



West Midlands Combined Authority

Housing & Land Delivery Board

Wednesday 2 March 2022 at 10.00 am

Minutes

Present

Councillor Mike Bird (Chair)
Councillor Zahoor Ahmed
Councillor Shabrana Hussain
Councillor Ian Kettle
Councillor Andy Mackiewicz
Councillor David Welsh

Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Birmingham City Council
Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Coventry City Council

Participating via MS Teams

Councillor Peter Butlin
Councillor Matthew Dormer
Sarah Middleton

Councillor Richard Overton
Councillor Ed Potter
Kevin Rodgers

Councillor Stephen Simkins
Suzanne Ward

Councillor Kristofer Wilson

Warwickshire County Council
Redditch Borough Council
Black Country Local Enterprise
Partnership
Telford and Wrekin Council
Shropshire Council
West Midlands Housing Association
Partnership
City of Wolverhampton Council
Environment Agency

Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough
Council

Item Title No.

40. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Fitzgerald (Cannock Chase District Council) Councillor Gakhal (City of Wolverhampton Council), Jo Nugent (Homes England) and Dawn Ward (Greater Birmingham & Solihull LEP).

41. Nomination of substitutes

Councillor Simkins (City of Wolverhampton) participated in the meeting via MS Teams on behalf of Councillor Gakhal.

42. Minutes -19 January 2022

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 19 January 2022 be approved as a correct record.

43. Affordable Housing Delivery with Housing Associations : Progress Update

The board considered a report of the Director of Housing and Regeneration that provided an update and clear direction of travel on the ongoing work of the WMCA and housing association partners to establish a more comprehensive collective approach to the delivery of affordable housing across the region - a key deliverable for the Housing and Land Delivery Board in 2022/23.

The report also sought endorsement for the work underway to develop an innovative pilot approach with a small group of Housing Associations based on packaged land disposal. It was noted that affordable housing was part of the set of deliverables for the Housing and Land Delivery Board.

A report outlining the WMCA definition of affordable housing (currently under review) which was endorsed by this board in January 2020 was circulated with the papers for information.

Councillor Mackiewicz considered the affordable housing definition was difficult to determine from the documents circulated and asked for it to be made clearer if possible. He also advised that Solihull Officers thought the Help to Own Scheme does not meet certain national affordability criteria and would like WMCA Officers to check this.

The Director of Housing and Regeneration, Gareth Bradford reported that he understood the Help to Own Scheme in Wolverhampton meets the WMCA definition of affordable and the definition in the National Planning Policy Framework but would check on this and confirm the position with the board.

The board received a presentation from the Strategic Planning Manager, Rob Lamond that provided an update on work being undertaken to update the affordable housing definition for the WMCA, progress made with housing associations on affordable housing delivery, the objectives of the pilot package and next steps.

Councillor Simkins reported that Wolverhampton has established a housing forum and would like the Combined Authority to work with the forum. He considered that the WMCA should work with ALMOs/local authorities to improve housing and make it affordable so as to allow people to remain in their local area, noting that Birmingham City Council has the biggest local authority housing stock in the country.

Gareth Bradford reported that the WMCA was engaging with Wolverhampton Living in Wolverhampton, Birmingham Municipal Housing Trust amongst other organisations and some non-constituent authorities. Rob Lamond advised that he would look to analyse the National Planning Policy Framework and WMCA's affordable housing definitions in terms of the extent to which they supported the wishes of people wishing to stay within their locality.

In relation to the proposed pilot package, Councillor Welsh enquired whether the sites for affordable housing have already been determined as he noted

the report referred to new homes being located adjacent to a Metro station and a new hospital which did not apply to Coventry. He asked that officers be open and transparent with regards to any sites identified.

The Chair reported that, to avoid commercial prejudice, the preferred sites could be identified, if and when they were in public control as opposed to being available on the open market. It was agreed that a future report should set out why WMCA should progress affordable housing delivery in this way.

The Director of Housing and Regeneration advised that, whilst a number of sites have been considered for the pilot approach, the preferred sites have not yet been confirmed: the report set out criteria which were based on a couple of potential sites but the criteria are being reviewed and the final version will be used to determine the preferred sites.

Councillor Welsh confirmed he was satisfied with this approach and asked for the revised criteria be re-submitted to the board.

Councillor Mackiewicz asked that consideration be given to establishing a clear definition of key workers with regards to housing support and noted the WMCA needs to press on with Net Zero given the current situation with Russia and Ukraine.

The Chair concurred with the need for a definition of affordable housing and stated that the definition of 'key workers' should not be too narrow or prescriptive e.g. it should not be restricted to NHS workers. The definition should also consider what is genuinely affordable in cost terms and the potential benefits of schemes such as Help to Own which does not require a deposit.

The Director of Housing and Regeneration reported that it is up to each local authority to determine its definition of key workers, but he was happy for the WMCA to look at setting the principles for its own definition, to be applied on development projects where WMCA support was requested.

The board discussed the role of council housing in affordable housing and the need for local authorities to be provided with funding to enable them to renew their housing stock. It was noted that, as housing stock ages, the associated maintenance costs increase. There is a need for a review of older stock, retaining dwellings which provide viable, good quality accommodation and considering estate renewal elsewhere. WMCA also needs to work closely with Housing Departments in local authorities to maximise the opportunities for affordable housing, bringing forward more opportunities, particularly on brownfield land.

