

## Overview & Scrutiny Committee

<b>Date</b>	17 October 2022
<b>Report title</b>	Trailblazer Devolution Deal Scrutiny Working Group - Summary of Findings
<b>Members Undertaking the Review</b>	Overview & Scrutiny Committee
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**Recommendation(s) for decision:**

**The Overview & Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:**

- (1) Endorse the conclusions of the working groups, as set out within the report, that will help to support and shape the Trailblazer Devolution Deal submission to Government being considered by the WMCA Board on 28 October 2022.
- (2) Receive further updates and briefings at future meetings of the committee on developments following the submission of the devolution proposition to Government.

## **Purpose**

1. To consider the findings of the Overview & Scrutiny Trailblazer Devolution Deal Working Groups, which considered each of the Trailblazer Devolution proposals in detail.

## **Background**

2. The Trailblazer Devolution Deal process is continuing with devolution proposals being developed across a wide range of themes. Proposals are being drafted in accordance with the principles and plans previously agreed by the WMCA Board. With more responsibility, there should be more accountability, and so the proposals have been tested by Overview & Scrutiny Committee to ensure that they have a clear focus on drawing down powers and funding from Government (including opportunities for 'double devolution' to the WMCA's constituent member authorities where appropriate), and ensuring that the roles and responsibilities of those constituent authorities were not being 'devolved' upwards.
3. At its meeting on 11 July, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee agreed to hold a series of working groups over the summer period to review each of the proposals in detail and to discuss the local benefits that could be delivered to each local authority area through the proposed Trailblazer Devolution Deal.

## **Emerging Themes and Considerations**

4. The working groups met during August and September and was supported by the WMCA's Trailblazer Devolution Team. Overview & Scrutiny Committee invited each of the workstream leads to present and answer questions on each of the trailblazer devolution proposals that were grouped into four thematic areas:
  - Going Further & Faster
  - Rebooting the Economy
  - Increasing Pride in Place
  - Enabling Delivery

In addition, members also scrutinised the local benefits that could be delivered by the trailblazer devolution deal in each of the constituent and non-constituent authority areas.

5. After considering each of the trailblazer devolution proposals and the local benefits, a number of key themes/considerations emerged.

### **5.1 Investment sought compared to the scale of the ambition**

The Working Group welcomed the scale of ambition outlined in the proposals in terms of the areas that were being addressed, but in some instances queried whether the investment being sought from Government was bold enough to ensure delivery. Although clearly greater sums would be welcome, in the main, officers considered that the financial asks were figures that would be more likely to be deemed reasonable by Government departments and in particular HM Treasury.

It was also noted that Government had firmly stated that there would be 'no new money'. However, it was recognised that many of the proposals within the Devolution Deal, although focused on financial issues, were seeking greater regional control of existing pots

of funding, or simplification of funding streams, rather than requesting new funding budgets.

## **5.2 Impacts from proposals**

Working Group members provided invaluable insight into some of the challenges that their communities faced. This 'on-the-ground' perspective was incredibly valuable for officers both in terms of greater understanding of the issues being faced by residents and businesses within the region, but also as evidence and case studies to bolster discussions with Government colleagues.

Overall, it was also recognised that the Devolution Deal proposals focused on the strategic levers and controls that should be devolved to the region and authorities, rather than specific projects to be implemented through those enhanced levers.

These insights also reinforced the importance of representing 'people' in the proposals – rather than merely strategic measures and interventions. This perspective has been incorporated strongly into the 'West Midlands Levelling Up Growth Prospectus' which has been developed to accompany the emerging Deal proposals. This document reflects the importance, for example, in all communities in the region benefitting from 'levelling up' through inclusive economic growth and equal access to opportunities.

## **5.3 Priorities**

Whilst the breadth and diversity of proposals was welcomed – with many clearly affecting clear and present challenges within the region – the Working Group did reinforce the importance of prioritisation of these proposals. Key focus areas were identified as: housing, transport, skills and climate change. Although this was not to the exclusion of other proposals, these areas reflected the greatest concerns for members' residents and there was genuine concern that spreading the capacity too thinly, given the level of resource being sought, would undermine delivery in these areas. As such, the committee recommended focusing on these four priority areas and the CA's core remit and should not focus on things like healthcare delivery, but rather on understanding how the CA can influence and enable better health outcomes and inequalities through the four thematic areas and its current devolved responsibilities.

## **5.4 Integration of strategic approaches**

The interdependency between proposal areas became clear through discussions at the Working Group meetings: for example, the important relationships between skills and economic growth, or effective transport systems and easy access to employment opportunities. Although many of these areas were already well-integrated and connected, it was certainly noted that the Trailblazer Devolution Deal had highlighted even greater opportunities for the integration of approaches and measures which would continue to underpin the work of WMCA officers.

## **5.5 Partnerships**

The positive engagement with, and contributions from, OSC members was warmly welcomed. This mirrored the wider support that had underpinned the development of the proposals overall: from the private sector through organisations such as the Regional

Business Council; local authorities through a range of regular engagement sessions; and through third sector organisations on topics such as social economy and digital inclusion.

This collaborative approach was recognised as important not only for the robustness of the proposal itself, it also demonstrated to Government that the Deal truly reflected the needs and aspirations of the region – a fundamental principle of enhanced devolution.

## **5.6 Actions**

During the course of the Working Group meetings, a number of actions were highlighted by members and logged. These have been taken forward by officers, and with the exception of one outstanding action which is reliant on more detailed data being available, have all been addressed.

### **Financial Implications**

6. There are no direct financial implications immediately arising out of the recommendations contained within this report.

### **Legal Implications**

7. There are no direct legal implications immediately arising out of the recommendations contained within this report.

### **Equalities Implications**

8. There are no direct equality implications arising out of the recommendations contained within the report.

### **Inclusive Growth Implications**

9. There are no direct inclusive growth implications arising out of the recommendations contained within the report.

### **Geographical Area of Report's Implications**

10. The local benefits of a devolution deal will impact constituent and non-constituent authorities.

### **Other Implications**

11. There are no further specific implications arising out of the recommendations contained within the report.