



West Midlands Combined Authority

Housing & Land Delivery Board

Monday 23 January 2023 at 10.00 am

Minutes

Present

Councillor Mike Bird (Chair)
Councillor Andy Mackiewicz
Councillor Charn Padda
Jo Nugent
Councillor Richard Smith

Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Homes England
Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council

In Attendance via MS Team

Councillor Richard Overton

Telford and Wrekin Council

Item Title No.

39. 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 10 February 2023 for formal approval and adoption.

40. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Butlin (Warwickshire), Councillor Fitzgerald (Cannock), Councillor Gakhal (Wolverhampton), Councillor Sullivan (Dudley), Kevin Rodgers (West Midlands Housing Association Partnership) Dawn Ward (Greater Birmingham & Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership), Suzanne Ward (Environment Agency) and Councillor Welsh (Coventry).

41. Minutes - 16 November 2022

It be recommended to the WMCA Board that:

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 November 2022 be agreed as a true record.

42. Trailblazer Devolution Deal and Investment Zones: Update on Housing & Land Asks

The board considered a report of the Executive Director of Housing, Property and Regeneration that provided an update on discussions with Government relating to the Trailblazer Devolution Deal.

The Head of Strategy and Analysis, Rob Lamond outlined the report and highlighted the four headline Housing and Land Portfolio asks of Government within the Trailblazer Devolution Deal which comprised of a Single West Midlands Regeneration Fund; a West Midlands Land Reform Programme; Affordable Housing; and Levelling Up Zones. It was noted that these Levelling Up Zones are distinct from the Investment Zones proposed by HM Government in October 2022. The Head of Strategy and Analysis stated that WMCA is working with local authority partners on a regular basis to develop these further.

The Chair asked about the Wednesbury to Brierley Hill Levelling Up Zone given that it is based on the proposed Metro extension. Rob Lamond confirmed that WMCA remained committed to the Metro extension and that discussions were continuing with Transport for West Midlands and local authority partners, especially Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council.

The board welcomed the report that set out the positive progress made in discussions with Government to secure funding for the region.

It be recommended to the WMCA Board that:

1. The development of the Housing and Land Asks within the Trailblazer Devolution Deal be noted and
2. The latest version of the Housing and Land Asks (as set out in Section 3 of the report) be supported.

43. Quarterly Report on Housing & Land Portfolio Deliverables, progress on Housing & Land Annual Business Plan and proposed High Level Deliverables for 2023/24

The board considered a report that provided a regular quarterly update on deliverable progress and sought endorsement for the proposed High Level Deliverables for 2023/24.

The Executive Director of Housing, Property and Regeneration, Gareth Bradford, reported on key highlights during the quarter which included the West Midlands Place Pilots, private and public sector engagement and pipeline building, and the Trailblazer Devolution Deal. In relation to the new High Level Deliverables for 2023/24 it was noted these build on the current High Level Deliverables and were included for comment/review prior to consideration by the WMCA Board on 10 February 2023.

In relation to the West Midlands Place Pilots, the Chair reported on the need to re-invent town and city centres following the decline of retail outlets and to utilise the opportunity for housing that would attract people back into the centres. The Chair noted that more people living in town and city centres will encourage expenditure in the local economy and highlighted that some change of use, from retail to residential, can be achieved through permitted development rights in certain circumstances. He also enquired as to the progress being made on the WMCA's target for homes in the region.

Gareth Bradford advised that 16,700 houses had been built in the region in 2021/22 and that the housing numbers would continue to be monitored closely this year. He undertook to include this information as part of the main (public) report going forward.

It be recommended to the WMCA Board that:

1. The positive progress in achieving the Housing and Land Portfolio's approved Annual Deliverables in Q3 2022/2023 be noted;
2. The key performance highlights set out in Section 3 of the report be noted;
3. The positive performance and effective deployment of WMCA's Devolved Housing & Land Fund illustrated by the schemes summarised in the confidential annexe to this report (many of these schemes are now in the 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; and
4. The draft High Level Deliverables for the Housing and Land Portfolio for 2023/24 (attached as Appendix 1 to the report) be endorsed prior to consideration by the WMCA Board on 10 February 2023.

44. Future Homes Strategy: Update on progress

The board considered a report of the Executive Director of Housing, Property and Regeneration that provided an update on progress on one of the key approved deliverables for the Housing and Land Portfolio – the development of a Future Homes Strategy.

The Head of Policy and Planning, Pat Willoughby, outlined the report and highlighted that excellent feedback has been received from the Delivery Steering Group and Future Homes Taskforce on the structure and content of the emerging strategy and Future Homes Technical Standard which supports it. She further stated that WMCA is canvassing a broad range of opinion in developing the Future Homes Strategy including developers, investors, technical specialists, suppliers, etc. Based on our work to date, we expect this engagement to give confidence that, when the Future Homes Strategy is presented to the Housing & Land Delivery Board for consideration, it will be deliverable and achievable.

