



West Midlands Combined Authority

Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Monday 7 September 2020 at 10.00 am

Minutes

Present

Councillor Lisa Trickett (Chair)
Councillor Ahmad Bostan
Councillor Richard Brown
Paul Brown

Councillor Mike Chalk

Councillor Peter Fowler
Councillor Robert Grinsell
Councillor Stephen Simkins
Councillor Diane Todd

Birmingham City Council
Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Coventry City Council
Black Country Local Enterprise
Partnership
Worcestershire Non-Constituent Local
Authorities
Birmingham City Council
Joint Coventry/Solihull Representative
Association of Black Country Authorities
Staffordshire Non-Constituent Authorities

In Attendance

Deborah Cadman
Louise Cowen
Julia Goldsworthy
Adam Hawksbee
Aisha Masood
Lyndsey Roberts
Sean Russell

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Item Title No.

62. Inquorate Meeting

This meeting was inquorate and therefore decisions taken at the meeting would be submitted to the WMCA Board on 18 September 2020 for formal approval.

63. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Cathy Bayton (Association of Black Country Authorities), Councillor Angus Lees (Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council) and Mike Lyons (Greater Birmingham & Solihull Local Enterprise).

64. Minutes - 13 July 2020

The minutes of the meeting held on the 13 July 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

65. Chair's Remarks

(a) Gigafactory

Prior to committee, the Chair had circulated key information relating to the Gigafactory programme and informed the committee that a deep-dive would be undertaken with further information being provided at its next meeting.

(b) WMCA Scrutiny Review on the Effectiveness of the WMCA's Governance Structures in Delivering the Policy Objectives of the WMCA

The Chair informed the committee of her discussions with relevant officers to progress the findings on the governance review previously undertaken. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the delay in the Mayoral elections, the findings of this review had not yet been progressed.

66. Recharge West Midlands - Creating Grand Central Diagnostics Hub

The committee received a presentation from the Director of Implementation on the Grand Central Diagnostics Hub at Birmingham New Street station. It was recognised that the region faced significant health inequalities which had only been exasperated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The need to provide quicker access to diagnosis and treatment to those with life-threatening conditions to ensure they could remain in employment as long as possible was highlighted.

The committee expressed its concern over the focus of a health-related initiative, as this was not directly within the remit of the Mayor's powers. The Chief Executive confirmed that this was a pilot and was linked to the WM5G programme, with a focus of 5G technology. She also highlighted that the WMCA had responsibility and powers for public service reform, which provided legitimacy to this initiative.

Councillor Ahmad Bostan expressed his concerns regarding the accessibility of Grand Central being the chosen location, and requested further information on the assessments being completed to indicate that this location successfully met the needs of those suffering from health inequalities. Councillor Richard Brown echoed those concerns around Grand Central being the access point as to those in need in deprived areas.

The Director of Implementation confirmed to the committee that further work was being undertaken to develop the original proposals, and it had only been targeted within Birmingham as this was a pilot project. In respect of volume of footfall, the Director of Implementation highlighted that he had received data from transport colleges which indicated that 50 million individuals accessed Grand Central across the year.

The committee requested further information on the assessment being completed on those individuals from inner city communities accessing Grand Central and those from black, Asian & minority ethnic communities suffering from health inequalities. Information on the suggested individual profile was also requested, as well as the return on investment and target numbers for the usage of the diagnostic hub.

Recommended to the WMCA Board that:

- (1) The presentation be noted.

67. Economic Recovery in the West Midlands

The committee considered a report from the Director of Strategy providing an update on the progress of the region's economic recovery plan and activity including the 'Recharge the West Midlands' investment proposition. 'Recharge the West Midlands' was the region's collective proposition to Government to stimulate economic recovery and boost business and consumer confidence. Since its submission in June, 18 of the 31 propositions had either been allocated funding or were in policy areas where the Government had allocated money, and the WMCA would continue to push for confirmation of funding for the West Midlands.

The Chair expressed her disappointment that a tracker had not been implemented to cross-reference the bids submitted to Government against what was approved, as had been requested at the last meeting. The Chair requested information in the tracker to show outcomes, outputs and how the bid aligned to the needs of the region impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Director of Strategy undertook to work with the Chair to implement a tracker to provide to committee with the necessary information.

The Chief Executive highlighted that the WMCA would continue to make appropriate bids on Government announcements to respond to the needs of the region, whilst ensuring a focus was maintained on sustaining and growing the economy for the West Midlands and protecting individuals from unemployment. The committee was keen to ensure that value for money was embedded across all propositions. The Chief Executive suggested that at a future meeting, information from the Community Recovery Group and Citizen Panel was considered to be able to scrutinise the feedback received from communities and how this influenced the decision making process.

Recommended to the WMCA Board that:

- (1) The region's overall approach to economic recovery, taking account of short and long-term actions tailored to economic and health conditions, be noted.
- (2) The impact of Government's announcements, including those in respect of the region's 'Recharge the West Midlands' Proposition, and how this provided the basis for influencing the Comprehensive Spending Review, be noted.

68. Comprehensive Spending Review - Draft Submission Document

The committee received a report from the Head of Policy & Programme Development on the draft response to the Government's 2020 Comprehensive Spending Review consultation. The submission was broken down into four thematic projects; infrastructure, economy and skills, public services and financial sustainability.

Councillor Bob Grinsell referenced the information provided on the HS2 interchange and how this related to an application considered by Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council's planning committee on access to parking, ensuring that proposals provided value for money. The Chair also commented on how further proposals should consider the #WM2041 environmental ambitions and the need for investment into transport infrastructure. She also commented on the need to clearly identify which proposals were being prioritised to reflect the needs of the region to make a difference.

Councillor Ahmad Bostan expressed his concern over the ending of the furlough scheme and how the residents of the West Midlands region would suffer and what the WMCA could do to help those struggling with potential redundancies. Further to Councillor Mike Chalk's question on public consultation, the Head of Policy & Programme Development confirmed that engagement had been undertaken with individuals representing varied social-economic groups.

Recommended to the WMCA Board that:

- (1) The comments made by committee be noted and help form the final draft of the consultation response to be considered by the WMCA Board on 18 September 2020.

69. Forward Plan

The committee noted a forward plan of items that were to be reported to further meetings of the committee and the WMCA Board.

The Scrutiny Officer provided members with an overview of the work programme to be considered by the committee and the Mayoral question times. Members were to provide the Scrutiny Officer with any requests for further information to help with their lines of enquires in preparation for the Mayoral question times.

The Chair informed the committee of her proposals for a task and finish group to consider investments within the Black Country. Members were in agreement to this proposal. The Scrutiny Officer was to draw up a review scoping document for the task and finish group, which would be shared at the next meeting.

The Chief Executive suggested that the committee consider the WMCA's response to the Government's Devolution White Paper, along with the community recovery priorities and the impact of the lifting of the furlough scheme. The Chair welcomed this suggestion and requested that these items, along with the outstanding WMCA governance scrutiny review, be scheduled for the appropriate meetings, including arranging additional meetings of the committee as required.

70. Date of the Next Meeting

Monday 2 November 2020 at 2.00pm.

The meeting ended at 12.05 pm.