



West Midlands Combined Authority

Housing & Land Delivery Board

Wednesday 15 September 2021 at 10.00 am

Minutes

Present

Councillor Mike Bird (Chair)	Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
Philip Farrell	Homes England
Councillor Adrienne Fitzgerald	Cannock Chase District Council
Councillor Ian Kettle	Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Andy Mackiewicz	Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor David Welsh	Coventry City Council
Councillor Matt Jennings	Stratford on Avon District Council

Participating via MS Teams

Councillor Zahoor Ahmed	Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Bhupinder Gakhal	City of Wolverhampton Council
Kevin Rogers	West Midlands Housing Association Partnership

Item No. Title

1. Inquorate Meeting

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

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Peter Butlin (Warwickshire County Council), Councillor Matthew Dormer (Redditch Borough Council), Councillor Shabrana Hussain (Birmingham City Council), Councillor Robert Macey (Shropshire Council), Councillor Daren Pemberton (Stratford on Avon District Council), Councillor Kristofer Wilson (Nuneaton and Bedworth Council) and Councillor David Wright (Telford and Wrekin Council).

Apologies for absence had also been received from Bill Blincoe (Coventry and Warwickshire LEP) and Suzanne Ward (Environment Agency).

3. Notification of Substitutes

Councillor Matt Jennings had been nominated as a substitute for Councillor Darren Pemberton (Stratford on Avon District Council)

4. Declarations of Interests

No declarations of interest were made relative to items under consideration at the meeting.

5. Chair's Remarks

The Chair reminded board members of the need to attend the meeting in person to ensure the meeting was quorate. He asked that members nominate a substitute to attend on their behalf, if they were unable to attend the meeting in person for any reason.

6. Terms of Reference

The terms of reference for the board were submitted for information.

The Chair commented that the terms of reference for this board, in common with other WMCA boards, did not refer to the appointment of a vice-chair. He considered this provision should be included, so that meetings could be held in the absence of the Chair and asked that the matter be referred to the WMCA Board for consideration.

Resolved: That the terms of reference be noted.

7. Minutes - 3 March 2021

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 3 March 2021 be approved as a correct record.

8. Public Land Progress Update

Gareth Bradford introduced the report that provided an update on the new approach to public land disposals that was endorsed by the board in September 2020 and an update on the work of the Public Land Taskforce that was subsequently established.

Gurdip Nagra outlined key areas of the report and in particular reported on the 6 key recommendations of the Public Land Taskforce. This included the creation of a public land charter that would look at best practice in the management and disposal of land similar to AMC and other taskforce charters; assessing the benefits of convening meetings at a regional level with individual public landowners, the Taskforce and WMCA together; 'deep dive' sessions on unlocking and accelerating specific sites; commissioning comprehensive mapping of surplus public land, preparing a best practice/partnership guide and a report highlighting the key messages from the working groups. He emphasised that the objective was to add value to existing processes and, through collaboration, maximise the potential of land ownerships. All landowners would retain full control over their own land and the WMCA's role would be to support local authorities and other public sector landowners; help to bring land forward for development; accelerate the process of land disposal; and provide assistance in the process.

The local authority members of the board considered that surplus public land could be 'parcelled' together to obtain greater benefits and the WMCA could assist through its collaborative role, mapping process and the potential to provide enabling support.

The Chair reported on the challenges faced by local authorities when considering the future use of land and the need to consider the social and economic benefits it could bring.

Gareth Bradford advised that the public land charter would create consistency on how surplus land was interpreted and reported that the WMCA would be seeking to hold round table conversations with a wide range of public sector partners (e.g. NHS, Network Rail and Highways England) to undertake a collaborative approach to unlock sites and take these forward with the Single Commissioning Framework. The process of land assembly and amalgamation of public sector land ownerships has the potential to increase the scale and scope of benefits that could be delivered. There is also the potential to accelerate delivery.

He asked the board to identify sites or provide case studies in their area where the WMCA could provide enabling support to unlock or repurpose land.

