

## **Minutes of the Meeting of Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council**

**17<sup>th</sup> October, 2017 at 6.12pm  
at the Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

**Present:** The Mayor (Councillor Haque);  
The Deputy Mayor (Councillor Eaves);

Councillors Ahmed, Allcock, Allen, Ashman, Bawa, Carmichael, Cherrington, Costigan, Crompton, S Crompton, Dr T Crompton, S Davies, Y Davies, Downing, Edis, Edwards, Eling, Frear, Garrett, Gavan, E A Giles, E M Giles, Hackett, Hadley, Hartwell, Hevican, Hickey, L Horton, R Horton, D Hosell, S Hosell, P M Hughes, P Hughes, Hussain, Jarvis, I Jones, O Jones, S Jones, Khatun, Lewis, Lloyd, Marshall, Melia, Millard, Moore, Piper, Preece, B Price, R Price, Rouf, Sandars, Shackleton, Shaeen, Tagger, Taylor, Tranter, Trow, Webb and White.

**Apologies:** Councillors K Davies, P Davies, Dhallu, Gill, Gault, Dr Jaron, Meehan, Phillips, Sidhu and Underhill.

**In Attendance:** Karen Gowreesunker (Clerk to the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority), Gary Taylor (Assistant Chief Fire Officer), Stewart Towe and Dr Nand Srivastava (Independent Remuneration Panel Members).

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**81/17      Declarations of Interest**

The following members declared an interest:-

Agenda Item	Subject	Member	Interest
8	West Midlands Fire Service – Governance.	Councillors Allcock, Edwards and Tranter.	Pecuniary - Member of the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority.
10	Transport for the West Midlands	Councillors Eling and R Horton	Other registerable – Members of West Midlands Rail Ltd.

**82/17      Minutes**

**Resolved** that the minutes of the meeting of Council held on 18<sup>th</sup> July, 2017 be confirmed as a correct record.

**83/17      Mayor's Announcements**

Details of Mayoral engagements since the last meeting of the Council had been circulated to members.

In particular, the Mayor made reference to the many citizenship events he had attended at Highfields, West Bromwich and the second reception he had hosted in September.

The Mayor also referred to the welcome for the Sandwell Lions International Youth exchange students who were joined by the Sandwell Special Olympics team and also the gala event at West Bromwich Town Hall in September.

The Mayor thanked everyone for their continued support.

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The Mayor invited the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Councillor Hackett, to inform members of Sandwell's Pledge to Looked After Children and appealed to members to assist in raising awareness in the recruitment of additional foster carers.

**84/17      Petitions Under Standing Order No. 5**

No petitions were received under Standing Order No. 5.

**85/17      Questions Under Standing Order No. 6**

No questions were received under Standing Order No. 6.

**86/17      Independent Remuneration Panel – Review on Members' Allowances Scheme**

In accordance with the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2001, as amended, the Council must invite independent representatives of Sandwell to form a Panel to make recommendations on a suitable remuneration scheme for elected Members.

The Panel had the function of providing the Council with advice on its Members' Allowances Scheme and the nature and level of allowances to be paid. The Council must have regard to this advice when reviewing or amending its Scheme. It was recommended that the Panel carried out a fundamental review of the Scheme at least every four years and an annual 'light touch' review was recommended. This particular review was a fundamental review of the Scheme and its constituent parts.

The Panel comprised of Mr Stewart Towe (Chair), Dr Nand Srivastava and Ms Sylvia Parkin. Stewart Towe was the Chairman of the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership Board and Chairman and Managing Director of Hadley Group, an Engineering Group, with its Head Office and fourth manufacturing site in the borough of Sandwell.

