

West Midlands Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny

10th July 2023

Public papers available here:

<https://governance.wmca.org.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=138&MId=839>

Live stream available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-NPIHkq6WbU>

Councillor Cathy Bayton was appointed chair of the committee. Councillor Naeem Akhtar was appointed vice chair.

West Midlands Priorities and Challenges 23/24

Laura Shoaf Chief Executive of the WMCA delivered a verbal report on the priorities and challenges in the coming year for the combined authority. She spoke of the vision for the authority; to be greener, fairer, better connected, more prosperous. To be innovative, driven, inclusive and better connected.

The role of the authority is to deliver, commission and operate services. Secondly the authority also acts as convenors and guides, helping district authorities to deliver more. Thirdly the authority has a role to amplify the voice of the region and act as an advocate, to help resolve challenges and lobby Government to release funding into the areas in the West Midlands.

The aim is to deliver projects which do not work in silos but instead cut across services. This holistic way of working can bring forward projects which tackle several elements all in one. For example, a bus station with affordable housing above, greener build on brown field land.

Laura aims to work closer with local authorities more this year with officers attending district scrutiny boards throughout the year. Officers will also look to providing briefing papers for members to aid reporting back to constituencies.

Members spoke about how to get a simplified message out to the public of what exactly the WMCA do and don't do.

Members asked about a bill going through the house of Lords currently which will change how membership to the combined authority is decided. This is due to the fact Warwickshire is exploring joining the CA. As far as Laura is aware no other region is considering joining currently.

Adult Education Budget (AEB) devolution:

The results so far of the devolution of the AEB have been very positive. Going forward, the partnership approach, although good, can be maximised further.

The AEB is about residents needs first and business needs secondly, however it was clear a balance between the two was necessary. There is more work to do with employers, ensuring training is useful for the needs of the businesses.

The west midlands are seeing low levels of unemployment but high levels of economic inactivity. More over 50's have left work since the pandemic.

There is an aim not just to get someone into their first job, but also a good job with career progression.

There is an interest in skills bootcamps and short duration training courses over long term training schemes. Additionally, there is a need for functional skills training for those who are less academic. It is felt that good careers advice is also vital to assist in finding the right courses for the right people.

The model needs to be responsive to changes in the labour market and to combat “worklessness”

We also spoke about community learning and family learning courses.

Deeper Devolution

With greater devolution comes the need for greater scrutiny and accountability. O&S is going to focus on the scrutiny process and connection to the Mayor.

Part of the Bill making its way through Westminster are mayoral scrutiny sessions with the local MPs in addition to the O&S committee.

Grant Register

When the devolution deal is enacted, there is an expectation that there will be an overlap with current funding schemes which will run concurrently with the new funding arrangements.