



West Midlands Combined Authority

Housing & Land Delivery Board

Wednesday 5 October 2022 at 10.00 am

Minutes

Present

Councillor Stephen Simkins
Councillor Charn Padda
Jo Nugent
Dawn Ward

City of Wolverhampton Council
Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Homes England
Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local
Enterprise Partnership

Participating in the meeting via Teams

Councillor Andy Mackiewicz
Councillor Richard Overton
Councillor Richard Smith
Councillor David Welsh
Delma Dwight

Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Telford and Wrekin Council
Nuneaton and Bedworth Council
Coventry City Council
Black Country Local Enterprise
Partnership
Environment Agency

Suzanne Page

Item Title No.

16. Inquorate meeting

It was reported that the meeting was inquorate and therefore the recommendations contained within the minutes would be submitted to the WMCA Board on 28 October 2022 for formal approval and adoption.

Councillor Simkins in the Chair

17. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from the Chair, Councillor Bird (Walsall), Councillor Butlin (Warwickshire), Councillor Fitzgerald (Cannock), Councillor Gakhal (Wolverhampton), Councillor Thompson (Birmingham) Kevin Rogers and Sarah Middleton.

18. Nomination of Substitutes

Councillor Gakhal (City of Wolverhampton Council) had nominated Councillor Simkins to attend on his behalf.

Sarah Middleton (Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership) had nominated Delma Dwight to attend on her behalf.

19. Minutes - 20 July 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 July 2022 were agreed as a true record.

20. Quarterly Report on Housing & Land Portfolio Deliverables and Progress on Housing and Land Annual Business Plan

The board considered a report of the Executive Director of Housing, Property and Regeneration, which provided a regular quarterly update on progress in delivering the High Level Deliverables for the Housing and Land Portfolio as co-developed with the Housing & Land Delivery Board throughout the year and agreed by the WMCA Board in February 2022.

Councillor Simkins commented that a number of big priority projects in Wolverhampton had stalled and there is a need for the WMCA to look at these.

Councillor Mackiewicz commented that some brownfield sites in rural areas are difficult to develop on sustainability grounds e.g. due to lack of public transport. He enquired whether the WMCA could help bring forward brownfield sites in rural locations, such as those in in Solihull.

Tracy Darke commented that development in rural locations needs to be considered very carefully against the criteria of the National Planning Policy Framework: there might be some that are more accessible than others but not all.

The Executive Director of Housing, Property and Regeneration, Gareth Bradford, reported that WMCA is on track against various targets set out in the devolved housing and land funds and works closely with all local authorities to bring forward developable projects, create a pipeline of future projects and consider whether projects meet current HM Government funding criteria. More Government funding is needed for brownfield sites and having more flexibility in the criteria applied by HM Government lies at the heart of negotiations on the Trailblazer Devolution Deal. Where projects do not meet current HM Government funding criteria, the WMCA would be submitting these as case studies to Government to demonstrate the need for flexible funding. He advised the board that the WMCA regularly meets with local authority colleagues to identify their priority projects and undertook to inform the board of the 'difficult to deliver' projects/sites that are coming through the WMCA funding processes.

Councillor Simkins asked that the WMCA process used to determine applications for devolved housing and land funds be reviewed to consider how the pace of delivery might be increased. He suggested local authorities should provide a list of difficult to deliver sites for potential WMCA support, looking at worst sites first.

The Executive Director of Housing, Property & Regeneration commented that, at the last meeting, Members had considered a range of very difficult to deliver sites which had been unlocked and accelerated through the WMCA housing and land programme and were now on site or completed. He offered to produce a list of sites for the next meeting which would highlight the specific problems which are being encountered and how increased flexibility in funding might help with this. He added that where improvements are needed to the process, these will be implemented. Discussions will also continue with individual local authorities.

It be recommended to the WMCA Board that:

1. Positive progress to achieve the Housing and Land Portfolio's approved Annual Deliverables in Q1 & Q2 2022/23 be noted ;
2. The key performance highlights set out in Section 3 of the report be noted and
3. The positive performance and effective deployment of WMCA's devolved housing and land illustrated by the Single Commissioning Framework schemes summarised in the confidential annex to the report (many of these schemes are now in delivery phase, having progressed through to the end of the process, which shows the role of the WMCA in unlocking, accelerating and problem solving on 'difficult to deliver' schemes) be noted.

