



Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Monday 8 November at 2.00pm

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 Kate Booth	Birmingham City Council
Councillor Mike Chalk	Worcestershire Non-Constituent Local Authorities
Councillor Liz Clements	Birmingham City Council
Councillor Peter Fowler	Birmingham City Council
Councillor Ian Kettle	Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Nigel Lumby	Shropshire Non-Constituent Local Authorities
Councillor Simon Peuple	Staffordshire Non-Constituent Local Authorities
Councillor Vera Waters	Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council

In Attendance:

Councillor Tony Diccico	Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council (joined by MS Teams)
Dan Essex	Governance Services Manager
Adam Hawksbee	Head of Policy and Programme Development
Jackie Homan	Head of Environment
Linda Horne	Director of Finance
Satish Mistry	Interim Director Law & Governance
Julie Nugent	Director of Productivity and Skills
Sara Rasul	Corporate Strategy Lead
Lyndsey Roberts	Scrutiny Officer
Councillor Paul Sweet	City of Wolverhampton Council (joined by MS Teams)
Kate Taylor	Head of Finance Business Partnering
Jake Thrush	Associate Policy Advisor

22. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Maya Ali (Coventry) and Councillor Charn Padda (Sandwell).

23. Chair's Remarks

The Chair welcomed Councillor Kate Booth (Birmingham City Council) to the meeting who had replaced Councillor Shabrana Hussain on the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

24. Minutes 6 September and 14 October 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 September and 14 October 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

25. Response from Interim Chief Executive to the Recommendations Arising from the 'Economic Needs of the Black Country' Scrutiny Review

The committee considered a letter from the Interim Chief Executive in response to the findings of the 'Economic Needs of the Black Country' scrutiny review that was presented to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 8 March 2021.

In relation to the work of the Economic Growth Board, the Director of Productivity & Skills reassured members that as part of its developing work programme, the board would consider the requirements and differences of sub-regions, including the Black Country. The committee emphasised the importance of an inclusive economic growth model that would work for all parts of the region, whilst recognising differences within all communities.

The Chair and Vice Chair would consider the recommendation to revisit the previous skills deep dive and report back.

Resolved:

The letter be noted.

26. Governance Review - Progress Update

The committee received a presentation from Councillor Bob Sleight and the Interim Director of Law & Governance that provided an update on the WMCA governance review.

In June 2021 the Mayor and Constituent Authority Leaders commissioned a review of WMCA governance that specifically looked at the formal decision-making and consultative bodies at the WMCA, the process of report drafting and preparation and effective stakeholder engagement. The committee noted the activities of the Governance Working Group and welcomed its recommendations, including the need for a review of the WMCA's Members Allowances scheme. It was proposed that a report seeking the approval to establish an Independent Remuneration Panel to review the scheme would be submitted to the WMCA Board in January 2022.

It was noted that the role of the proposed professional support officer would be to assist the decision making within the WMCA and to work with Leaders of the constituent authorities to ensure that they had some insight in terms of policy development within the WMCA. In relation to comments shared with regards to the region having 'one voice', Councillor Bob Sleight recognised the importance of the need for a shared regional view and stressed that the WMCA Board operated on a consensus basis.

Resolved

(1) The recommendations within the presentation be endorsed.

- (2) The Overview & Scrutiny Committee be kept abreast on the progress being made with the implementation of the recommendations.

27. Simplifying Economic Governance and Establishing the West Midlands Economic Growth Board

The committee considered a report of the Director of Productivity & Skills on the establishment of a new Economic Growth Board with decision making powers, led by the Portfolio Lead for Economy & Innovation that would put regional economic development at the heart of the WMCA decision making.

The Leaders of the seven constituent authorities and the Mayor had previously agreed to a comprehensive review of the region's governance. This included a focus on streamlining economic governance and policy making, and establishing clearer, more accountable, decision-making. It was noted that the Government had not yet concluded its review of Local Enterprise Partnerships, where recommendations were expected to be published alongside the Levelling Up White Paper.

Members discussed and shared comments on the delegated decision-making powers and funding, progressing inclusive economic growth, the importance of ensuring local residents were provided with the opportunities to access the growth areas and the need for effective public community engagement in policy development and WMCA activities, opportunities for local communities to directly influence the Mayor, the membership and role of the Economic Growth Board to ensure that investment was pushed into the right areas, the development of the growth plan and the importance of SMEs, and the need to support businesses to transition due to wider economic factors.

Resolved:

The comments and observations received from members of the committee be considered by the WMCA.

[NB. Councillor Lisa Trickett declared an interest in this item as a member of the Strategic Economic Development Board.]

