



Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Monday 11 July 2022 at 10.00 am

Minutes

Present

Councillor Cathy Bayton (Chair)
Councillor Naeem Akhtar (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Andrew Burrow
Councillor Mike Chalk

Councillor Ellen Fenton
Councillor Ian Kettle
Councillor Nigel Lumby

Councillor Martin McCarthy
Councillor Lauren Rainbow
Councillor Mike Sutherland

Councillor Jamie Tennant
Amanda Tomlinson

Councillor Vera Waters

Association of Black Country Authorities
Coventry City Council
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Worcestershire Non-Constituent Local
Authorities

Association of Black Country Authorities
Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Shropshire Non-Constituent Local
Authorities

Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Birmingham City Council
Staffordshire Non-Constituent Local
Authorities

Birmingham City Council
Black Country Local Enterprise
Partnership

Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council

In Attendance

Ed Cox

Dan Essex
Clare Hatton
Lyndsey Roberts
Laura Shoaf
Kate Taylor

Executive Director, Strategy, Integration
& Net Zero

Governance Services Manager
Director of Employment & Skills Delivery
Scrutiny Officer

Chief Executive
Head of Finance Business Partnering &
Strategic Planning

**Item Title
No.**

65. Appointment of Chair

The committee noted that at the WMCA Board meeting held on 10 June 2022, Councillor Cathy Bayton had been appointed as the Chair of this committee for 2022/23.

66. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Simms (Sandwell), Councillor Sweet (Wolverhampton) and Councillor Wood (Birmingham).

67. Appointment of Vice-Chair

The appointment of Vice-Chair was the responsibility of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and had to be a member from a different political group to the Mayor. The Chair proposed that Councillor Akhtar be appointed as Vice-Chair of this committee.

Resolved:

- (1) Councillor Akhtar be appointed as Vice-Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee for 2022/23.

68. Appointment of Chair of the Transport Scrutiny Sub-Committee

The appointment of the Chair of Transport Scrutiny Sub-Committee was the responsibility of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and had to be a member from a different political group to the Mayor.

The Vice-Chair proposed that Councillor Bayton be appointed as Chair of the Transport Scrutiny Sub-Committee.

Resolved:

- (1) Councillor Bayton be appointed as Chair of the Transport Scrutiny Sub-Committee for 2022/23 and be co-opted onto the sub-committee for this purpose.

69. Chair's Remarks

The Chair welcomed new members to the first meeting of the year and thanked the former Vice-Chair and members of the committee for their work and contributions during 2021/22.

In terms of its focus for 2022/23, the Chair proposed that the committee continued to focus on whether the policies, investment and actions of the WMCA continued to benefit all communities in the West Midlands.

70. Minutes - 7 March 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 March 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

71. Update on Trailblazer Devolution Deal

The committee considered a report of the Executive Director, Strategy, Integration & Net Zero that provided an update on the progress being made in relation to the Trailblazer Devolution Deal.

The Trailblazer Devolution Deal process was continuing with devolution proposals being developed across a wide range of themes. Proposals were being developed in accordance with the principles and plans previously agreed by the WMCA Board. In particular, proposals had a clear focus on drawing down powers and finance from Government, and the roles and responsibilities held by local authorities would not be drawn away from them through this process.

The committee received an overview of the 17 draft devolution proposals that were grouped into four thematic areas: Going Further & Faster, Rebooting the Economy, Increasing Pride in Place and Enabling Delivery.

Members discussed and shared comments on the development of a West Midlands outcome framework, investment zones and compulsory purchase orders, drawing down powers and finance from Government, working alongside Greater Manchester Combined Authority whilst recognising the important differences, the importance of communication and the availability of up-to-date information, increased public engagement at the appropriate time, the use of existing funding pots and funding simplifications for transport, housing, skills and retrofit.

In terms of new money, as a matter of principle the WMCA would not accept new responsibilities via a devolution deal unless it had adequate resources attached to those new powers. In addition, the Executive Director, Strategy, Integration & Net Zero agreed to consider ways in which local authorities could further demonstrate their support for the proposals, which could be in a form of a complimentary letter to support negotiations.

The committee enquired about funding and the structures and safeguards in place to avoid competitive bidding amongst local authorities and to ensure that respective authorities received their fair share of funding. It was noted that as a region, the WMCA would seek to administer the funding strategically and in a co-ordinated manner, however competitive bidding could not be ruled out.

In terms of next steps, the Chair proposed that a series of scrutiny working groups be held over the summer period to review each of the Trailblazer Devolution proposals in detail.

Resolved:

- (1) The progress being made in relation to the Trailblazer Devolution Deal be noted; and
- (2) The Overview & Scrutiny Committee to be kept abreast on the development of a West Midlands outcome framework that would provide a levelling up evidence base with outcome measures for monitoring.