21. Levelling Up : Trailblazer Devolution Deal - Update

The board considered a report of the Executive Director of Housing, Property & Regeneration that provided an update on progress on the development of the Housing & Regeneration proposals within the West Midlands Trailblazer Devolution Deal.

The Executive Director of Housing, Property & Regeneration stated that work on investment zones was proceeding at pace and thanked local authorities for their engagement in this work.

The Executive Director of Housing, Property & Regeneration stated that, in relation to Investment Zones, HM Government appears very focused on economic growth; he explained that discussions continue to highlight the board's wider ambition for Investment Zones to drive social and environmental benefits.

The Head of Strategy & Analysis, Rob Lamond, informed the board that the devolution proposals could be subject to change due to the changes made within Government and referred to the latest proposals set out in section 4 of the report. The deadline for submission of Expressions of Interest, led by WMCA, is 14 October 2022.

The Executive Director of Housing, Property & Regeneration, Gareth Bradford undertook to follow up a conversation with Suzanne Ward (Environment Agency); the agency is being approached by local authorities to explore how delivery on some projects could be accelerated.

Councillor Mackiewicz suggested that retrofit would help to deliver economic growth and problems in the supply chain (materials, labour costs) need to be addressed.

Councillor Simkins suggested the board's work should be aligned with that of the Economic Growth Board and wider regeneration benefits needed to be considered e.g. health, education. Conversations need to take place on housing delivery/retrofit with local authorities and/or through their arms' length management organisations.

It be recommended to the WMCA Board that:

1. Progress made since the last meeting of the Housing & Land Delivery Board on the development of the Housing, Property and Regeneration proposals within the West Midlands Trailblazer Devolution Deal be noted;
2. The current version of these proposals as set out in the report be endorsed and
3. The ongoing extensive internal and external engagement programme supporting development and testing of these proposals with the new Government be noted and
4. The ongoing engagement and input from the Housing and Land Delivery Board Members in this process be welcomed.

22. Affordable Homes Supply Strategy : Discussion Paper

The board considered a report of the Executive Director of Housing, Property & Regeneration that set out the work to date on the preparation of an Affordable Homes Supply Strategy and invited discussion on the proposed approach and indicative content.

The Head of Strategy & Analysis, Rob Lamond, presented the WMCA's proposed approach to an Affordable Homes Supply Strategy. This included the strategic context (key drivers and key trends) and the vision and approach to the strategy (delivery arrangements and key independencies and links).

Dawn Ward (GBSLEP) commented that many individuals, in particular young people, cannot afford to buy or rent property in the West Midlands and that the region risked losing talent to other areas where housing was affordable.

Rob Lamond reported that he was speaking to universities in the region on this issue and undertook to speak to Dawn Ward to discuss to how the WMCA could obtain access to students and student organisations.

Councillor Padda (Sandwell) proposed that the vision needs to ensure a supply of affordable homes are meeting local needs and that these are really affordable for local people.

Rob Lamond undertook to speak Councillor Padda on the matter outside of the meeting.

Councillor Mackiewicz reported on a pilot project in Solihull that helps key workers buy a house (shared ownership) at a rate that is cheaper than renting using HRA reserves.

Councillor Simkins considered the WMCA should look at best practice across the WMCA area to ensure the best housing options are utilised.

The Executive Director of Property, Housing and Regeneration, Gareth Bradford, reported that the WMCA seeks to add value with regards to affordable housing and would welcome feedback from members and, further to Councillor's Simkin's suggestion would research best practice.

