

Briefing Note

Title: West Midlands Combined Authority
Overview & Scrutiny Committee

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Job Title: WMCA Scrutiny Officer

**Intended
Audience:**

Internal

Partner organisation

Public

Confidential

Purpose

This report provides a summary of the work of the West Midland Combined Authority's Overview & Scrutiny Committee during 2021/22, as well as its current work programme for 2022/23.

Background

- 1.1 Overview & Scrutiny is a statutory requirement for the West Midlands Combined Authority to undertake. The committee has the responsibility to undertake this function, which it does through reviewing the work of the elected Mayor of the West Midlands, the WMCA Board and its committees, making recommendations arising out of topic-specific scrutiny reviews and by operating a 'call-in' of policy decisions for further scrutiny where required.
- 1.2 The Overview & Scrutiny Committee produces an annual report that sets out its work over the last municipal year. The latest annual report was submitted to the WMCA's AGM on 10 June 2022 and is attached as an appendix to this report for information.
- 1.3 During the current year, the work of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee will continue a strong focus on whether the policies, investments and actions of the WMCA continued to benefit all communities within the region, with particular attention being given to the outcomes of the WMCA's strategic aims and objectives.
- 1.4 This year's work programme has also focussed on the proposed UK Shared Prosperity Fund Investment Plan and the propositions contained within the planned 'Trailblazer Devolution Deal' due to be submitted to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities early in 2023 and the local benefits that this deal could deliver to the West Midlands, the implications of the Levelling Up & Regeneration Bill for the WMCA, the delivery of local skills training, and the progress being made in relation to the delivery of WMCA's net zero carbon strategies.
- 1.5 In addition, this year the committee has also focused on the Local Enterprise Partnership Integration Plan and the WMCA's Future Homes Building Strategy, Affordable Housing Strategy and the Affordable Housing Pilot project in 2023.

- 1.6 Scrutiny members will undertake this work programme in a range of ways most appropriate, including topic-specific working group sessions, public Q&As with the Mayor and Portfolio Lead Members, spotlight sessions and 'deep dive' scrutiny reviews.
- 1.7 So far this year, the committee has commenced work on two main elements of its work programme as follows:

Trailblazer Devolution Deal and the Local Benefits

- 2.1 The Trailblazer Devolution Deal process is continuing with devolution proposals being developed across a wide range of themes. Proposals are being drafted in accordance with the principles and plans previously agreed by the WMCA Board. These proposals are then being tested by Overview & Scrutiny Committee to ensure that they have a clear focus on drawing down powers and funding from Government (including opportunities for 'double devolution' to the WMCA's constituent member authorities where appropriate), and ensuring that the roles and responsibilities of those constituent authorities were not being devolved 'upwards'.
- 2.2 Over the summer period, a series of scrutiny working groups have been held to review each of the devolution proposals in detail and to discuss the local benefits that could be delivered to each local authority and non-constituent authorities through the proposed Trailblazer Devolution Deal. A detailed report on the findings of the working groups will form part of the Trailblazer Devolution Deal submission to the WMCA Board on 13 January 2023.
- 2.3 After considering each of the trailblazer devolution proposals and local benefits a number of key themes/considerations emerged, including:
 - Investment sought compared to the scale of the ambition
 - Impacts from proposals
 - Priorities
 - Integration of strategic approaches
 - Partnerships

Skills

- 3.1 The Adult Education Budget for the West Midlands area was devolved central Government to the WMCA for delivery from August 2019. The WMCA agreed an approach to commissioning adult education and training that was able to align the mix of provision more closely to local and sectoral priorities, whilst avoiding the unnecessary destabilisation of locally based colleges and adult education providers.
- 3.2 The Overview & Scrutiny Committee has considered that it was now an appropriate time to undertake a further scrutiny review to assess the impact and outcomes that had been delivered through the Adult Education Budget since its devolution. The

review commenced in October and will report its findings to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee in March 2023 for consideration.

- 3.3 The review will seek to understand the impact of the devolution of the Adult Education Budget to the WMCA on the delivery of local skills training within the region, and to identify the challenges and ways in which the WMCA and its constituent authorities could most effectively use skills development to address short and longer term challenges in the region, particularly in relation to the big economic challenges. The findings of the review will be used to help shape future skills funding.

Mayoral Q&A Sessions

- 4.1 As part of its role in holding the Mayor of the West Midlands and WMCA Board to account, the committee holds two Q&A sessions this year. On 20 October, the committee held a Q&A with the Mayor based on policy matters that were the responsibility of the WMCA. Questions focussed on the cost of living pressures and the impact of the Government's economic policies on businesses, individuals and families within the region, environment, skills and transport. The next Q&A will be held on 15 December and will look at the proposed draft budget 2023/24.

Learning & Development

- 5.1 As part of its learning and development programme to help scrutiny members to be more effective in their role, the committee will undertake a series of training workshops, including a focus on the WMCA's Investment Programme and on the detail of the draft budget 2023/24.
- 5.2 The WMCA has also been instrumental in setting up a new Combined Authorities Scrutiny Chairs' Forum, enabling the chairs from the country's ten combined authorities' scrutiny committees to meet to share best practice, discuss areas of common interest and to build relationships.

Transport Scrutiny Sub-Committee

- 6.1 The Transport Scrutiny Sub-Committee has a specific responsibility to oversee the role and performance of Transport for West Midlands. This year the sub-committee will focus on a review of the transport governance structures currently in existence and its suitability and effectiveness, the delivery of the Wednesbury - Brierley Hill Metro extension, the lessons learnt from the public transport offer supporting the Commonwealth Games, walking and cycling, automated mobility, the bus service improvement plan and bus franchising.
- 6.2 On 13 October a Q&A session was held with Councillor Ian Ward, the WMCA's Portfolio Lead for Transport on transport policy related matters. Questions focused on Wednesbury - Brierley Hill Metro extension, reaching net zero by 2041, holding operators to account, resource vs ambition and cross boundary travel. In February

next year, a Q&A will be held with Councillor Richard Worrall, the Chair of the WMCA's Transport Delivery Committee on transport delivery matters.

City of Wolverhampton Council's Representation

- 7.1 The city council is represented on Overview & Scrutiny Committee by Councillor Paul Sweet. It is represented on Transport Scrutiny Sub-Committee by Councillor Barbara McGarrity.