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Dr Srivastava had been a resident of Sandwell for 41 years and was a retired senior consultant working in Public Health Medicine with a special interest in palliative care services. He had been honoured with 'Member of the British Empire' by Her Majesty the Queen. Sylvia Parkin was a Deputy Lieutenant and a Lieutenancy ambassador for Sandwell. She was the Regional Employer Engagement Officer for the West Midlands Reserve Forces and Cadets Association and negotiated with Employers on the terms and conditions for Employment of Reserve Military Personnel.

The Chair of the Panel, Stewart Towe, was present and outlined the details of the review of the Members' Allowances Scheme.

The Panel had met on several occasions to undertake their work and during August 2017, had met with various elected members who had expressed an interest in making representations to the Panel; they had also met with the Leader, Councillor Steve Eling.

Having considered this information alongside comparative data and benchmarking evidence, the Panel set out the following recommendations for the Members' Allowances Scheme at Sandwell MBC:-

- 1) overall, the majority of members interviewed felt that the Members Allowance Scheme should remain frozen until staff had an appropriate pay rise and recognised the good work undertaken by staff during these times of austerity;
- 2) the Panel recognised how members appreciated the work undertaken by staff and how staff pay increases were limited by current Government restraints. Members were of the view that any adjustment made to elected members allowance scheme should not exceed staff salary increase;
- 3) the Panel felt that the members allowance scheme should be made attractive to all those who were eligible to stand as councillors whatever their age or family commitments;

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- 4) whilst it was acknowledged that an allowance for childcare provision was included in the current scheme for members on Council duty, the Panel felt that it was not currently clear what would constitute a Council and non-Council duty as currently referred to within the scheme. The Panel was therefore recommending that the scheme be more specific on what would be covered and to raise awareness amongst members of this provision;
- 5) the Panel felt that a bike allowance/loan provision should be considered within the scheme to encourage members to use alternative environmentally friendly transport and to support the Council's health and wellbeing agenda by encouraging the use of cycling or other modes of transport, particularly with the advent of the West Midlands Combined Authority;
- 6) whilst many current members were retired or of a pensionable age, it was important for the Council to encourage younger members who may not have the same benefits/source of income as some of the older elected members. It was therefore felt that, in order to encourage younger members, members basic allowance should keep pace with the level of inflation where possible, but should not exceed staff increases;
- 7) the Panel recommended that in the event of the incapacity of the Mayor, the Mayor's Allowance be made available, pro-rata, to the Deputy Mayor acting in their absence;
- 8) the Panel looked at the members' basic rate of allowance and noted that it had not changed since 2012. The Panel was of the view that a 1% increase in member's allowance should be recommended for approval for 2017/18, in line with the staff pay increase, to address the cost of living impact;
- 9) the Panel considered the findings of the review undertaken by the Leader's advisory group in March 2017 comprising of Councillors Khatun, P Hughes, Costigan, Gavan, Hevican, Sandars, Piper and Taylor. The advisory group had made recommendations to amend the terms of reference for a number of Council committees and to make changes to a

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number of Special Responsibility Allowances. The Panel indicated their support to the proposed rates of allowances, which were calculated as a percentage of the rate of allowance paid to the Leader of the Council, in view of the significant additional responsibilities attached to some roles;

- 10) the Panel felt it was unreasonable for members to incur significant travel costs to attend those meetings where a member was appointed in the capacity as Council representative. The Panel therefore recommended that where members were involved with Outside Body responsibilities, in the capacity as a Council representative, those outside bodies be requested to recompense members where there was a travel cost incurred for attending meetings. This is particularly relevant due to the Council's involvement in the West Midlands Combined Authority and the significant travel arrangements that it may entail;
- 11) the Panel acknowledged that a transport plan for members who did not drive had been removed, however, they felt that there was a need to revisit this issue as there was still a need to compensate members for travel costs incurred whilst on Council business, particularly those members who did not drive.

Mr Towe wished to place on record his thanks to his colleagues on the Panel and also to the Councillors who took the time to liaise with the Panel.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Eling, thanked Mr Towe and the Panel for their work and the considerable number of hours they had spent, on a voluntary basis, on the review. It was important to have an independent review of the members' allowance scheme to give assurance. The piece of work had validated the current scheme and identified some areas which needed to be addressed.

