

Birmingham City Council

City Council

1 December 2020



Subject: West Midlands Combined Authority - Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Report of: Chair of the WMCA's Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Report author: Councillor Lisa Trickett

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? Yes No

1. Executive Summary

1.1 This report provides a summary of the work of the West Midland Combined Authority's Overview & Scrutiny Committee, which is chaired by Councillor Lisa Trickett.

2 Recommendation

2.1 That the report be noted.

3 Background

3.1 Overview & Scrutiny is a statutory requirement for the West Midlands Combined Authority to undertake. The committee has the responsibility to review the work of the elected Mayor of the West Midlands, the WMCA Board and its committees, to make recommendations to the WMCA Board and its committees and call-in decisions for further scrutiny.

3.2 The committee performs two functions: 'overview' focusses on the development of future policy and 'scrutiny' looks at decisions that have been made or are about to be made.

3.3 The Overview & Scrutiny Committee has produced an Annual Report for 2019/20, which sets out clearly and succinctly the work of the committee over the last year. This report attached as appendix 1 for information.

3.4 During this current year 2020/21, the work of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee has had a strong focus on the regional recovery plan following the COVID-19 pandemic.

- 3.5 The committee has met with Councillor Ian Brookfield, WMCA Portfolio Lead for Economy & Innovation, Deborah Cadman, WMCA Chief Executive and Julia Goldsworthy, Director of Strategy to discuss and answer questions on the 'Recharging the West Midlands' submission of funding asks to Government.
- 3.6 This key regional document has prompted the committee to commission two pieces of work looking in more detail at individual projects within it: the creation of the Grand Central Diagnostics Hub at Birmingham New Street station, and delivery of a battery Gigafactory and the wider regional benefits that could be realised.

Mayoral Q&A Sessions

- 3.7 In October, the committee questioned the Mayor on the delivery and impact of the WMCA's policies. The following observations were shared with the WMCA Board on 13 November:
- Whilst recognising the value of the 'Recharge West Midlands' asks of the Government, did this investment portfolio adequately address the existing embedded and systemic inequalities in the region and the challenges currently being faced by residents across the West Midlands seeking to recover from the economic impacts of the pandemic?
 - Did the WMCA have a clear plan to enable it to transition its policy objectives to meet the new and emerging challenges across the region, including the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and automation, especially within sectors and communities still impacted by previous transitions?
 - Was there sufficient ambition with the devolution discussions with the Government to deliver the WMCA the powers and resources necessary to meet the economic and social challenges of the region, and did the WMCA maximise its other sources of funding to address these challenges?
 - Did the outputs of the WMCA meet its stated ambitions, and could better use be made of aligning the region's priorities in order to close the inequality gap that currently existed and, as a consequence deliver lasting inclusive growth?
 - Had the WMCA developed sufficient policies that would drive its inclusive growth ambitions and deliver lasting change?
- 3.8 The committee will hold its second Q&A with the Mayor on 11 December, which will have a focus on the proposed budget for 2021/22.
- 3.9 At its meeting in November, the committee met with Councillor Mike Bird, WMCA Portfolio Lead for Housing & Land to discuss and answer questions in relation to housing and land issues, including the delivery of affordable and social housing and brownfield land remediation fund.

Call-In

- 3.10 The Overview & Scrutiny Committee has recently called-in the decision of the Housing & Land Delivery Board. The call-in was in relation the 'Affordable Housing Collaborative Delivery Vehicle' report. The reason for the call-in was stated as:

The board was not made aware of the extent of need and possibility of specifying a purpose to deliver on social housing requirements. Our concern is that members have not been given the information required to make an informed decision and that this report unduly fetters the opportunity to use such a vehicle to deliver on housing need in the region.

Scrutiny Reviews

- 3.11 During 2019/20 the Overview & Scrutiny Committee undertook a series of reviews, including a high-level review of the WMCA's internal governance arrangements, as well as the effectiveness of the existing governance arrangements relating to its transport responsibilities.

WMCA Governance

- 3.12 This review sought to understand the effectiveness of the current arrangements in embedding and maintaining strong links between policy development and delivery for the WMCA and whether the authority exhibited appropriate decision-making behaviours and culture.
- 3.13 The review panel heard evidence from the Mayor of the West Midlands, the Chair of Audit, Risk & Assurance Committee and the statutory officers, along with external stakeholders and representatives from the Greater Manchester Combined Authority and the chief executives of Coventry City Council and the City of Wolverhampton Council.
- 3.14 The Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee attended a meeting of the Strategic Leadership Team to present the findings of the review and discuss its implications, including the committee's sense of existing cultures and behaviours, political leadership, place shaping, investment and fund strategies, outcome-based reporting, political challenge and oversight within the WMCA, and consultation & engagement with the Young Combined Authority. This work continues, with the Chair to meet further with senior officers within the WMCA in the near future.

Effectiveness of Transport Governance

- 3.15 The Overview & Scrutiny Committee undertook a scrutiny review on the effectiveness of transport governance within the West Midlands Combined Authority. At its meeting on 17 January, the WMCA Board considered the findings of the scrutiny review and subsequently approved its recommendations in their entirety.
- 3.16 Included within these was a recommendation to establish a Transport Scrutiny Sub-Committee reporting into the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, which had

responsibility to review and scrutinise topics or issues connected to the transport-related powers exercised by the Mayor and the WMCA Board (including Transport for West Midlands).

- 3.17 The Transport Scrutiny Sub-Committee, which includes amongst its membership the City Council's Chair of the Sustainability & Transport Overview & Scrutiny Committee (Councillor Liz Clements), held its first meeting in September, which was followed by a Q&A session with Councillor Ian Ward, WMCA Portfolio Lead for Transport. Its workplan for the remainder of the year includes reviewing the development of the revised Local Transport Plan, the impact of the Active Travel Fund and oversight of the transport arrangements supporting the 2022 Commonwealth Games. A Q&A session with the Chair of the WMCA's Transport Delivery Committee (Councillor Kath Hartley) will be held in February 2021.

Black Country Scrutiny Review

- 3.18 During this current year the Overview & Scrutiny Committee will undertake a review to understand whether the regional economic recovery proposals were meeting the needs that had been identified within the Black Country sub-region, and to consider whether these specific sub-regional needs were being adequately considered during the development of wider regional policies and delivered sustainably.
- 3.19 Meetings of both the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Transport Scrutiny Sub Committee continue to be held remotely under the current pandemic regulations, but all meetings are streamed live online to maximise public awareness.