019, a Members induction session was held to welcome new members that had been appointed onto the WMCA Board and/or its committees.

The purpose of the session was to help members to better understand the role and remit of the West Midlands Combined Authority, and to meet the Chief Executive, the Mayor and Deputy Mayor and key senior officers.

Statutory Guidance on Overview & Scrutiny in Local and Combined Authorities

In the summer of 2019, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee received an update on the new statutory guidance on Overview & Scrutiny in Local and Combined Authorities, and what this meant for the committee, which had been published by the Ministry of Housing & Communities Local Government in May 2019.

Role of the WMCA's Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Members of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee received further training and material that highlighted the core role the scrutiny committee played in the WMCA, its value and the outcomes it could deliver, the powers it had, its membership and the role and purpose of the committee. The WMCA had developed a suite of information to help communicate scrutiny's role and purpose to members and officers including:

New Scrutiny Protocol

A new scrutiny protocol was developed during year that helped to develop a collective understanding of the committee's core role and purpose and a common understanding about the way it operated. The protocol outlined cultural aspects such as behaviours, officer support, expectations and engagement, together with ways of working and important administrative aspects.

Overview & Scrutiny Member Role Profile

The WMCA had developed a role profile for members that helped to give them an indication of what would be expected of them as a member of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

Member Development Plan 2019/20

A development plan for members of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee had been produced for 2019/20. The plan ensured that members were provided with the skills and knowledge to help them to effectively fulfil their role as a scrutiny member within the West Midlands Combined Authority. A number of training sessions were held throughout the year including:

WMCA Finance Training

During October and November 2019, members participated in two training sessions in relation to the WMCA's finances 2019/20 and the draft budget 2020/21. The training sessions focused on the:

- WMCA's financial position for 2019/20
- draft budgets for the respective portfolios 2020/21
- draft capital budgets
- Investment Programme
- options for funding future transport services
- additional funding devolved from Government to the WMCA to deliver its priorities through two devolution deals, a housing deal and a skills deal.
- timetable for the development of the Medium Term Financial Plan 2020

Centre for Public Scrutiny Training Events

In addition to internal training, officers of the WMCA and members of the committee were informed of training and events that are led by the Centre for Public Scrutiny, as appropriate.

Centre for Public Scrutiny Annual Conference: Driving Smarter Scrutiny - 3 December, London

The Centre for Public Scrutiny held its Annual Conference on 3 December in London. The conference was attended by Statutory Scrutiny Officer and Governance Services Manager. The event consisted of practical workshops with expert speakers on the latest news and trends. There were opportunities to share best practice, challenges and learn from others.

Combined Authority Governance Network Group – 'A Collective of the Combined Authorities'

The Combined Authority Governance Network Group is a collective of combined authorities across the country that meet on a regular basis and share best practice and learn from others on governance matters, including overview and scrutiny issues. The West Midlands Combined Authority is a regular participant of the network group, which is facilitated by the Centre for Public Scrutiny on behalf of the Local Government Association.



Communications Activity

Overview & Scrutiny Committee Communications Plan

The WMCA has developed a communications plan to help to:

- raise the level of awareness of the work of the committee amongst members of the public, local authorities and other stakeholders.
- Increase citizen engagement, particularly amongst harder to reach communities.
- Highlight best practice within governance and scrutiny.

End of Year Evaluation Survey

An end of year self-evaluation survey was undertaken this year that provided members with an opportunity to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of the WMCA's current arrangements for Overview & Scrutiny Committee, and to put in place practical steps for improvement. Key findings included:

- More engagement sought with portfolio leads and their areas of responsibility.
- Greater use to be made of the knowledge and expertise of LEP representatives.
- Focussed topics of discussion for each of the Mayoral Q&A sessions.
- Greater flexibility around scheduling of meetings required to help member participation.

Twitter Account - @WMCA_Scrutiny

In February 2020, the WMCA had introduced a dedicated twitter account @WMCA_Scrutiny for its Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

Scrutiny Bulletin

A bulletin summarising the work of the committee was circulated after each meeting to members and officers within the West Midlands Combined Authority and constituent and non-constituent authorities.

Looking Forward

Overview & Scrutiny is a statutory function within the West Midlands Combined Authority, undertaken by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee that has responsibility to review the work of the Mayor and the WMCA and hold decision makers to account.

Earlier and Regular Engagement between the Executive and Scrutiny

For 2020/21, the committee want to work closely with the Strategic Leadership Team to develop its annual work programme. Whilst recognising their distinct roles, the committee wishes to engage with senior officers on the key challenges for the WMCA, which had helped to form its lines of enquiry in previous years and can continue to assist in the development of committee's work programme going forward.

Performance Monitoring and Pre-Development/Pre-Decision Scrutiny

For the forthcoming year, the committee would like to continue to engage with the Strategic Leadership Team specifically to develop the committee's role in relation to performance monitoring and delivery, and to embed a culture of pre-development and pre-decision scrutiny as an integrated part of the WMCA's business culture.

Social Media

In conjunction with the WMCA's Communications Team, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee has created a communications plan that has already seen the introduction of a dedicated Twitter account @WMCA_Scrutiny. For the forthcoming year, the committee would look to work with the WMCA to produce more multi-media content (video, animation, statistics as well as key messages), to engage in online conversations with the public relevant to the work of the committee, post short videos of key participants offering comments and views relating to scrutiny work and enhance live stream facilities to broadcast committee meetings.

Mayoral Question
Time Sessions

Spotlight Sessions
Task & Finish Reviews

**Overview &
Scrutiny
Committee:
2020/21
in Summary**

Public Engagement
Twitter, Facebook,
Videos, Online
conversations

Pre-Development
Scrutiny
Pre-Decision Scrutiny
Performance Monitoring



West Midlands
Combined Authority