**Resolved:-**

- (1) that the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel following their review of the Members' Allowance Scheme be received and approved;

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- (2) that a further report be submitted to the Annual Meeting of Council on the revised Members' Allowance Scheme 2018/19.

(one member abstained from voting)

**87/17 West Midlands Fire Service – Governance**

In response to the Policing and Crime Bill 2016 consultation, the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority set out a direction seeking the future sustainability of services under a Mayoral West Midlands Combined Authority model of governance.

In recognising the need for an independent review of the possible future governance options, the Fire and Rescue Authority commissioned an appraisal panel in April 2016. The outcomes of the group were built upon through a public consultation undertaken during December 2016 to January 2017, seeking public and partner opinion regarding the future strategy to deliver risk-based services across the West Midlands. A Reformed Fire Authority and Mayoral Combined Authority were identified as the desirable options for the future governance of West Midlands Fire Service.

Accepting the findings of both the Group and the public consultation, considering these against the strategy of the West Midlands Fire Service, the priorities of the West Midlands Combined Authority and the expectations of government, the route to future Mayoral West Midlands Combined Authority governance was agreed by the Fire and Rescue Authority on 20<sup>th</sup> February 2017.

The West Midlands Combined Authority supported the Fire and Rescue Authority's broad proposal for the transfer of its functions to the Mayoral Combined Authority on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2017. Alongside this, work was underway to implement a Reformed Fire Authority as an interim measure until the Fire and Rescue Authority functions were transferred to and assumed by the Mayoral Combined Authority.

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On 8<sup>th</sup> September 2017, the West Midlands Combined Authority Board noted the timeline for the mayoral governance route and approved the development of a governance review and scheme, for Mayoral Combined Authority governance of West Midlands Fire Service pursuant to Sections 111 and 112 (1d) of Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.

The benefits of the Mayoral West Midlands Combined Authority governance model provided huge opportunities for the joint transformation of public services to West Midlands communities, providing value for money in the delivery of public safety. These opportunities had been detailed in the Governance Review.

The Governance Review provided a review of existing governance arrangements and functions, including the proposed new model under the Mayoral combined authority.

The Scheme detailed the roles, accountabilities, and powers required by each individual/body in the proposed governance model.

Following constituent authority consultation on the Governance Review and Scheme, the Scheme must enter a formal public consultation.

The Government would use these documents and the results of the consultation to approve the model and create an order to amend existing legislation, in order to confer the necessary powers on the Mayoral West Midlands Combined Authority to carry out the functions currently exercised by the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority.

In response to a question regarding benefits to the people of Sandwell, the Fire Service representative advised that evidence had been based focussed on the delivery of services across the West Midlands. There was continued collaboration and the scheme was seen to provide significant opportunities to deliver improved services to communities.



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Councillor P Hughes expressed concern regarding the level of power vested in one person and the need for accountability. A Governance Task and Finish Group had been set up to look at the detail.

The Leader of the Council moved the recommendations subject to the Scheme including:-

- (paragraph 1.5) effective ring fencing of core funding and precept income (essential for delivering prevention, protection and response activities by the Fire Service);
- (paragraph 1.8) the establishment of the Mayoral Fire Advisory Committee as set out (essential for retaining and broadening local authority connections with the fire and rescue service, lead member principle, etc);
- appointment of the Chair of the Fire Committee - there was a need to secure wording that ensured that, in appointing the Chair, the Mayor had due regard to the views of the West Midlands Combined Authority, the Committee and the political balance across the West Midlands;
- (paragraph 1.12) the Chief Fire Officer should maintain full accountability for operational functions of the service (essential to maintain the operational excellence and response times which currently exist);
- that the Home Office should be expected to consult West Midlands Combined Authority and the seven local authorities on any draft order before they sought Parliamentary approval. Whilst there was no legal requirement for this, any order for revised fire service governance which did not meet West Midlands 'red line' areas set out in this draft scheme would be unacceptable.

