



West Midlands
Combined Authority

Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Monday 6 September 2021 at 10.00am

Minutes

Present:

Councillor Cathy Bayton (Chair)	Association of Black Country Authorities
Councillor Lisa Trickett (Vice-Chair)	Birmingham City Council
Councillor Naeem Akhtar	Coventry City Council
Councillor Maya Ali	Joint Coventry/Solihull Representative
Councillor Mike Chalk	Worcestershire Non-Constituent Local Authorities
Councillor Liz Clements	Transport Scrutiny Sub-Committee (co-optee)
Councillor Tony Diccio	Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Peter Fowler	Birmingham City Council
Councillor Ian Kettle	Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Nigel Lumby	Shropshire Non-Constituent Local Authorities
Councillor Charn Padda	Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Simon Peaple	Staffordshire Non-Constituent Local Authorities
Councillor Vera Waters	Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council

In Attendance:

Fiona Bebbington	Head of Business Planning & Performance Reporting
Dan Essex	Governance Services Manager
Adam Hawksbee	Head of Policy & Programme Development
Jackie Homan	Head of Environment
Linda Horne	Director of Finance
Satish Mistry	Interim Director of Law & Governance
Sara Rasul	Corporate Strategy Lead
Lyndsey Roberts	Scrutiny Officer
Kate Taylor	Head of Finance Business Partnering

11. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Shabrana Hussain (Birmingham City Council).

12. Chair's Remarks

(a) Scrutiny Champions

The Chair reported that following the last meeting some members had expressed an interest in becoming a scrutiny champion for Housing & Land and Environment, Energy & HS2 for 2021/22. A scrutiny champion would be expected to keep abreast of policy developments, review the minutes of the relevant boards and committees, and bring any matters to the attention of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee that they felt may benefit from further consideration or scrutiny.

The Chair considered that the Finance portfolio would benefit from having a scrutiny champion and members were to inform the Scrutiny Officer if they were interested in becoming the champion for this portfolio area.

Resolved:

- (1) Councillor Simon Peuple be appointed as the Scrutiny Champion for Housing & Land.
- (2) Councillor Peter Fowler be appointed as Scrutiny Champion for Environment, Energy & HS2.

(b) Senior Officer Changes

The committee considered a briefing note from the Interim Head of HR that provided a summary of the changes at senior officer level at the WMCA and the timescales for recruitment to vacant roles.

The Chair noted the interim arrangements within the WMCA and the financial cost of the interim appointments and consultants employed by the WMCA. It was agreed that the committee would pursue these lines of enquiry during the Mayoral Q&A on the proposed budget 2022/23.

Resolved:

The report be noted.

(c) Aisha Masood, Young Combined Authority

The Chair reported that this was the last meeting that Aisha Masood would be attending as her term on the Young Combined Authority Board would be coming to an end at the end of the month. She thanked her for her significant involvement and contributions to meetings of the committee and looked forward to meeting her replacement.

Aisha Masood thanked the committee for allowing members of the Young Combined Authority to participate within its meetings and scrutiny reviews, which had created relationships with similar groups across other combined authorities.

13. Minutes - 21 July 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 July 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

14. Matters Arising

(a) Economic Needs of the Black Country Scrutiny Review - Summary of Findings (minute no. 6b)

The Chair reported that she had received a response from the Interim Chief Executive to the recommendations arising from the Black Country Scrutiny Review.

The WMCA agreed with the recommendations, particularly those relating to the coherence of funding and the co-ordination of delivery across the West Midlands. The WMCA echoed the aspiration that any further devolution must be simplified and enable the region to respond to current and emerging challenges.

It also recognised the need to support businesses and residents, and to understand the particular needs and inter-related dependencies in relation to education, skills, employment, transport and health. The WMCA was currently reviewing its governance arrangements and, in particular, was seeking to strengthen its focus on delivering inclusive economic growth and linking residents to jobs and opportunities.

Whilst the committee welcomed the response and the acceptance of the recommendations by the WMCA, members considered that it lacked the specific detail as to how each of the recommendations would be progressed. In terms of the next steps, the Chair and Vice-Chair agreed to have an initial meeting with the Head of Policy & Programme Management to discuss the individual recommendations and better understand how they may be progressed. An update would be provided at the next meeting.

Resolved:

The 'Economic Needs of the Black Country Scrutiny Review - Summary of Findings' report to be circulated to members of the committee for information.

15. Corporate Strategy

The committee received a presentation from the Head of Policy & Programme Development that provided an update on the development of the Corporate Strategy.