It be recommended to the WMCA Board that :

1. Progress with developing an 'Affordable Homes Supply Strategy' as commissioned by the Housing & Land Delivery Board, to help drive the increased provision of a range of affordable homes within the region to meet local needs and establish the West Midlands as the leading UK region in terms of affordable homes and policy delivery be noted;
2. The product of this work will be an integrated strategy that directly supports key policy agendas of WMCA and local authorities through enabling affordable housing delivery and driving advanced manufacturing in construction, zero carbon homes and the design quality and devolution asks be noted;
3. The potential contents and remit of an affordable homes supply strategy as set out in the supporting slides (attached as Annex 1) be noted and
4. The proposed next steps be endorsed.

23. Future Homes Strategy Update : Themes and Structure

The board considered a report of the Executive Director of Housing, Property and Regeneration that provided an update on the wide-ranging activity that has been undertaken to develop a new Future Homes Strategy and a programme of targeted action.

Rachel Atterbury, Projects Officer, introduced the report and the Chair of WMCA's Future Homes Taskforce, Mark Farmer who presented more detailed information.

Mark Farmer, CEO of Cast Consultancy and the UK Government's MMC Champion reported on the work of WMCA's Future Homes Taskforce that seeks to shape the strategy development programme and to identify opportunities for industry-driven leadership on Future Homes in the West Midlands. He explained that the challenge is to land more new zero carbon homes alongside an agenda focused on how they are built. Most combined authorities are focused on zero carbon; the West Midlands would focus on how we build in order to deliver that outcome.

In relation to an enquiry from Suzanne Ward (Environment Agency) as to whether Severn Trent were involved with the Taskforce, Mark Farmer advised that the Taskforce would look at water consumption and sustainable drainage along with changing behaviour.

Projects Officer, Rachel-Ann Atterbury explained that two previous reports on this subject matter had come to the board and that the final strategy will be presented in early 2023. The current report presented the context for the Future Homes Strategy, the four key points of difference which frame the Future Homes Strategy putting the region in pole position, the key themes and structure of the strategy and next steps.

Councillor Overton asked how SMEs might work with the system and whether it related to smaller sites. Rachel Atterbury explained that the Future Homes Strategy links to WMCA's Plan for Growth which highlighted the potential of the region in this area (a cluster of expertise already existing in the supply chain) and there is more potential to be developed.

Councillor Mackiewicz (Solihull) commented that the key to growth is consistency in policy and taxation. He considered that there is a need for a vision that covers the next 5-10 years that encourages local suppliers to come into this space and make a long-term commitment.

Councillor Simkins asked for engagement with the Economic Growth Board on this subject matter.

Councillor Padda was supportive of the proposals and, in particular, using local supply chains and suggested looking at other places in the world such as Scandinavia on how they deal with warmer homes.

It be recommended to the WMCA Board that:

1. Work undertaken to date to develop an integrated West Midlands Future Homes Strategy that establishes the West Midlands as the centre of excellence for low carbon living, modular construction in the UK and demonstrates the WMCA is going faster than national regulatory standards due to be introduced in 2025 be noted;
2. The expert Future Homes Taskforce has now been established and is fully engaged in development of the strategy and its successful implementation be noted;
3. The proposed key themes and points of difference of the West Midlands Future Homes Strategy be endorsed and
4. The proposed structure of the Future Homes Strategy be endorsed.

24. West Midlands Brownfield Regeneration Strategy : Discussion Paper

The board considered a report of the Director of Housing, Property & Regeneration that sought their views on the WMCA's current thinking on the nature and form of West Midlands Brownfield Regeneration Strategy as previously commissioned by this board.

The Head of Policy and Planning, Pat Willoughby, outlined the report and advised the board that the brownfield regeneration strategy would bring together the different brownfield, housing and regeneration initiatives, projects and programmes the board is overseeing into a single coherent strategy. Working with local authorities, it was proposed the strategy document that would be produced would be similar to the Investment Prospectus document and that seeks to unlock private sector investment.

Councillor Welsh (Coventry) agreed that there is a need to bring forward brownfield land for development but expressed concerns about the report and approach as currently written in this report. He suggested that the document should evidence it is more collaborative in its approach and should include explicit reference to local authorities and other agencies so that it reflected a partnership approach. He reported that the WMCA does not have the powers to intervene in this area and would appreciate a meeting with the Director of Housing, Property and Regeneration to discuss the matter further with regards to Coventry City Council.