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**Resolved:-**

- (1) that the Governance Review and Scheme for West Midlands Fire Service be approved, subject to the inclusion of:-
  - effective ring fencing of core funding and precept income;
  - the establishment of the Mayoral Fire Advisory Committee consisting of members appointed by the constituent councils;
  - wording that ensured that, in appointing the Chair of the Fire Committee, the Mayor has due regard to the views of the West Midlands Combined Authority, the Committee and the political balance across the West Midlands);
  - the Chief Fire Officer maintain full accountability for operational functions of the service;
  - the Home Office consult the West Midlands Combined Authority and the seven local authorities on any draft order before it seeks Parliamentary approval;
- (2) that, subject to (1) above, the move forward to public consultation for the scheme and proposed governance model be approved;
- (3) that the Chief Executive be authorised to make minor amendments to the Governance Review and Scheme upon completion of the local authority approval process prior to public consultation;
- (4) that the Council supports/leads on the public consultation in the Sandwell Metropolitan area on behalf of the West Midlands Combined Authority;
- (5) that the timeline of the governance route to the Mayoral Combined Authority be noted.

(Councillors Allcock, Edwards and Tranter left the room during consideration of this item and took no part in the debate)

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**88/17      Proposal to Depart from the Local Development Plan at Anglo Caribbean Exports, Chaters Close, Tipton**

At the meeting of Planning Committee held on 4<sup>th</sup> October 2017, approval was given to planning application DC/17/60757 which related to a new B2/B8 commercial unit at Anglo Caribbean Exports, Chaters Close, Tipton, subject to conditions recommended by the Executive Director – Neighbourhoods.

As the site was allocated for future housing led regeneration within the Site Allocations and Delivery Development Plan Document, it was necessary for the Council to consider whether or not to grant an exception to its policy to allow the application to proceed.

**Resolved** that an exception to the local development plan be allowed in respect of planning application DC/17/60757 (proposed erection of new B2/B8 commercial unit (revised application DC/16/60152), Anglo Caribbean Exports, Chaters Close, Tipton, DY4 8JQ).

**89/17      Report from the Council's lead representative on the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority**

Councillor Edwards, the member nominated pursuant to Section 41 of the Local Government Act 1985 to report on the activities of the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority, presented an update on the work of the Fire Authority.

Particular reference was made to:-

- **Revenue finances**

By 2019/20, core funding provided by the Government to the Fire and Rescue Authority would have been reduced by 50% (£38 million) since the cuts began in 2011. A four year settlement offer had been secured from Government by the provision of a service efficiency plan for 2016/17 – 2019/20.

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- **Capital spending**

Coventry and Aston fire station rebuilds were currently taking place. The Fire and Rescue Authority had agreed an essential vehicle replacement programme which included front line fire appliances. Various other items of essential capital expenditure were also included in the rolling capital programme, such as IT equipment, which was critical to mobilising emergency response.

Despite unprecedented cuts in government funding, West Midlands Fire Service continued to maintain its five minute target response times to category one incidents which threatened life or property.

In response to questions, the Assistant Chief Fire Officer confirmed:-

- that work continued in an effort to reduce the number of false alarm calls. The service was working more innovatively and could despatch a business support vehicle with only one firefighter;
- that following continued funding reductions, it was a struggle to maintain services, however, campaigning for increased funding continued.

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**Report from the Council's lead representative on Transport for the West Midlands**

Councillor R Horton, the member nominated pursuant to Section 41 of the Local Government Act 1985 to report on the activities of the transport authority (Transport for West Midlands), presented an update on the work of the Authority.