72. Implications of the Levelling Up & Regeneration Bill for the WMCA

The committee considered a report of the Executive Director, Strategy, Integration & Net Zero on the implications of the upcoming Levelling Up & Regeneration Bill for the WMCA.

The Levelling Up & Regeneration Bill was announced in the Queen's Speech on 10 May 2022. This legislation would have implications for the WMCA in a number of areas, including planning and regeneration, consents and WMCA geography, accountability and devolution and local governance.

Members noted the provisions of the Levelling Up & Regeneration Bill and enquired about the potential for the integration of the West Midlands Fire & Rescue Fire Authority into the WMCA's structures. The Executive Director, Strategy, Integration & Net Zero agreed to look into this further as it was not specifically mentioned within the provisions of the Bill.

Resolved:

- (1) The implications of the upcoming Levelling Up & Regeneration Bill for the WMCA be noted; and
- (2) Overview & Scrutiny Committee to be kept abreast on the developments of the Levelling Up & Regeneration Bill.

73. Review of Governance - Update

The committee received a verbal report from the Interim Director of Law & Governance on the progress being made in relation to the review of governance arrangements.

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. A Governance Working Group developed a series of recommendations that were now being progressed.

As part of the overall governance review, a review had also been undertaken with regard to members' allowances. At its meeting on 18 March 2022 the WMCA Board agreed to convene an Independent Remuneration Panel to review and make recommendations in relation to the allowances that should be paid to the Mayor, Deputy Mayor and other members of WMCA's boards and committees. The Independent Remuneration Panel had now concluded its review and its recommendations would be reported to the WMCA Board in September 2022.

The Interim Director of Law & Governance explained that with regards to allowances, only the Mayor, Deputy Mayor and members of the WMCA Board could receive an allowance, although he had received legal guidance noting that members of the other boards and committees were considered to be 'co-opted members' and therefore an allowance could also be paid if a recommendation were to be made by the Independent Remuneration Panel.

In response to a question raised by the Chair, the Interim Director of Law & Governance explained the difference between a co-opted member and non-co-opted member and confirmed that all members of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee were deemed to be co-opted members of the WMCA Board. He added that the WMCA Board confirmed the acceptance of the co-opted members through a report which was considered by the WMCA Board at its annual meeting.

Resolved:

- (1) The update be noted.

74. Skills Provision Review Overview

The committee considered a report of the Director of Employment & Skills Delivery that set out the proposed scope for the committee's review of skills provision across the region and provided a background scope for the review in context of the economic and skills provision of each of the seven local authority areas, progress to date and the future challenges posed by economic recovery, the greening and automation of industry and the opportunities for continued joint working.

The Adult Education Budget for the constituent member area was devolved to WMCA for delivery from 1 August 2019. The WMCA agreed an approach to commissioning adult education and training that aligned the mix of provision more closely to local and sectoral priorities, whilst avoiding the unnecessary destabilisation of locally based colleges and adult education providers.

The Director of Employment & Skills Delivery brought the committee's attention to the shared challenges and funds that were available to help to address these challenges, including the Adult Education Budget, National Skills Fund 'Free Courses for Jobs', Technical Bootcamp Fund, Community Renewal Fund, Multiply and UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

The committee discussed and shared comments in relation to the number of skills and training providers, which had reduced to 70 core providers working across the West Midlands, concerns on the lack of encouragement to enable individuals to fulfil their potential within their place of work, skills being broader than qualifications and the importance of reviewing individuals' life chances and looking at and understanding outcomes.

The Director of Employment & Skills Delivery confirmed that the short term and long-term challenges would be reviewed as part of the scrutiny review and, in relation to the engagement with business communities, this could also be included within the review.

The committee questioned the allocation of skills funding per local authority area and emphasised the importance of levelling up. Members expressed concern that the current funding formula used for the allocation of the Adult Education Budget had been on an historic investment basis rather than a needs basis. Given this, the committee agreed that this matter should be reviewed as part of the scrutiny review.

Resolved:

- (1) The draft scoping document be agreed, subject to the incorporation of the committee's comments.

- (2) It be agreed that Councillors Burrows, Kettle, Tennant and Waters be appointed as members of the review group; and
- (3) The review to commence during October with a report to be submitted to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 12 January for consideration.

[NB Amanda Tomlinson declared an interest in this item as a Governor at Wolverhampton College]

75. Grant Register

The committee considered a report of the Executive Director of Finance & Business Hub 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.

Resolved:

- (1) The grant register be noted.

76. Minutes: Transport Scrutiny Sub-Committee - 23 March 2022

The committee received the minutes of the Transport Scrutiny Sub-Committee on 23 March 2023.

Resolved:

- (1) The minutes of 23 March 2023 be agreed.

77. Work Programme

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

78. Date of Next Meeting

Monday 5 September at 10.00am

The meeting ended at 12.00pm.