



West Midlands Combined Authority

Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Monday 7 March 2022 at 10.00 am

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	Coventry City Council
Councillor Kate Booth	Birmingham City Council
Councillor Mike Chalk	Worcestershire Non-Constituent Local Authorities
Councillor Robert Grinsell (Substitute for Councillor Dicicco)	Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Ian Kettle	Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Peter Fowler	Birmingham City Council
Councillor Nigel Lumby	Shropshire Non-Constituent Local Authorities
Councillor Charn Padda	Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Vera Waters	Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council

In Attendance

Councillor Mike Bird	Portfolio Lead for Housing & Land
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Item No. Title

51. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Liz Clements (Birmingham), Councillor Tony Dicicco (Solihull), Councillor Simon Peale (Staffordshire Non-Constituent Local Authorities) and Councillor Paul Sweet (City of Wolverhampton Council)

52. Chair's Remarks

(a) Overview & Scrutiny Committee 2021/22

The Chair reflected on the activities of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee during 2021/22 and thanked Councillor Lisa Trickett (Vice-Chair), members of the committee and WMCA officers for their support and cross-party contributions during the year.

(b) Scrutiny Review: Helping to Deliver Affordable and Social Housing

A review of the WMCA's Housing & Land Policy: Helping to Deliver Affordable and Social Housing had now concluded, and the findings of the scrutiny panel would be reported to Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 7 March 2022.

(c) Scrutiny Review: Delivery of Local Skills Training

At the last meeting it was reported that a review would be undertaken to understand the impact of the devolution of the Adult Education Budget to the WMCA on the delivery of local skills training within the region, and to identify the challenges and ways in which the West Midlands Combined Authority and Local Authorities could better target skills needs in the region particularly in relation to the big economic challenges.

The scrutiny panel had yet to receive its strategic report to help inform its key lines of enquiry and therefore, to ensure that the review was as effective as possible, it was agreed to defer the review until 2022/23.

53. Minutes - 10 January 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 January 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

54. Mayoral Question Time: Budget - Response from the Mayor to the recommendations presented to the WMCA Board on 14 January 2022

The committee noted the response received from the Mayor in respect of the observations it had identified following the Budget Q&A session on 15 December 2021.

Resolved:

- (1) The report be noted.

55. Affordable Housing Delivery with Housing Associations: Progress update

The committee considered a report of the Director of Housing and Regeneration that provided an update on the direction of travel on the ongoing work of the WMCA and housing associations partners to establish a collective approach to the delivery of additional affordable housing across the region.

Councillor Mike Bird, Portfolio Lead for Housing & Land provided an overview of the affordable housing programme, joint working, the successful delivery of housing to date, challenges and priorities for the Housing & Land Delivery Board.

There had been significant progress made in the recent months regarding the joint pilot approach and its potential to deliver additional affordable homes. During the discussion, the Director of Housing & Regeneration explained the reasoning behind the introduction of the WMCA's affordable housing target and explored comments as to how the WMCA reviewed the different affordable housing levels within areas and across the region.

The committee welcomed the work undertaken and progress made to date regarding the proposed pilot package.

Resolved:

- (1) The positive progress with the work taking place under the Housing & Land Delivery Board to improve the collaboration and co-investment in the region between housing associations and WMCA to secure more social and affordable housing to meet local needs be welcomed.
- (2) That the collaboration that was part of broad package of affordable housing measures and initiatives being progressed under the Housing & Land portfolio be noted; and
- (3) The specific work taking place on a new innovative joint approach with a group of housing associations in the region to deliver additional affordable housing and wider socio-economic outcomes on WMCA land be welcomed and noted.

56. Progress Update: Scrutiny Review - Helping to Deliver Affordable and Social Housing

The committee considered a verbal report from Councillor Lisa Trickett on the findings of the recent scrutiny review undertaken to examine the role and remit of the WMCA to deliver affordable and social housing within the West Midlands through the use of the Brownfield Land Remediation Fund, and to consider how this supported and added value to the responsibilities of the constituent authorities in respect of affordable and social housing provision.

The review group conducted face-to-face interviews with a range of key witnesses to help inform its conclusions and recommendations. During the consideration of the written and oral evidence gathered during the review, a number of key challenges and issues were identified, including the long term financial plans of local authorities and the drive to receive a receipt on the sale of land which undermined the capability to develop and bring forward affordable and social housing within the region, the shortage of land, an increase in flip sales, issues with capacity, capability and the costs of land assembly and Compulsory Purchase Orders. It was recognised that there were opportunities to share expertise across the WMCA area to address this issue.

The WMCA was commended on its focus on affordable housing and its 20% target however, the review group noted the consequences that this had on the behaviours in the market. The review group were also advised that the Government set affordable housing areas and the impact that this had on the delivery of affordable and social housing across the region was acknowledged.

The committee discussed and shared comments on the importance of understanding the differential housing needs within the region. Concern was also expressed on the growth within the private sector and impact that temporary accommodation had on individuals and children.

It was considered that the Levelling up White Paper together with the affordable housing joint venture delivered an opportunity for a collective, collaborative approach to addressing the housing need of the region.

Resolved:

- (1) That the findings of the review be noted; and
- (2) A report on the findings and conclusions of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee to be submitted to the WMCA Board on 18 March 2022, with a request for a collective, collaborative leadership approach to address the housing need within the region.

57. Engagement of Independent Remuneration Panel

The committee received an update on the WMCA's governance review and the progress being made on the establishment of an Independent Remuneration Panel.