Particular reference was made to:-

- **2026 Delivery for Transport** - the West Midlands Combined Authority had approved the 2026 Delivery Plan for Transport which set out a high level programme of capital schemes.

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- **M5 Oldbury Viaduct works** – Transport for West Midlands were working with Highways England and the Council regarding the M5 Oldbury Viaduct maintenance works. A co-ordinated approach to communications between stakeholders had taken place to make the public aware of the works and advise them to plan ahead, allow extra time for travel and where possible use public transport to carry out local journeys.
- **West Midlands Bus Alliance** had been in place since November 2015 and had delivered significant improvements for passengers across the region.

Using the experience of this initial eighteen month period the Bus Alliance Board was now developing 50 key deliverables to be delivered by the partners over the next 2 years.

- **Rail Investment and Partnerships** – Transport for West Midlands had been actively developing new partnership agreements with both Chiltern Railways and Virgin Trains – these would be considered at the November Transport Delivery Committee meeting.
- **West Midlands Franchise Competition** – West Midlands Trains had been successful in its bid to operate the new West Midlands Rail Franchise. This would commence on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2017 and operate to March 2026. Within the West Midlands area, rail services would be branded as West Midlands Railway.
- **Park and Ride** Transport for West Midlands continued to develop schemes to expand Park and Ride and was reviewing its approach to delivering Park and Ride across the network. All Park and Ride sites for stations in Sandwell were currently full and the priority would be to deliver improvements at Sandwell and Dudley and Tame Bridge Parkway stations, although options for other stations in the borough would be kept under review.
- **HS2 Connectivity Package** – work on the Connectivity Package had been progressing in line with the Implementation Plan, with updates being provided through regular dashboard reports.

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- **Safety and Security** – the Safer Travel Partnership was responsible for delivering the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner's Local Transport Policing Plan. The key objectives of this plan for 2017/18 continued to be to reduce crime and improve passenger perception of personal safety.

In response to questions, Councillor Horton responded as follows:-

- park and ride was successful, however, there were problems across the borough where car parks were overflowing and commuters were parking on streets. Work was ongoing to try to address the situation;
- with regard to the timescales for Sprint, Councillor Horton would make enquiries and respond direct to the member concerned.

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**Report from the Council's lead representative on the West Midlands Police and Crime Panel**

The Council's representative on the West Midlands Police and Crime Panel, Councillor Costigan, provided members with an update on the work undertaken by the West Midlands Police and Crime Panel.

The Panel had a dual role to both support and scrutinise the work of the Police and Crime Commissioner.

The Panel acted as a critical friend on behalf of West Midlands residents and had a number of statutory tasks:-

- to scrutinise and comment on the Commissioner's Police and Crime Plan;
- to scrutinise and make a recommendation on the policing precept and budget for policing;
- to review the Commissioner's Annual Report;
- to hold confirmation hearings before the Commissioner made certain key appointments;
- to handle complaints about the Police and Crime Commissioner and the Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner, referring serious complaints to the Independent Police Complaints Commission.

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The Panel had met four times since January 2017 and had carried out a number of statutory tasks.

In February 2017, the Panel reviewed the Police and Crime Commissioner's policing precept and budget for 2017/18 and in September 2017, the Panel commented on the Police and Crime Commissioner's Annual Report 2016/17. In addition, the Panel had examined partnership working across youth justice agencies, looked at work to tackle mental health and the supporting work of the West Midlands Combined Authority and received an update on the WMP2020 change programme.

The Panel had also scrutinised matters relating to the Police and Crime Commissioner's budget and how community safety funding would change.

(Councillor Preece declared a registerable interest as a member of the West Midlands Strategic Police and Crime Board.)

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### **Report from the Leader of the Council on the West Midlands Combined Authority**

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Eling, provided an update in relation to West Midlands Combined Authority activity since the election of the Mayor on 4<sup>th</sup> May 2017.

