



Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Thursday 15 December 2022 at 10.00 am

Minutes

Present

Councillor Cathy Bayton (Chair)	Association of Black Country Authorities
Councillor Ian Kettle	Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Martin McCarthy	Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Lauren Rainbow	Birmingham City Council
Councillor Paul Sweet	City of Wolverhampton Council
Councillor Jamie Tennant	Birmingham City Council
Amanda Tomlinson	Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership
Councillor Vera Waters	Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council

In Attendance

Dan Essex	Governance Services Manager
Linda Horne	Executive Director of Finance and Business Hub
Lyndsey Roberts	Scrutiny Officer
Laura Shoaf	Chief Executive
Andy Street	Mayor of the West Midlands
Councillor Bob Sleigh	Portfolio Lead for Finance

**Item Title
No.**

101. Welcome and Introductions

The Chair welcomed the Mayor, Portfolio Lead for Finance and members of the committee to the second mayoral question time for 2022/23 that would be focussing on the proposed draft 2023/24 budget.

102. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Akhtar (Coventry), Councillor Burrow (Solihull), Councillor Chalk (Worcestershire), Councillor Fenton (Sandwell), Councillor Lumby (Shropshire) and Councillor Sutherland (Staffordshire).

103. Questions to the Mayor and the Portfolio Lead for Finance from Members of the Committee

The committee pursued a number of general lines of enquiry with the Mayor and the Portfolio Lead for Finance, including the sustainability of the budget, the investment programme, the trailblazer devolution deal and transport.

With regards to a mayoral precept, whilst the reasons for choosing not to set a precept during the mayoral term was recognised, the committee considered that the collective decision made not to support the introduction of a precept had had an impact on the sustainability of the WMCA's budget. In terms of the trailblazer devolution deal, it was acknowledged that the decision not to set a precept could affect negotiations with Government, however this decision had been weighed against the economic pressures on individuals paying taxation.

The Mayor and Portfolio Lead for Finance answered questions in relation to the Government's financial support packages for bus and light rail, redistribution of taxes, capital investment for longer term transport strategies to improve connectivity, reliability and public transport times, financial challenges for existing and future supported transport policies, patronage levels, subsidised routes and criteria, value for money and the West Midlands Growth Company.

In terms of train services, in particular the Aldridge route, the Mayor explained that this route would be funded through the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement and its business case had yet to be approved. In addition, the latest position with regards to the delivery of HS2 and the benefits of the introduction of the car park located in Solihull was also noted.

The committee questioned whether there were any constraints within the budget that might have an impact on the WMCA's net zero targets. Whilst the WMCA continued to make good progress in terms of the reduction in transport emissions, addressing the energy efficiency of homes was a challenge in terms of resource. In addition, members explored the potential for new builds to be carbon neutral and how the WMCA could influence this.

To enable scrutiny members to hold those responsible to account, members sought assurances that 'accountability' was embedded within the WMCA's Single Assurance Framework. There were a number of areas where accountability was built in, and members were assured that public dashboards were available that demonstrated the outputs achieved.

In terms of the work undertaken on the proposed investment zones, the Mayor explained how this work would be utilised for future 'levelling up zones' and would be of value for future projects for the region.

Recommended:

The following observations be shared with the Mayor and WMCA Board for consideration and response:

(1) Regional Role in Energy Efficiency

Members expressed their concerns on the cost of energy and the impact that this had on the economy. There was a need to seek the introduction of alternative solutions, for example energy turbines.

(2) Investment Portfolio

The committee questioned whether the WMCA was generating economic growth in specific areas, especially given the disparity of investment

(3) Greater Scrutiny - Arms' Length Companies and the Delivery of Outputs

The committee considered that there needed to be a greater focus on the outputs generated through investments and a greater scrutiny focus on arms' length companies and the outputs delivered for the region.

(4) Carbon Neutrality

The committee stressed the importance of the work being undertaken to achieve carbon neutrality on projects that the WMCA was supporting.

104. Date of Next Meeting

Thursday 12 January 2023 at 10.00am

The meeting ended at 12.00 pm.