



# West Midlands Combined Authority

## Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Monday 8 March 2021 at 10.00 am

### Minutes

#### Present

Councillor Lisa Trickett (Chair)  
Councillor Cathy Bayton (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor Naeem Akhtar  
Councillor Ahmad Bostan  
Paul Brown

Councillor Mike Chalk

Councillor Peter Fowler  
Councillor Robert Grinsell  
Councillor Angus Lees  
Councillor Suky Samra  
Councillor Stephen Simkins  
Councillor Diane Todd

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

#### In Attendance

Michael-Akolade Ayodeji  
Deborah Cadman  
Ed Cox  
Louise Cowen  
Dan Essex  
Barry Evans  
Julia Goldsworthy  
Jacqueline Homan  
Linda Horne  
Tim Martin  
Aisha Masood  
Lyndsey Roberts  
Jonathan Skinner

Young Combined Authority  
West Midlands Combined Authority  
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WSP  
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West Midlands Combined Authority  
Young Combined Authority  
West Midlands Combined Authority  
West Midlands Combined Authority

#### Item Title No.

#### 104. Inquorate Meeting

The meeting was inquorate and therefore decisions taken at the meeting would be submitted to the WMCA Board on 19 March 2021 for formal approval.

**105. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Chris Cade (Warwickshire Non-Constituent local authorities), Councillor Dean Carroll (Shropshire Non-Constituent local authorities), Mike Lyons (Greater Birmingham & Solihull LEP), Councillor Kate Wild (Solihull) and Sarah Windrum (Coventry & Warwickshire LEP).

**106. Chair's Remarks**

The Chair noted that this was the last meeting of the municipal year and thanked members and officers for their attendance and commitment to the scrutiny process during the last year.

**107. Minutes - 11 January 2021**

The minutes held on the 11 January 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

**108. Matters Arising**

In respect of minute no. 97 ('Matters Arising'), the committee noted a tracker which outlined member attendance at committee meetings during the current municipal year.

In respect of minute no. 98 ('Mayoral Question Time: Policy - Response from the Mayor to Recommendations presented to the WMCA Board on 13 November 2020') Councillor Peter Fowler noted the discussions regarding the high level of non-school ready children within the region and suggested that this may be a subject for a future scrutiny review. Councillor Angus Lees indicated that this issue had been raised in the Black Country scrutiny review, which included a recommendation in this regard.

**109. Economic Funding Tracker**

The committee considered an updated copy of the economic funding tracker from the Director of Strategy. The tracker outlined specific projects and priorities in the 'Recharge the West Midlands' proposition to Government, along with other funding that provided emergency economic support. It was noted that of the 31 'asks' in the 'Recharge the West Midlands', 24 had either been allocated funding or were within policy areas where Government had allocated money through November's spending review and the winter economic plan. The Chair noted that the tracker included funding allocations that were not within the spending influence of the WMCA and so did not give an accurate indication of the funding secured for WMCA use.

The Chair expressed concern over the content of the tracker, which she wished to show the actual money received to date against the asks and their delivery, which she felt this would provide greater transparency, accountability and confidence in the process. The committee requested that further updates should provide this information clearly, and that the information should be broken down into portfolio and local authority areas if possible.

The Director of Strategy highlighted that the recharge asks from Government were made on behalf of the region, rather than specifically the WMCA. She undertook to work further with the Director of Finance to ensure the committee was provided with clarity on the funding elements of these asks.

Recommended:

That the contents of the economic funding tracker be noted.

**110. Mayoral Question Time: Budget - Response from the Mayor to recommendations presented to the WMCA Board on 13 November 2020**

The committee considered the Mayor's response to the recommendations arising from the Question Time on the WMCA draft 2021/22 budget, which were presented to the WMCA Board on 13 November 2020.

The Chair considered that the Mayor's response did not adequately reflect the extent of the needs of the region as evidenced to the committee during the course of the year. Members of the committee also considered that the Mayor had not owned the challenge of inequality that existed, and that the current funding regimes for education and skills pathways worked against addressing the need for reform in these areas.

Councillor Ahmad Bostan expressed his disappointment that investment projects did not appear to him to sufficiently target deprived areas, although Councillor Mike Chalk indicated that schemes being put forward in Redditch were targeted at generating employment and improving residents' lives. He did however suggest that more funds should be put towards addressing the skills shortage.