Resolved:

1. That the update on progress with public land work commissioned by the Housing and Land Delivery Board in September 2020 to support the board's approved Covid-19 Recovery Plan which was discussed and endorsed at the Delivery Steering Group be noted;
2. That the work of the expert Public Land Taskforce, its progress to date, key recommendations this far and the matter it has discussed be noted;
3. That the proposed activities the WMCA is overseeing on this agenda as outlined in section 3.7 of the report be endorsed and
4. That members put forward specific projects to the WMCA so that officers can test the principles and approaches with the taskforce to position the West Midlands at the national vanguard of emerging approaches to public land.

9. Business Cases to HM Government: Update Report

Rob Lamond presented a report that updated the board on the business cases being developed to secure further funding from HM Government for the region as agreed by the board and set out in the portfolio's High Level Deliverables for 2021/22.

The report provided the latest position with regards to business cases for the proposal for the new Commercial and Employment Land Development Fund, Affordable Housing, Advanced Manufacturing in Construction (AMC) and Zero Carbon Homes.

In relation to a comment from the Chair regarding the different definitions for affordable housing which often vary between different authorities, Rob Lamond advised that the WMCA used the definition for affordable housing that was agreed in January 2020 and which is applied in the Single Commissioning Framework. He added that consideration was being given to reviewing the WMCA's definition of affordable housing alongside the national definition and a report would be submitted to a future meeting on the matter.

Resolved: That progress of business cases and proposals to HM Government for new funding and investment as agreed by this board and in alignment with the Housing and Land portfolio's High Level Deliverables for 2021/22 be noted.

10. Quarterly Report on Housing & Land Portfolio Deliverables and Progress on Housing & Land Annual Business Plan

Rob Lamond presented a report that provided a quarterly update on progress to date and next steps in delivering the High Level Deliverables for the Housing and Land Portfolio and outlined the key highlights since the last report.

In relation to the delivery of the brownfield regeneration and housing delivery programmes, Gareth Bradford advised that the WMCA was in the process of commissioning an assessment of the potential for additional brownfield land / development capacity in the Black Country. The study was expected to be completed by Christmas time.

Councillor Welsh reported that Coventry was undertaking an assessment of its brownfield sites and was looking forward to having a conversation with the WMCA with regards to bringing forward sites for affordable housing.

The Chair noted that brownfield sites are more expensive to develop and therefore required a subsidy from Government to take forward. He considered that developers should approach local authorities in the first instance who can advise/assist them on their proposals before seeking planning approval.

Councillor Ahmed concurred with the need for Government to provide more funding for brownfield sites given the limited number of greenfield sites in Sandwell.

In relation to an enquiry from Councillor Welsh regarding a request for a breakdown of housing on brownfield sites that have been developed with WMCA funding, Rob Lamond undertook to provide Councillor Welsh with this information.

Further to an enquiry from Councillor Kettle as to how the approval process could be expedited for development proposals, Gareth Bradford advised that expressions of interest for WMCA investment funding take around 12 weeks to be submitted to the Investment Board. However, he noted the time taken by developers to start work on site following the funding award varied greatly and reported that he would ask Rob Lamond to look at how the end to end process could be shortened with the Planning Officers Group.

The Chair also noted the need to speed up the legal process following the agreement of a scheme's funding allocation.

Gareth Bradford undertook to investigate building timescales into legal agreements for the Investment Board approval process.

Resolved:

1. That the positive progress underway to achieve the Housing and Land portfolio's Annual Deliverables in Q2 2021 and the clear plans in place for progressing the agreed High Level Deliverables work programmes during remainder of 2021/22 be noted;
2. That the key performance highlights set out in section 3.0 of the report be noted and
3. That the positive performance and effective deployment of WMCA's Devolved Housing and Land Funds illustrated by the Single Commissioning Framework schemes summarised in appendix 1 of the report (many of these schemes are now in delivery phase having progressed through the end to end SCF process which shows the role of the WMCA in unlocking, accelerating and problem solving difficult to deliver schemes) be noted.