28. WMCA Aims and Objectives

The committee considered a report of the Head of Policy & Programme Development on the latest draft of the WMCA Aims and Objectives that would be presented to the WMCA Board on 19 November. Members were provided with another opportunity to undertake pre-decision scrutiny on the document prior to its submission to the WMCA Board for approval.

Members noted that the aims and objectives would be regularly reviewed, including a formal review every six months to monitor progress. The aims and objectives sat one level up from the existing annual business planning process and would ensure that as an organisation, the WMCA was delivering on the region's priorities.

With regard to Aim 5 of the document, it was proposed that it should read 'to demonstrate the strength of our regional partnership to secure new powers and resources from Central Government', as this identified what the WMCA wished to do and how this would be achieved. In terms of the additional powers being sought from Government, the WMCA was seeking additional new powers through the Levelling Up White Paper specifically for three areas including building human capital, supporting growth and enterprise and net zero. It was agreed that a copy of the devolution submission would be shared with the wider committee for information.

The Chair noted that to ensure that the work of the WMCA was reflective and understood the views of local communities, it was important for the WMCA to undertake effective citizen engagement and she wished to review this further going forward. The Head of Policy & Programme Development welcomed the committee's comments.

In response to a question raised by the Chair regarding the regional One Public Estate Programme, the Head of Policy & Programme Development agreed to look into this further.

Resolved:

The draft Corporate Aims and Objectives be endorsed. With consideration given to the inclusion of comments from the committee

29. Air Quality Options Paper

The committee received an update from the Head of Environment on the progress being made with the Environment Bill that would set out the Government's framework for environmental legislation post-Brexit. The Bill was included in the Queen's Speech in May and was currently with the House of Commons for 'consideration of amendments' following its third reading in the House of Lords. The Bill was expected to receive royal assent later in 2021/early 2022.

The Head of Environment welcomed the engagement of Councillor Peter Fowler, Councillor Liz Clements and Councillor Vera Waters on the development of the Air Quality Options paper which was to have been presented to the WMCA Board on 19 November. However, it was subsequently agreed to defer the paper until the Bill had received Royal Assent.

The Head of Environment explained that the WMCA Board would be asked to consider two options, including the potential to continue to deliver air quality action using the current working arrangements or it could choose to adopt a more collaborative approach to air quality in which Local Air Quality Action Plans could be complemented by a regional West Midlands Air Quality Framework that would sit alongside the Local Transport Plan.

Some members of the committee expressed a view that they did not believe it necessary to defer the report until the Environment Bill had received Royal Assent and that progress could have been made regardless.

Although the decision had been taken to defer the consideration of the Air Quality Options paper, the committee stressed the importance of pre-decision scrutiny and considered that members should have had the opportunity to review the paper in its draft form at its meeting as scheduled.

Resolved:

The update be noted and that the Air Quality Options paper be shared with members of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee for review.

30. Grant Register

The committee considered a report of the Director of Finance that provided an update on the grant register which contained all current '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 what the grant delivered.

The committee expressed concern at the risk in terms of the implications of the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement programme that had not been fully funded and emphasised the importance of a shared understanding of the challenges that were faced by the region. The Head of Finance Business Partnering explained that the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement had been deliberately over-programmed, and a further update report would be submitted to the WMCA Board in January 2022.

In response to a question raised by the Chair, the Head of Policy & Programme Development provided further information on the Multiply Scheme to help support adults improve their numeracy skills and also shared the detail in respect of the £800m, in which the WMCA had received a proportion for electric vehicles. He added that the Multiply Scheme was for £500m and would be taken from the Shared Prosperity Fund of £2.6bn. It was expected that the £800m for electric vehicle manufacture would come from the Global Investment Fund which was to be administered by the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy - so bypassing the WMCA.

Resolved:

- (1) The update be welcomed, and the Overview & Scrutiny Committee be sighted on the additional funds discussed.
- (2) The grant register be noted.

31. Scrutiny Champions - Progress Update

The committee received an update from the Scrutiny Champions on the activities of the Housing & Land and Environmental & Energy portfolio areas.

Resolved:

The updates be noted.

32. Minutes: Transport Scrutiny Sub-Committee - 13 September and 22 October 2021

The committee received the minutes of the Transport Scrutiny Sub-Committee meeting on 13 September and 22 October 2021.

Resolved:

The minutes of 13 September and 22 October 2021 be agreed.

33. Work Programme

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

34. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the committee would be held on Wednesday 15 December 2021 at 10.00am.

[The meeting ended at 4.10pm]