Many members voiced their concern over the bidding process for funds and believed this was a flawed process. The Chief Executive reported that following the recent budget announcements from Government, a proposal was being taken forward to other Chief Executives across the region to look at opportunities to work strategically together to improve access to funding sources.

Although the committee noted the Mayor response, there remained concern that it did not adequately address the level of inequalities and deprivation with the region.

Recommended:

That the response from the Mayor be noted.

**111. WM2041 Five Year Plan: 2021 - 2026**

The committee received a presentation from the Director of Public Service Reform & Inclusive Growth and Head of Environment on the development of a five year plan to help meet the WM2041 net zero carbon ambitions. The committee received this item as an item of pre-decision scrutiny prior to the report being considered by the WMCA Board on 19 March 2021.

The Chair considered that the proposals did not provide a clear understanding of the requirements, nor provided an adequately clear direction or clarity on some transport elements. The Director of Public Service Reform & Inclusive Growth recognised that the Local Transport Plan would play a critical part in addressing regional air quality issues. The committee was concerned that the plan was not ambitious enough and lacked direction in terms of clear and coherent interventions that would lead the region in a net zero carbon environment. It also highlighted that whilst the work on a technical baseline was welcomed, there remained an absence of climate clarity.

Aisha Masood stressed the importance of ensuring systematic inequalities that further disadvantaged certain sections of the population needed to be adequately addressed, and stressed the importance of work on behaviour change. The Director of Public Service Reform & Inclusive Growth reported that work was being undertaken with the behavioural insights team to address issue and he would be happy to share the outcome of that work at a future meeting.

Recommended:

- (1) The presentation be noted.
- (2) The comments made by the committee help inform the preparation of the report prior to its submission to the WMCA Board on 19 March 2021.

**112. 'Economic Needs of the Black Country' Scrutiny Review - Summary of Findings**

The committee considered a draft report from Councillor Ahmad Bostan outlining the findings of the scrutiny review undertaken to understand whether the region's economic recovery proposals, which the WMCA were supporting and enabling, were meeting the needs that had been identified within the Black Country sub-region. The review also considered whether the specific sub-regional needs were being adequately considered during the development of wider regional policies.

The review considered a number of themes relating to funding, resources, learning, skills, governance, responsibility, structures, and interdependencies. The group proposed four recommendations falling under a number of key areas of activity: coherence of the funding landscape, scaling-up immediate support for businesses and people whose jobs were at risk, working towards a long-term whole-life approach, and co-ordination, governance and accountability across the Black Country.

It was recognised that the report had been amended and re-circulated to correct a number of drafting inaccuracies which had not been brought to the review group's attention as it was gathering evidence. The Chair commented that they had been contacted by the Black Country LEP to address some factual elements that were not reflected within the report and required amendments. Councillor Angus Lees indicated that he did not support these changes, which he felt had watered down the clear views of the review panel, and could therefore not support the recommendations. The Head of Governance and Monitoring Officer apologised for the lateness of the changes required but stressed the importance of the report being factually correct.

Councillor Stephen Simkins noted that the review had highlighted that the level of deprivation within the Black Country and the need for the WMCA to address issues such as health, education, quality of life and upskilling in a coherent way. Councillor Cathy Bayton also highlighted that the review identified the role of the Association of Black Country Authorities as being unclear, and she supported an overarching strategy to closely align the work of the Black Country authorities, whilst still allowing for local solutions to local problems.

Recommended:

(1) The observations and conclusions of the scrutiny review group be endorsed for further consideration by the WMCA, Black Country local authorities and the Black Country LEP, specifically:

(a) Coherence of the Funding Landscape

Complex funding streams and processes can hinder delivery of impactful projects. Future devolution agreements need to simplify funding to the region and ensure funding is available where it is needed. The importance of the speed and urgency in rectifying this could not be overstated by the review panel.

(b) Scaling-up immediate support for businesses and people whose jobs were at risk

- The need to urgently review regional skills plan that provided a clear strategy for career pathways.
- The WMCA needed to review and understand the updated publication from the New Policy Institute that identified key information regarding the state of 'economic justice' in Birmingham and the Black Country local authority areas and assess whether its policies addressed the challenges identified in the report. This updated version of the report was published on 1st February 2021 and an Executive Summary is attached as an appendix. The full report is available from the Barrow Cadbury Trust website.

