

West Midlands Combined Authority Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Annual Report 2018/19



West Midlands
Combined Authority



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Foreword

Chair - Councillor Peter Hughes



Welcome to the 2018/19 Annual Report of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee. I hope this report is able to capture a number of the highlights of the work carried out by the committee over the last year.

The committee has made good progress in developing and refining its work programme so as to provide a constructive challenge to the decision makers within the WMCA. This is work in progress and there is still much more to be done. I believe strongly that councillors have risen to the challenge of providing oversight of the expanding remit of the WMCA, with the committee focusing its attention on a number of key workstreams. This has enabled us to challenge preconceptions, test ideas and add rigour to the development and implementation of public policy as this fledgling Combined Authority starts to spread its wings.

Our committee has met seven times this year, in addition to a further two Q&A sessions focused on scrutinising the Mayor's policies and budget proposals. As Chair, I have been grateful for the support of the two Vice-Chairs, Councillor Ian Shires and Councillor Lisa Trickett, as well as those members who have taken champion roles in carrying out the committee's work. I very much appreciate the hard work and commitment shown by those elected members who have participated actively in the committee, made possible by the professional and dedicated input of the small team of officers supporting the scrutiny function

Putting aside our political differences for the common good, the committee has worked

together to look closely at areas of concern. I very much appreciate the willingness shown by members of the committee in balancing the significant commitment required of them, while also continuing with their own special responsibilities and other public duties within their own local authorities. I therefore wish to place on record my gratitude for the public service shown by the region's councillors in supporting this vital scrutiny process by holding the WMCA to account and questioning it. I also extend my thanks to all the officers of the Combined Authority who have contributed to, and helped us to deliver, our successful work programme.

It is as important as it has ever been that civic leadership within the region closely resembles the people who call the West Midlands home, which applies equally to those of us holding decision makers to account. Going forward, I am calling upon participating councils to better reflect the diversity of their areas in the appointments they make to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, to ensure that talented and capable people from all backgrounds feel that they have a stake in the Combined Authority and the region's future. I look forward to the further evolution of overview and scrutiny within the WMCA in the coming years.

Committee Members

2018/19



**Councillor
Peter Hughes**

Sandwell
Metropolitan
Borough Council
Committee Chair
and Chair of Budget
Working Group



**Councillor
Cathy Bayton**

Dudley Metropolitan
Borough Council
Chair of Health
and Wellbeing
Working Group



**Councillor
Stephen Simkins**

City of
Wolverhampton
Council
Scrutiny Champion -
Environment



**Councillor
Lisa Trickett**

Birmingham City
Council
Vice-Chair and Chair
of Productivity, Skills
and Inclusive Growth
Working Group



Councillor Ian Shires

Walsall Metropolitan
Borough Council
Committee Vice-
Chair and Chair of
Housing and Land
Working Group



**Councillor
Mike Chalk**

Redditch Borough
Council
Scrutiny Champion -
Transport



Mike Lyons

Greater Birmingham
& Solihull Local
Enterprise Partnership



**Councillor
Angus Lees**

Dudley Metropolitan
Borough Council
Scrutiny Champion -
Transport



**Councillor
Vera Waters**

Walsall Metropolitan
Borough Council



Sarah Windrum

Coventry &
Warwickshire
Local Enterprise
Partnership



**Councillor
Stuart Davies**

Solihull Metropolitan
Borough Council



**Councillor
Peter Fowler**

Birmingham
City Council



**Councillor
Josh Jones**

Birmingham
City Council



**Councillor
Tariq Khan**

Coventry
City Council



**Councillor
Joe Tildesley**

Solihull Metropolitan
Borough Council



Paul Brown

Black Country Local
Enterprise Partnership



**Councillor
Dean Carroll**

Shropshire Council

A year of Overview & Scrutiny in Numbers

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Scrutiny
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Committee

Introduction

Overview & Scrutiny is a statutory requirement within the West Midlands Combined Authority. The committee has the responsibility to review the work of the Mayor and the WMCA and hold decision makers to account. It may make recommendations to the WMCA Board and its committees and call in decisions that have already been made for further scrutiny. The committee can act as an advocate for residents of the West Midlands by investigating issues that are important to them and by looking further into matters brought to its attention by the public. From improving the economy to tackling mental health inequality, from delivering new modes of public transport to enabling the construction of new housing, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, comprising the region's local councillors, is the body that oversees how all this is done.