The Director of Housing, Property and Regeneration, Gareth Bradford reported that the document is intended to be a partnership document that seeks to add value and would be produced in the same collaborative way as had been used for the Investment Prospectus; he committed to look afresh at the approach and report with the local authority officer group.

Councillor Simkins stated that local authorities need to drive this agenda and that the WMCA should be focusing on its role as an enabler, adding value to the work of local authorities.

Councillor Welsh agreed the strategy document should be adding value. A report that addresses the concerns raised should come back to the board, when ready.

Councillor Mackiewicz (Solihull) considered the document should reference economic growth as this was now central to the Government's policy agenda.

The Director of Housing, Property and Regeneration advised that in the light of comments on the contents of the report, and the issues raised by Members, he would bring forward a revised report to a future meeting following significantly greater engagement, collaboration and co-development.

It be recommended to the WMCA Board that :

No decision be taken and the item be deferred to a future meeting to address the issues highlighted by Members and to ensure full co-development with partners across the region.

25. WMCA & Homes England - Strategic Partnership Opportunity

The board considered a report of the Executive Director of Housing, Property & Regeneration that sought discussion and endorsement of the initial conversations held with between the WMCA and Homes England to establish a new strategic partnership, the fifth partnership to be signed by the WMCA under the Housing and Land Delivery Board.

The Head of Strategy & Analysis, Rob Lamond outlined the report and highlighted the principles of establishing a Strategic Place Partnership with Homes England.

Jo Nugent (Homes England) reported that Homes England supported the WMCA's Public Land Charter and would look at how land could be utilised to support local plans.

Councillor Simkins stated that a partnership with Homes England is needed; both organisations have the same ambitions. The partnership could be used to drive delivery.

Councillor Overton said that this was a positive report and that public sector land could be used to develop the strategy.

The board acknowledged this was a positive report.

It be recommended to the WMCA Board that :

1. The principles and progress to date on establishing a formal strategic partnership between the WMCA and Homes England to unlock the delivery of new homes in the West Midlands be endorsed;
2. The proposed next steps of work be endorsed and
3. This would form part of the work under the Housing & Land Delivery Board to establish formal strategic partnerships be noted.

26. WMCA Housing Deal Local Plans : Progress Update

The board considered a report of the Executive Director of Housing, Property & Regeneration that provided a further update on the progress of local plans in the region following a request from the board at its meeting in April 2022 that local plans update should be provided at all future meetings. The report explained that WMCA had also been asked to provide a regional overview on employment land supply and demand.

Councillor Mackiewicz (Solihull) reported that he was very disappointed with the inspector's opinion regarding the delivery of new housing on the NEC site and the proposed relocation of a school. He was seeking clarification on the matter.

The Head of Policy and Planning, Pat Willoughby, advised that WMCA was already in discussion with Solihull officers regarding delivery of development on the NEC site and that WMCA would help in any way that they could.

Tracy Darke (Shropshire) updated the board on the status of Shropshire's Local Plan; a final first stage hearing was planned for January 2023.

It be recommended to the WMCA Board that:

The progress update on local plans in the West Midlands be noted.

27. WMCA Taskforces : Progress Update

The board considered a report of the Executive Director of Housing, Property & Regeneration that provided an update on the activities of the WMCA taskforces which support the Housing & Land Portfolio and provide vital industry insight, challenge and steer across its range of projects and programmes.

The Head of Policy and Planning, Pat Willoughby, introduced the report that was submitted for information.

It be recommended to the WMCA Board that:

1. The positive work and contributions to date of the industry-led taskforces established by the WMCA under its Housing & Land Delivery Board be noted and
2. The recent activity that has taken place around each of the four taskforces in operation be noted.

28. Exclusion of the Press and Public

Resolved:

That in accordance with Section 100A4 of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items of business as they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information relating to the business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

29. Confidential Appendix to Quarterly Report

The board considered an appendix to the Quarterly Housing and Land Portfolio Deliverables report that provided an update on Single Commissioning Framework Schemes.

It be recommended to the WMCA Board that:

The report be noted.

The meeting ended at 11.49 am.