- The need for an employment taskforce to address the economic needs of the Black Country.
- The WMCA should consider brokering a region-wide common understanding and vision for the skills, training and employment needs of the Black Country.

(c) Working towards a long-term, whole-life approach

Recognising that many residents in the Black Country were born, work and then retire in the Black Country, a more joined-up whole-life approach to targeted support needs to be implemented throughout public authorities and other stakeholders in recognition of the inter-dependency between education, skills, employment and health.

(d) Co-ordination, governance and accountability across the Black Country

- The Black Country's economic, social and wellbeing outcomes were interlinked and co-dependent. It was therefore vital that decisions made by the region's public bodies were joined up, and best practice shared widely.
- Local authorities were most likely best placed to understand the needs of localities. It was important therefore that the structural architecture existed that enabled this knowledge of place to shape wider regional economic strategy. The review group were unpersuaded that this architecture currently existed in a robust enough state, and this might therefore be something that required a more in-depth scrutiny review to be undertaken during the coming year.

(2) It be noted that the conclusions of the scrutiny review would be reported to the WMCA Board on 19 March 2021.

**113. Effectiveness of Transport Delivery Committee in Overseeing the Delivery of WMCA Transport Policies - Update on Recommendations**

The committee considered a report of the head of Governance on the progress made with the implementation of the recommendations arising from the Transport Governance scrutiny review undertaken last year. The recommendation relating to strengthening Transport Delivery Committee had been acknowledge as not as progressing at the pace initially anticipated. The establishment of both the Strategic Transport Board and Transport Scrutiny Sub-Committee had been successfully implemented.

It was noted that a review of Mayoral and members' allowances was still outstanding, and Councillor Cathy Bayton stressed the importance of progressing this as a matter of priority.

Recommended:

The progress on implementations of the recommendations agreed by the WMCA Board on 17 January 2020 be noted.

**114. WMCA Scrutiny Review on the Effectiveness of the WMCA's Governance Structures in Delivering the Policy Objectives of the WMCA - Update on Recommendations**

The committee considered a report from the Head of Governance on the progress made with the observations and conclusions arising from the Governance scrutiny review undertaken last year. It was acknowledged that many of the observations identified were matters that required consideration and reflection at a political, rather than an operational, level. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was acknowledged that the capacity of the Mayor and Constituent authority Leaders to reflect on these matters had been limited. The Head of Governance concluded that it would be timely to re-start those consideration immediately after the Local and Mayoral election in May 2021.

Councillor Ahmad Bostan indicated that his concerns were very much related to the political aspects of the review's findings, and wished to thank the Chief Executive and her leadership team in an organisation he considered to be well run. He did however stress the need for a review of members allowances to progress at pace.

Recommended:

- (1) The current position and progress made on the observations and conclusions arising from the Governance scrutiny review presented to the Strategic Leadership Team in October 2020 be noted.
- (2) The comments made by the committee be noted.

**115. Transport Scrutiny Sub-Committee Minutes**

The committee considered the minutes of the Transport Scrutiny Sub-Committee held on the 22 February 2021. It was noted as both Transport Scrutiny Sub-Committee and Overview & Scrutiny Committee were inquorate, approval for recommendations outlined within the minutes would be sought at WMCA Board on the 19 March 2021.

Recommended:

- (1) The minutes be approved.
- (2) The terms of reference of the Transport Delivery Committee be reviewed and updated to reflect the changed role of the committee since the establishment of the WMCA and clearly setting out the specific role and responsibilities the WMCA Board wished the committee to undertake, to include a responsibility for a performance monitoring role of Transport for West Midlands.

- (3) Transport Delivery Committee member role profiles be developed as a priority to give clarity as to what was expected of those councillors appointed to the committee.
- (4) Transport Delivery Committee's annual work planning process be reviewed to more closely align the responsibilities of the committee with the transport-related deliverables contained with the WMCA's Annual Plan and other strategic policies.
- (5) The role and purpose of Transport Delivery Committee's Lead Member Reference Groups be reviewed to improve their accountability and transparency, including to ensure that all members of the committee were fully involved in formal decision making and the discussions and decisions made at these meetings being reported publicly to the Transport Delivery Committee.
- (6) The relationship between the Chair of Transport Delivery Committee, the Mayor and the Portfolio Lead for Transport be strengthened and formalised so as to ensure proper engagement and collaboration between transport policy and delivery.

**116. Forward Plan**

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

The meeting ended at 12.45 pm.