While the committee's membership includes local councillors nominated by the WMCA's 18 member councils, it also has three representatives from the region's local enterprise partnerships. This brings a private sector perspective to discussions and ensures that the views of the region's local industries are heard at the highest levels of decision making.

Overview & Scrutiny Committee

The committee has continued to build on the work of the previous year in developing a programme that gives a broad oversight to the policies of the WMCA and reviews the effectiveness of its key decisions.

Significantly, it has enhanced the breadth of the pre-decision scrutiny it has undertaken, thereby adding value at the developmental stage of key policies before they are considered by the WMCA Board.

In the last year the committee has considered a number of reports and has undertaken key pre-decision scrutiny work in respect of:

- Governance proposals relating to the Fire and Rescue Service and Police and Crime Commissioner
- The WMCA's 2019/20 budget
- The Local Industrial Strategy
- A common approach to cycling and walking in the region
- Park & Ride policies
- The establishment of a Youth Combined Authority
- Wednesbury to Brierley Hill Metro extension
- The principles and key features of the WMCA's Annual Plan 2019/20
- Measures aimed at targeting childhood obesity

Other reports that the committee have considered include a progress report on the West Midlands Low Emissions Strategy and Action Plan and the 'Leaders Like You' report published by the WMCA's Mayoral Leadership Commission.



Overview & Scrutiny Holding Decision Makers to Account

Andy Street, Mayor of the West Midlands

The committee has undertaken a number of public Mayoral Q&A sessions, where Andy Street has been questioned on the delivery and impact of WMCA policies in areas as varied as public transport, air quality, housing and Brexit. In December, the committee held its second Q&A with the Mayor and questioned him on issues relating to performance against the budget 2018/19; proposals for the 2019/20 budget; other strategic finance issues; and the decision not to set a Mayoral precept for 2019/20. The Mayor was also joined at the session by the Deputy Mayor, Councillor Bob Sleight. We feel this is an important part of providing public accountability and transparency of decision making for the WMCA's only directly elected politician.

Scrutiny members have also established a number of working groups that have been able to give more focused attention into specific policy areas, holding to account portfolio lead members and lead directors/officers in workstreams such as health and wellbeing; finance; governance; inclusive growth, productivity and skills; and housing and land.

WMCA Portfolio Leads 2018/19

It is equally important that the WMCA programme areas that are led by the portfolio leads receive appropriate scrutiny. At each of the committee's meetings this year, it has received an update from a different portfolio lead member as follows:

- Andy Street [Mayor] - September and December
- Councillor Mike Bird [Housing and Land] - November and February
- Councillor Steve Eling [Cohesion and Integration and Public Service Reform] - September
- Councillor Izzi Seccombe [Wellbeing] - April
- Councillor Bob Sleight [Finance and Investments] - December

At each meeting, committee members questioned the portfolio lead on the progress being made in their respective area.



Overview & Scrutiny Helping to Shape Policy

The committee has made a total of 37 recommendations to the WMCA Board and its committees, all of which were accepted without further amendment, in relation to:

- West Midlands Combined Authority policies
- West Midlands Combined Authority budget for 2019/20
- Bilston Road Metro track replacement work
- Measures aimed at tackling childhood obesity
- Town Centres programme
- WMCA Leaders Like You

The West Midlands Combined Authority will become responsible for the Adult Education Budget (AEB) within the region from 1 August 2019. The Overview & Scrutiny Committee therefore carried out a review of the devolution of this funding from the Department for Education. As a result of this review, the committee submitted eight recommendations to the WMCA Skills Advisory Board for its consideration.

The Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee is a regular participant in the WMCA Board meetings and has the opportunity to present the findings and recommendations of the committee at those meetings.