11. Affordable Homes Programme Update

A report updating the board on the progress of the approved Affordable Housing Work Programme and the associated activities was submitted.

The report had been considered by an informal Housing and Land Delivery Board on 7 July.

Resolved:

1. That progress and next steps for the WMCA's Affordable Housing [Delivery] Programme as set out in the Housing and Land Portfolio's Annual Deliverables for 2021/22 and its approved Covid 19 Recovery Plan be noted;
2. That progress in the development of a funding proposal to HM Government that was a key ask in the Recharge West Midlands document, seeking additional investment to the West Midlands specifically focused on accelerating and increasing the supply of affordable homes in the region be noted and
3. That the formation of a small Task and Finish Group to co-develop the proposals to HM Government for affordable housing; review progress of the affordable housing definition and review the requirements of affordable housing provision under the Single Commissioning Framework be noted.

12. Future Homes Standard and Zero Carbon Homes: West Midlands

as a UK Pioneer

A report outlining the known upcoming changes to building regulations covered by the Future Homes Standard (FHS) and the potential implications of these on the WMCA's approved Zero Carbon Homes (ZCH) route map and wider aspirations in relation to the 2041 agenda was submitted.

The report had been considered by an informal meeting of the Housing and Land Delivery Board on 7 July 2021.

Resolved:

1. That the purpose and requirement of the upcoming Future Homes Standard and identified approaches for achieving these requirements be noted;
2. That the potential implications of the Future Homes Standard for future development in the region be noted;
3. That the proposal for the WMCA to implement its identified zero Carbon targets to achieve the Future Homes Standard and go beyond the Future Homes Standard requirement on the new development be noted;
4. That the intention to prepare an investment case to Government to ease and accelerate the transition to zero carbon building in the region which is a key intervention of the approved Housing and Land Portfolio COVID-19 Recovery Plan and is a major deliverable in the Housing and Land Delivery Board's 2021/22 Deliverables be endorsed and
5. That the intention to engage the Zero Carbon Homes Officer Working Group and our industry led Taskforce overcoming months as the WMCA refines its approach to going beyond the Future Homes Standard and the investment case for this work be endorsed.

13. Advanced Manufacturing in Construction: Proposed Update to the Definition Used by the WMCA

A report that outlined the proposal to explore updating the existing AMC definition to more closely align with regional specialisms, the national modular construction strategy and the Combined Authority's retrofit programme and set out a revised programme work for the updated definition was submitted.

The report had been considered by an informal meeting of the Housing and Land Delivery Board on 7 July.

Resolved:

1. That the proposal to update the AMC definition used by the WMCA to focus on pre-manufactured value as opposed to restricted AMC categories be agreed;
2. That the proposal to explore options for a new funding methodology that takes into account the wider benefits of AMC, including those related to build out rates, build quality skills and jobs creation be agreed;
3. That the high level principles of a funding ask to HM Government which has been worked up with the AMC Officer Working Group and the AMC Taskforce, seeking additional funding to accelerate delivery of AMC, investor confidence in AMC and growth of the region's AMC sector be endorsed and
4. That the Officer Working Group and the AMC Taskforce are involved in the AMC programme of work and ongoing refinement of the funding ask to HM Government both of which have been agreed as key interventions of the approved Housing and Land Portfolio Covid-19 Recovery Plan and is a major deliverable in the Housing and Land Board 2021/22 Deliverables be noted.

14. Exclusion of the Public and Press

Resolved: That in accordance with Sections 100A4 of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items of business as they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information relating to the business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

15. Quarterly Report on Housing & Land Portfolio Deliverables and Progress on Housing & Land Annual Business Plan (private appendix)

The board considered a private appendix relating to agenda item number 7, the Quarterly report on Housing and Land Deliverables and progress on the Housing and Land Annual Business Plan.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

16. Date of Next Week

Thursday 4 November 2021 at 10.00am

The meeting ended at 11.30 am.