

WMCA Board

Date	16 December 2022
Report title	Updated Single Assurance Framework
Portfolio Lead	Finance - Councillor Bob Sleigh
Accountable Chief Executive	Laura Shoaf, West Midlands Combined Authority email: laura.shoaf@wmca.org.uk
Accountable Employee	Linda Horne, Executive Director of Finance & Business Hub email: linda.horne@wmca.org.uk
Report has been considered by	Strategic Leadership Team Audit, Risk & Assurance Committee

Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

The WMCA Board is recommended to **approve** the attached refreshed Single Assurance Framework (September 2022) which has been updated in accordance with annual review requirements mandated by Government. The updated SAF now meets the National Local Growth Assurance Framework requirements, published by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC) in September 2021.

1. Purpose

1.1 The report provides the background to the updated Single Assurance Framework, highlighting the key changes. The updated Single Assurance Framework is also attached.

2. Background

2.1 WMCA is required to undertake an annual refresh of WMCA Single Assurance Framework document in accordance with Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC) document: The National Local Growth Local Growth Framework (September 2021). This framework sets out government's guidance for places that are required to develop their own local assurance framework. It applies to Mayoral Combined Authorities with a Single Pot and Local Enterprise Partnerships.

2.2 It replaces the previous Local Enterprise Partnership national assurance framework and the Single Pot assurance framework and seeks to provide a common framework of understanding of the assurance required for local growth funding.

- 2.3 The National Local Growth Assurance Framework includes the requirement to outline the CA's approach to Housing, Transport, and the Adult Education Budget.
- 2.4 The Single Assurance Framework (SAF) ensures that the mandatory WMCA role has as an Accountable Body for funding and the assurance requirements WMCA needs to ensure are met. All Directorates are now on board with the updated SAF. Programmes and projects coming forward from these Directorates will follow a proportionate and flexible programme/project development route to approval.
- 2.5 The key changes are:
- a. There should be an Annual Review of the SAF and has introduced the requirement to outline the CA's approach to Housing, Transport, and the Adult Education Budget.
 - b. WMCA SAF was last updated in November 2021, a refresh has been undertaken as stated above and ensure that WMCA continues to remain compliant with this updated guidance. The SAF Implementation Project Manager has worked with all Delivery Directorates to ensure that the SAF Implementation approach being developed for each directorate reflects the mandated guidance. Enabling Services teams have been consulted and their requirements have been incorporated.
 - c. The Board are requested to note that in relation to the updated SAF version 2022 that, there should be no visible change or impact to delivery directorates. The approach for Transport and Adult Education Budget summarises how SAF has already been incorporated within these Directorates and applied to projects as new business cases have been developed and assured. The approach to Housing is aligned to the national guidance and incorporates the current Single Commissioning Framework requirements.
 - d. The table next summarises the changes made, most changes have been made from a Governance perspective and can be viewed as a 'Spring Clean', the revised SAF reflects more accurately the changes to governance policy. The Governance team provided commentary for that part of the SAF:

Index	Description of Change
General	Restructured to follow the requirements of the National Local Growth Assurance Framework (NGLAF) updated Sept. 2021
General	Removal of duplication throughout, e.g., the reasons why there is an Assurance process appears in several places.
General	Removal of historical information, e.g., when/why WMCA was formed
Governance Section	Content reviewed and updated by Governance, e.g. new NGLAF requirements: how Board members are recruited, trained etc.
Inviting applications for funding	Inclusion of new NGLAF requirement
Whistleblowing, Complaints, FOI etc.	Moved from the Assurance Section into Governance - better fit
Single Assurance Framework	Structured to reflect stages of SAF, including introduction of pre-initiation, Annual Business Plan, Activity Register. Inclusion of all funding streams, not just Investment Programme
Single Assurance Framework	Simplification of flowcharts - to include who is responsible for each stage
Head of Paid Service, S151 Officer, Monitoring Officer	New requirements: Headline Job Description
Transport, Housing and Adult Education Budget	New requirement of NGLAF to document how they are included in the SAF
Change Control Process	New inclusion
State Aid	Now known as Subsidy Control: information provided by Legal

- 2.6 As a result of compliance to the National Local Growth Assurance Framework, WMCA will be able to unlock funding more efficiently than if Central Government were reviewing and assuring all business cases directly. However, WMCA as an Accountable Body in turn needs to demonstrate that the terms and conditions of funding streams have been met. By following the SAF, WMCA is now in a better position to provide the documentary evidence that these requirements are being fulfilled.
- 2.7 There is already evidence that there have been improvements in the quality of the business cases, although there is still an opportunity to further strengthen them. Although SAF engagement with Programme Assurance & Appraisal has increased, the team will need to work closer with delivery teams further to plan reviews and improve business case quality prior to approval submission. The Programme Assurance & Appraisal team have supported WMCA in ensuring compliant assurance requirements are being met. There is an opportunity to now move to support WMCA into the 'value add' phase and support the increase in project management capability in the organisation, in turn placing the WMCA in a better position to secure confidence and funding for additional projects for the Region.

3. Financial Implications

- 3.1 By adherence to the Single Assurance Framework, the Government Departments will have increased confidence in the ability of WMCA to manage funds. (CRSTS is an example where the Department of Transport has accepted the Single Assurance Framework as part of the Governance process).

4. Legal Implications

- 4.1 The WMCA is required to maintain an assurance framework which ensures that investment and spending decisions are made in the light of relevant considerations and proper stewardship of public monies is provided. By adhering to the updated Single Assurance Framework, this overall objective continues to be met. This report outlines the key changes of the Single Assurance Framework which has been updated in accordance with annual review requirements mandated by Government which are necessary to ensure that the WMCA continues to operate legally in relation to investment and spending decisions.

5. Equalities Implications

- 5.1 The Single Assurance Framework and supporting proforma have been written to ensure that equalities are part of the considerations when writing business cases.

6. Inclusive Growth Implications

- 6.1 The Single Assurance Framework and supporting proforma have been written to ensure that Inclusive Growth is part of the considerations when writing business cases.

7. Geographical Area of Report's Implications

- 7.1 The Single Assurance Framework covers all areas of the West Midlands.

8. Other Implications

- 8.1 None.

9. Schedule of Background Papers

- 9.1 Single Assurance Framework: September 2022.