Overview & Scrutiny

Adding Value

Case Study: Proposed Transfer of Police and Crime Commissioner Functions

The WMCA undertook a public consultation exercise regarding a proposal to transfer the powers of the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner to the Mayor of the West Midlands.

The proposal was part of the second devolution deal, which included a commitment from the WMCA and the Police and Crime Commissioner to work together to look at a detailed governance model and timetable for transferring the role and powers of the Police and Crime Commissioner to the elected Mayor.

The committee scrutinised the consultation process and invited the Police and Crime Commissioner and the Mayor to share their views and any input into the consultation.

The committee exerted influence in the wording of the final consultation documents used in the stage 1 consultation, resulting in sections being removed from both the introduction and one of the questions, to ensure the removal of any potential bias within the document. There was a wider recognition of the role the committee could play in scrutinising the Police and Crime Commissioner if the role was to be undertaken by the Mayor of the West Midlands.

Case Study: Forward Plans for the WMCA Board Committees and Boards

Overview & Scrutiny has strengthened the governance process by championing the need for each of the WMCA's committees to have introduced a forward plan that helps to give public awareness to its forthcoming decisions.

Case Study: Bilston Road - Metro Track Replacement Works

When approving the Midland Metro Construction: Proposed Business Support Package, the WMCA Board had asked the committee to investigate a number of specific issues that had arisen.

A task and finish group was established to undertake an investigation into the impact of the Bilston Road Metro track replacement works on nearby businesses and to evaluate the support received to mitigate this. The findings of the group were considered and its 12 recommendations adopted by the committee and WMCA Board.

Case Study: Women's Concessionary Travel Scheme Pass

During the Mayoral Q&A event on the proposed budget 2019/20, the committee challenged the Mayor to extend travel concessions to include women unfairly discriminated against in recent changes to pension eligibility ('WASPI women'), and ex-service personnel.

Following engagement with the constituent authority leader and the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, the WMCA Board agreed to establish a Women's Concessionary Travel Scheme from July 2019.

Case Study: WMCA Reports

The importance of committee decisions aligning with WMCA policies was recognised at an early stage, and all reports now contain specific implications for inclusive growth. The committee has also recommended that environmental, sustainability, social value, and health and wellbeing implications be included in all future Board reports.

Overview & Scrutiny Working Groups

During the year, the committee established five working groups to provide closer oversight of the following workstreams: budget; governance; health; inclusive growth, productivity and skills; and housing and land. The groups have examined policies and programmes and undertaken site visits and investigations.

Budget Working Group

2018/19 work programme:

- Budget proposals for 2019/20
- Brexit implications
- Regular monitoring of the Financial Monitoring Report
- Investigation into a major transport project

Case Study: Wednesbury to Brierley Hill Metro Extension

At the initial setting up of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee's Budget Working Group, members decided that, as part of its work, it would maintain overview of, and scrutinise, a major transport investment project from start to finish, using key milestones as the prompts for scrutiny.

As a key investment project for the WMCA, the Wednesbury to Brierley Hill Metro extension was selected. The findings of the working group were reported to the Investment Board, who factored them into their subsequent decisions regarding the project.

As a result of this involvement, our committee has now established an understanding that there will continue to be ongoing scrutiny of the project throughout its lifecycle.

Housing and Land Working Group

2018/19 work programme:

- Land Delivery Action Plan
- Methods of construction
- Partnership working with Sustainable Housing Action Partnership (SHAP)

Inclusive Growth, Productivity and Skills Working Group

2018/19 work programme:

- Local Industrial Strategy
- Devolution of the Adult Education Budget

Case Study: Devolution of the Adult Education Budget

The West Midlands Combined Authority will become responsible for the Adult Education Budget (AEB) for its residents from 1 August 2019. The devolved AEB will provide funding for adult skills delivery for residents aged 19 and over of the West Midlands' seven constituent areas (Birmingham, Coventry, Dudley, Sandwell, Solihull, Walsall and Wolverhampton). The Department for Education has confirmed the allocation to the WMCA for the 2019/20 academic year will be just under £126m.