The Director of Housing and Regeneration advised that, historically, government funding has been available only for new homes not replacement homes. As a result, at present, the number of dwellings secured by estate renewal is not an output accepted by Government although he was hoping that the Levelling Up Fund would offer some additional flexibility, including support for wider place making. He added that a new officer group had been set up with regards to Levelling Up and this could look at estate renewal.

Kevin Rogers stated that the aim is to provide as many affordable homes as possible, maximising the West Midlands share of national funding administered by Homes England. Consideration also needs to be given by local planning authorities to the mix of dwellings and to the impact of viability considerations in relation to affordable housing provision as required by the National Planning Policy Framework.

In relation to the viability requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework, the Director of Housing and Regeneration advised that he would look to put together some points on this issue for the next meeting. It was recognised that the delivery of affordable housing is strongly influenced by land values and that a long term strategy to deal with this is required. If affordable housing requirements are factored in at an early stage, it increases the potential to secure a higher percentage of affordable homes. In the meantime, WMCA will continue with its requirement for a minimum of 20% affordable to be provided on all schemes supported by WMCA and the mix of dwellings on each site will be agreed with local planning authorities. The Public Land Charter also requires affordable housing to be factored into any disposals.

The Director of Housing and Regeneration advised that an officer group encompassing WMCA, local authorities and housing associations is being set up to progress matters relating to affordable housing, including those raised in the meeting. Members were asked to nominate an officer to the group.

Resolved:

1. The positive progress with the work taking place under the Housing and Land Delivery Board to improve the collaboration and co-investment in the region between housing associations and the WMCA to secure more social and affordable housing to meet local needs be welcomed and endorsed;
2. This collaboration is part of a broad package of affordable housing measures and initiatives being progressed under the Housing and Land Portfolio be noted and
3. The specific work taking place on the 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 endorsed.

44. WMCA Housing & Land Devolved Funds : Progress Update

The board considered a report of the Director of Housing and Regeneration that provided an update on the funding which the WMCA has secured to date from Government on the housing and regeneration matters which it administers via the Single Commissioning Framework across the West Midlands. The report also provides an update on ongoing discussions with Government to secure further housing and regeneration funding for the region.

The Strategic Planning Manager, Rob Lamond reported that the WMCA has secured a further £28m from the Brownfield Housing Fund that was included in the Levelling Up announcements, the largest of any Mayoral Combined Authority. Additionally, the WMCA has also secured a further £17.4m through direct negotiations with Government to be administered through the Single Commissioning Framework. He advised that there were also further opportunities to deliver more housing and infrastructure for the region through the Levelling Up agenda.

In relation to an enquiry from Councillor Simkins regarding intervention rates that are prohibitive due to economic viability and whether these could be flexed going forward, the Director of Housing and Regeneration advised that the WMCA does not impose intervention rates on schemes but specifies what is needed to deliver the housing outputs based on Government requirements/targets. He added that it was cheaper to deliver housing on less contaminated land but the programme could flex according to needs and reminded the board that the outputs on every scheme are specified in the Quarterly Report on Housing and Land Portfolio Deliverables.

Councillor Welsh reported that Coventry was in the process of identifying its brownfield sites and was looking forward to working with the WMCA on how these could be utilised.

The Director of Housing and Regeneration, Gareth Bradford invited local authority colleagues to contact him or Rob Lamond to discuss how the WMCA could assist with regards to taking forward brownfield and or other potential sites or would like further information presented to Cabinet or Chief Executive meetings.

Resolved:

1. The success of the WMCA Housing and Land Portfolio in securing devolved housing and land funds from Government and the strong performance to date against targets set out in these funds be welcomed and endorsed and

2. The business case work being undertaken by the WMCA Housing and Land Portfolio to secure further funding from Government to support the objectives set by the Housing and Land Delivery Board including jobs, commercial development and brownfield land remediation and innovative new proposals like modular construction and zero carbon homes be noted and endorsed.

45. Housing & Land Portfolio Deliverables 2022/23 : Update Report

The board considered a report of the Director of Housing and Regeneration that sought endorsement of the draft Housing and Land Portfolio Deliverables prior to approval by the WMCA Board on 18 March 2022. The deliverables would directly support the implementation of the WMCA's Strategic Aims and Objectives approved by the WMCA Board in November 2021.

The board discussed the role of Advanced Manufacturing in Construction

(AMC), in particular, the role of modular housing in delivering cheaper and more energy efficient homes and the need to attract AMC manufacturers to the region.

The Director of Housing and Regeneration proposed a site visit be arranged to look at how the WMCA has helped support the delivery of AMC, Net Zero and affordable homes in the region (including Help to Own) if members were interested in this.

The Chair reported that he would like the above visit to be arranged for board members and for it to be scheduled during the summer. He indicated that he would like to know the location of AMC manufacturing sites as he would like to encourage businesses to come to the West Midlands.

The Director of Housing and Regeneration advised that he would ask AMC Officers/AMC Taskforce to look at how the WMCA could support the AMC industry with regards to WMCA land/infrastructure loans and would submit a report to the next meeting on the matter.

Resolved: The Housing and Land Portfolio High Level Deliverables for 2022/23 be endorsed prior to the approval by the WMCA Board on 18 March 2022.

46. Date of next meeting - 27 April 2022 at 10.00am

The meeting ended at 11.25 am.