The corporate strategy would be the single umbrella strategy that set out the objectives of the WMCA for the next three years. It would translate the WMCA's vision, regional and local authority priorities and the Mayoral Manifesto into a work programme. The Head of Policy & Programme Development sought the views of the committee on these proposals, in particular, on the content and framing and language prior to its submission to the WMCA Board on 19 November 2021 for approval.

Members discussed and shared comments on the extent in which the six draft aims applied to the non-constituent authorities, the need for a distinction between the responsibilities of the WMCA and local authorities, the importance of inclusive economic growth which needed to be reflected within the document together with how an equitable approach would be achieved. In terms of transport, it was considered that the vision within the document was not ambitious enough and it should have a focus on the development of an integrated public transport system that would allow passengers to have the same freedom to move around the region as was currently enjoyed by car owners.

In response to a question raised by the Chair, the Head of Policy & Programme Development explained that any activity undertaken outside of the agreed corporate strategy would not be funded.

Resolved:

- (1) The presentation on the emerging draft corporate strategy be welcomed.
- (2) Comments and observations received from members of the committee to be considered by the WMCA.

16. Grant Register, Business Planning and Performance Reporting

The committee considered a report from the Director of Finance that provided an overview of the current business planning, performance reporting and risk foundation and what the WMCA was working towards to provide exemplar reporting that enabled evidence-based decisions to be made.

In addition, members also received the current grant register that contained 'live' grants where the WMCA was the accountable body and captured a comprehensive total of grants, awarding body, time period for delivery and a description of that the grant delivered.

The committee thanked the Director of Finance for the comprehensive grant register which provided the information that it had previously sought. It provided greater transparency, accountability and confidence. The Chair added that it would be useful if the register included a column that identified the local authority in which funding had been allocated.

Resolved:

- (1) The current changes and progress with regards to business planning and performance reporting be noted
- (2) The grant register be noted.

17. Pre-Development Scrutiny: Air Quality and the Role of the WMCA

The committee considered a report from the Head of Environment that provided an opportunity for a small group of members to work with the Inclusive Growth & Public Service Reform directorate to review and understand the additional requirements arising from the outcome of the Environment Bill as it progressed through Parliament.

At its meeting on 25 June, the WMCA Board discussed the activity in respect of air quality and concern was expressed relating to the powers of the WMCA and how it complimented and contributed to the work being undertaken by constituent authorities. Additional requirements on local authorities would be announced in the autumn with regard to air quality in the form of the Environment Bill and a report would be presented to the WMCA Board on 19 November that would set out the options on the role of the WMCA and how this was balanced with the work of the constituent authorities.

The Head of Environment indicated that it would be helpful for Overview & Scrutiny Committee to be involved in the development of this WMCA Board report.

Resolved:

- (1) The proposed course of action with regards to scrutiny's engagement in air quality matters be endorsed
- (2) Councillor Liz Clements, Councillor Peter Fowler and Councillor Vera Waters meet with the Head of Environment in September and October, ahead of the 'Air Quality: Options on the Role of the WMCA' report being presented to the WMCA Board on 19 November for consideration.
- (3) The 'Air Quality: Options on the Role of the WMCA' report to be considered by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 8 November be noted

18. WMCA Governance Review Progress Update

The committee received a presentation from the Interim Director of Law & Governance that provided a progress update on the WMCA governance review.

The committee received an overview of the review group's terms of reference, the key themes that had been identified to date which would be explored further, details of the governance mapping exercise, comparative data, the consideration of the governance review report from the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the emerging key themes that had been debated.

Members welcomed the comparative work undertaken with other combined authorities and questioned whether the Portfolio Lead had to be a Leader of a constituent authority or could these functions be delegated to other members, drawn from each authority, to be key policy leads at a WMCA level. The work pressures of a Leader of a constituent authority was acknowledged together with the importance of a common purpose within the region.

With regards to scrutiny, the review group recognised that scrutiny was an essential part of the West Midlands Combined Authority. The Chair shared an email received from Councillor Bob Sleight regarding the WMCA's allowances scheme. It was noted that the issue would be referred to the Mayor and local authority leaders for their consideration as to an appropriate course of action to take with regard to any necessary review.

The Interim Director of Law & Governance reported that a final report on the findings of the Governance Review would be presented to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 8 November, and he noted that Councillor Bob Sleight would also be in attendance.

Resolved:

The presentation be noted.

19. Minutes: Transport Scrutiny Sub-Committee - 28 July 2021

The committee received the minutes of the Transport Scrutiny Sub-Committee meeting held on 28 July 2021.

Resolved:

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 July 2021 be noted.

20. Work Programme

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

It was agreed that a workshop would be held on Friday 1 October at 10.00am in preparation for the forthcoming Mayoral Q&A session on 14 October on policy matters.

21. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the committee would be held on Thursday 14 October at 9.30am.