We see the AEB as a significant enabler of inclusive growth through the improvement of the qualification levels and skills of our residents.

Scrutiny members held a meeting with each of the seven constituent local authorities' cabinet members for Education and Skills and undertook a deep dive into the work for each local authority area, the priorities and how the budget could be shaped going forward.

Health and Wellbeing Working Group

2018/19 work programme:

- Thrive into Work programme
- Tackling childhood obesity in the West Midlands
- Challenged the budget allocation for the Wellbeing workstream

Case Study: Reducing Childhood Obesity

The WMCA Wellbeing Board agreed to develop an approach to supporting system change to achieve healthy weight for more residents across the West Midlands.

Along with health and wellbeing partners across the region, the WMCA will work with partners to support the reduction in obesity across the West Midlands.

During 2018/19 the Health and Wellbeing Working Group contributed to the development of the Action Plan and made a number of recommendations for the endorsement by the Wellbeing Board. These were in relation to:

- Redistribution of surplus food
- Fast food outlets and planning rules
- Working with local schools and academies
- Membership of the Obesity Task Force reflecting the ethnicity and diversity of the region
- Links between obesity and mental health

Governance Working Group

2018/19 work programme:

- Contributions from the Centre for Public Scrutiny in relation to the work undertaken with combined authority scrutiny across the region
- Review of the statutory requirements of the governance model at the WMCA and delegated powers
- Established the principle that the Overview & Scrutiny Committee would have primary responsibility for scrutinising any future Mayoral powers relating to fire and rescue services
- Championed the representation of the Fire Brigades Union on the proposed Mayoral Fire Committee

Call-in

The committee has the power to call in decisions of the Mayor and the WMCA Board which have been made but not implemented.

A stop is placed on the implementation of the decision once it is under scrutiny.

There has been one call-in during the course of the year in relation to the Housing and Land Delivery Board - Town Centres programme.

Call-in: Town Centres Programme

The Town Centres programme will support local councils to accelerate their plans to regenerate and renew their town and district centres.

There was cross-party support for the call-in, based on the process in which the town centres were selected. The portfolio lead member for Housing and Land and the director of Housing and Regeneration attended the meeting to answer questions put to them by the committee.

Following its investigation, the committee agreed to take no further action, but made a number of recommendations which were agreed and have either been actioned or are in progress. These were in relation to:

- Clear and up-to-date forward plans for all boards and committees
- Pre-decision scrutiny to be embedded within the WMCA
- A review of the constitution and the call-in process
- Additional resources for the scrutiny function
- Future devolution deals and the engagement with the committee

Development of the WMCA Annual Plan 2019/20

The committee has engaged with the Chief Executive on the development of the Annual Plan for 2019/20 and has endorsed the principles and features used to develop the plan.

The working groups and scrutiny champions continue to work with the directors to help shape and develop the respective portfolio section of the Annual Plan prior to its consideration at the WMCA Board.

Embedded Pre-Decision Scrutiny into the WMCA

The committee has worked closely with the senior leadership team to develop a robust pre-decision scrutiny process. This continues to be developed, but significant progress has been made during 2018/19.



Looking Forward

As well as looking at its own in-house performance, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee has contributed to discussions aimed at developing the scrutiny role more widely within combined authorities across the country, which is recognised as still being in a developmental stage. The Committee has engaged the Local Government Association and the Centre for Public Scrutiny to provide an independent assessment of its scrutiny function and has also looked at how it may further develop its role, in the context of the evolving responsibilities of the WMCA.

For the forthcoming year, the committee would like to establish a closer working relationship with the portfolio lead members and the senior leadership team. Also, building on this, the committee would like to create and develop more effective links with the scrutiny boards at its constituent member authorities and the West Midlands Scrutiny Forum.

Public accessibility to meetings is an ongoing consideration, and it is intended to hold meetings across the region's towns and cities during 2019/20, rather than solely within Birmingham.



West Midlands
Combined Authority