Councillor Mackiewicz reported that the building trade is reluctant to change unless change is forced upon them and considered that the WMCA should consult with the sector to understand the timescales which are needed to implement any changes. He added that, when given clarity on what needs to happen, the building trade does adapt and the imperative for WMCA was to progress the strategy as quickly as possible. Councillor Mackiewicz further stated that the reluctance of the building trade to change current practices is as much about culture as it is about cost.

The Chair highlighted the need for the strategy to consider a wide range of new construction techniques: there are multiple methods of Advanced Manufacturing of Construction (AMC) not just timber frame. He also reminded Members of WMCA's ambition, supported by local authorities, to develop factories in the West Midlands, thereby increasing the capacity of the region.

Gareth Bradford agreed on the need for clarity, particularly if the West Midlands is to be a market leader in this field. He stated that work is progressing to help WMCA understand what the true costs for developers of implementing the strategy might be. He highlighted that the West Midlands has a history of innovation. He also reminded Members of the likely benefits to occupiers from the new future homes standard.

It be recommended to the WMCA Board that:

1. Progress with work to date to develop a Future Homes Strategy (one of the Housing and Land Portfolio Deliverables) including support from local authorities, specialist consultancy and input from the members of the Future Homes Taskforce be noted;
2. The proposed direction of travel for the Future Homes Strategy and the work taking place to prepare supporting materials be endorsed;
3. The intention that, when approved the technical standard will be an investment criterion for WMCA's devolved Housing and Land Funds be noted; and
4. The intention to incorporate the standards and aspirations of the strategy into existing and future strategic partnerships and joint ventures be noted.

45. West Midlands Local Transport Plan: Update

The board considered a report of the Principal Policy & Strategy Officer, Transport for the West Midlands. This provides a summary of the WMCA Board report that seeks approval to adopt the final version of the West Midlands LTP5 '*Reimagining Transport in the West Midlands*' Core Strategy; and also seeks approval for undertaking engagement on the draft LTP5 Big Move documents which form a part of the suite of documents within the wider LTP framework.

The Principal Policy & Strategy Officer, Helen Davies, outlined the report that follows the Draft LTP 5 and Big Move document, '*Accessible and Inclusive Places*' that was presented to the board in July 2022. She explained that the '*Accessible and Inclusive Places*' document includes a number of policies in 5 key areas: accessibility; spatial planning; transport design; digital transport/connectivity and digital infrastructure/platforms. The LTP document has been developed and shared with local authority officers and, subject to WMCA approval on 10 February 2023, the Big Moves document would go out to public consultation in February 2023.

The Chair stated that the document makes inadequate provision for the car which is still a mode of transport and is often the only choice of transport for many people. He considered that public transport needs to be convenient, reliable and on time in order to encourage its use.

Councillor Mackiewicz concurred with the Chair and reported that rural parts of the West Midlands have no alternative to the car and enquired whether autonomous vehicles could be considered for rural areas as there would be no costs for drivers. He also reported on the need to link North Solihull with South Solihull and for superfast broadband to be seen as a priority for rural areas. He also expressed the view that broadband is now an essential utility.

Councillor Padda also considered the car needs to feature in the Local Transport Plan and for parking facilities to be considered when new rail stations are built. He added that the automotive industry creates substantial revenue for the West Midlands region.

The Chair reiterated his comments on the provision of the car in the Local Transport Plan and added that rates of revenue and return need to be considered in the development of the West Midlands Metro. He highlighted the impact of new ways of working and innovative thinking on existing space.

Helen Davies noted all comments and suggestions on the Local Transport Plan from Members and stated that these will be communicated to colleagues within Transport for West Midlands.

It be recommended to the WMCA Board that:

1. The update on progress in developing the new West Midlands Local Transport Plan, 'Reimagining Transport in the West Midlands (LTP5) and linkages between the LTP and the work of the Housing and Land Portfolio be noted;
2. The LTP 5 Core Strategy sets out the principles and overarching approach on how TfWM approaches transport strategy in the West Midlands be noted; and
3. That the next steps (approval of the final adoption of the Core Strategy, consultation on the draft Big Moves documents and the draft Area Strategy guidance at the WMCA Board meeting on 10 February 2023) be noted.

46. Exclusion of the Public and Press

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).

47. Appendix to Quarterly Report - Performance on Housing & Land Devolved Funds

The board considered the Housing and Land dashboards on the Brownfield Housing Fund, National Competitive Fund and Land Fund that provided an update on performance since the last meeting.

It be recommended to the WMCA Board that:

The report be noted.

The meeting ended at 11.00 am.