A report seeking the approval to establish an Independent Remuneration Panel would be presented to the WMCA Board on 18 March 2022. The Interim Director of Law & Governance provided an overview of the composition of the panel, its focus and timescales.

The panel would undertake a review of the allowances paid to the Mayor and Deputy Mayor and it was envisaged that it would also review the responsibilities of other committee members, including the allowances paid to members of the Transport Delivery Committee.

The committee emphasised the need for a review of the allowances associated with the Mayor and Deputy Mayor and all other committees and boards, including the allowances paid to the Transport Delivery Committee, to be reviewed at the same time and a report to be considered by the WMCA Board at its meeting in June. Members expressed its concern at the length of time it had taken to review the allowances scheme and sought assurances that all areas would be reviewed by the Independent Remuneration Panel. This would ensure that the WMCA Board was able to consider and reach a view of the payment of allowances for members involved in WMCA activity in totality, rather than separate reports to separate meetings which could give rise to an inconsistent and contradictory scheme of allowances across the WMCA as currently existed.

Resolved:

- (1) Whilst acknowledging the need for a full in-depth review to be undertaken, it was the expectation of the committee that the Independent Remuneration Panel reviewed the allowances paid to the Mayor and Deputy Mayor, Transport Delivery Committee and other committees and boards to enable the new arrangements to commence at the start of 2022/23.

[NB. Councillor Bob Grinsell declared an interest in this item as a member of the Transport Delivery Committee].

58. Trailblazer Devolution Deal

The committee considered a report of the Director of Inclusive Growth & Public Service Reform that provided an update on the proposed plans for co-ordinating the WMCA's response to the Government's invitation to negotiate a Trailblazer Devolution Deal.

The Levelling Up White Paper was published on 2 February 2022, and had challenged some of the existing orthodoxy on theories of regional growth and development and announced a number of policy initiatives for the West Midlands, including an Innovation Accelerator, £28m from the Brownfield Housing Fund and funding for Digital Bootcamps in the region.

It was reported that the West Midlands and Greater Manchester combined authorities had been invited to negotiate a Trailblazer Devolution Deal with government, in which the WMCA had been developing its proposition to Government that would be presented to the WMCA Board in June for consideration.

The committee discussed and shared comments on the importance of community engagement and transparency, the six capitals, social capital, the importance of understanding the differential spatial content within the region, the importance of owning the challenges within the region, powers relating to public health, fire and the Police & Crime Commissioner.

The committee stressed the need for community engagement to ensure the voice of the citizen was heard and that the WMCA was involving the wider community in shaping its future role.

Resolved:

- (1) The report be noted; and
- (2) The Overview & Scrutiny Committee to have oversight on any potential additional powers to be devolved to the WMCA including those relating to the Police & Crime Commissioner and, to be kept abreast of the progress being made in terms of the active engagement with communities.

59. West Midlands Plan for Growth

The committee considered a report of the Chief Executive on the West Midlands Plan for Growth and the activities of the Economic Growth Board that had identified the need for interventions to be aligned and streamlined to catalyse additional growth in key clusters.

The committee noted the presentation that outlined the key findings and recommendations from the West Midlands Plan for Growth, which included a twin track approach capitalising on existing clusters of scale and strength and supporting nascent clusters and emerging technologies.

Whilst it was recognised that the Plan for Growth did not seek to be an economic wide strategy and that further work would be required to determine how the wider job sectors could be supported to create an inclusive economy, the committee expressed concern that these two areas of work were being undertaken separately and questioned how this work would be integrated to ensure that inclusive and social growth was being achieved.

Resolved:

- (1) The purpose and content of the West Midlands Plan for Growth be noted.
- (2) It be noted that the Economic Growth Board identified the need for interventions to be aligned and streamlined to catalyse additional growth in key clusters, and recognising a complex picture on economic functions, the Economic Growth Board agreed to establish a task and finish group, chaired by Councillor Ian Brookfield, to develop recommendations for aligning and streamlining economic development activity across organisations; and
- (3) The committee considered focussing predominately on this West Midlands Plan for Growth risks widening the inequality gap.

60. Annual Business Plan

The committee considered a report of the Director of Director that provided the background to the development of the Annual Business Plan and overview of content and how it would be used, monitored and measured that supported the move towards data driven, evidence-based decision-making.

The Annual Business Plan was a vital link in the 'golden thread' between the WMCA Aims and Objectives. The ambition was to produce a plan setting out all activity to be delivered in 2022/23. The plan would provide a single source of the truth that delivered data that would be triangulated with the Strategic Risk Register and finance cost codes. In terms of monitoring and reporting, the performance against the Annual Business Plan would be reported to the WMCA Board half-yearly.

Resolved:

- (1) That the report be supported.

61. 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.

There had been two new grants added to the register since the last update to the committee, including the Brownfield Housing Fund, an additional £17.5m had been secured from the fund and Social Prescribing Cycling and Walking that had received £0.098m.

A further reward had been received of £7.5m for the Social Decarbonisation Fund - Wave 1 and the detail on this would be reported to the WMCA Board on 18 March through the Financial Monitoring Report.

The Director of Finance advised the committee that the government had confirmed that it would extend the Bus and Light Rail Recovery funding for a further six months.

Resolved:

- (1) That the report be noted.

62. Minutes: Transport Scrutiny Sub-Committee

The committee received the minutes of the Transport Scrutiny Sub-Committee meeting on 17 January and 23 February 2022.

Resolved:

- (1) The minutes of 17 January and 23 February 2022 be agreed.

63. Work Programme

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

[The meeting ended at 12:15pm]