At the Annual Meeting of the West Midlands Combined Authority Board on 23<sup>rd</sup> June, 2017, the Board considered a report on "Delivering Our Priorities: The Mayor and West Midlands Combined Authority structures" which set out the Mayor's proposed approach to the West Midlands Combined Authority structures to deliver the priorities of the West Midlands Combined Authority. The report set out the Mayoral policy agenda as detailed in the Renewal Plan for the West Midlands. The key headings in the Mayor's Renewal Plan for the West Midlands were:

- Restore Pride in Our Region
- Get Our Transport System Moving Again
- Build the Houses We Need and Protect the Green Belt
- Lead a Coalition Against Crime
- Create Highly Paid Jobs for You and Your Family

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- Get the Best Financial Deal for the West Midlands
- Make a Success of Brexit
- Care for Those Who Need It Most
- Champion All that Makes the West Midlands a Great Place to Live
- Be the Most Transparent Mayor in Britain

The Mayor was seeking to ensure that the WMCA's policy priorities and the Mayor's policy priorities were completely aligned, to ensure the effective delivery of these shared objectives. These developments had led to a review of the structures in the WMCA to ensure continued success in delivering the WMCA's aims.

For the 2017/18 municipal year, Councillor Bob Sleigh (Leader of Solihull MBC) had been appointed as Deputy Mayor of the West Midlands Combined Authority. The portfolio leads for the WMCA were now held by the seven leaders of the constituent councils and one non-constituent council as set out below:-

- Wellbeing Board and HS2 - Councillor Bob Sleigh (Solihull MBC)
- Transport - Councillor Roger Lawrence (Wolverhampton City Council)
- Skills and Productivity - Councillor George Duggins (Coventry City Council)
- Economic Growth - (Leader of Birmingham City Council)
- Environment - Councillor Patrick Harley (Dudley MBC)
- Cohesion & Integration and Public Service Reform - Councillor Steve Eling (Sandwell MBC)
- Housing & Land - Councillor Sean Coughlan (Walsall MBC)
- Finance & Investments - Councillor Izzi Seccombe (Warwickshire County Council)

The Mayor committed to launching a number of initiatives and taskforces to bring in expertise and resources from outside the WMCA organisation to tackle specific policy issues. The following had already been established:-

- i) a Homelessness Taskforce to tackle the challenges of rough sleeping and homelessness across the West Midlands;



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- ii) a Leadership Commission to improve the opportunities for people from those communities and groups which were currently under-represented in the leadership of the West Midlands;
- iii) a Digital Taskforce to bring strategic drive and influence to drive and support the development of the digital strategy.

To date, the specific benefits of membership of the Combined Authority for Sandwell were:-

- i) the development and submission of the Business Case for the Brierley Hill Metro which was presented to Government, this would see an extension of the metro from Wednesbury to Brierley Hill;
- ii) the allocation of £200m for land reclamation of which £150m had been earmarked for the Black Country;
- iii) the inclusion of Sandwell in a range of pilots in employment, criminal justice and housing which were being developed to implement the recommendations of the Mental Health Commission Action Plan, Thrive West Midlands.

### **Links to Sandwell's Vision**

On 18<sup>th</sup> July 2017, Council approved the adoption of Vision 2030 which set the strategic direction for the Borough over the next thirteen years. The Vision contained ten ambitions which set out what the Borough should look like in 2030. To deliver the new vision, it was imperative that Sandwell made the most of the opportunities that the WMCA presented.

Work had been undertaken to examine the links between the Vision ambitions and the strategic priorities of WMCA, contained in the Strategic Economic Plan and in the Renewal Plan. The analysis would be used to focus how Sandwell could maximise the impact of WMCA on our economic prosperity.

The Land Remediation Fund presented an opportunity for Sandwell to bring into use sites that otherwise may have proven difficult to develop. The criteria and application process for the Black Country Land and Property Investment Fund were approved at the WMCA Board in September 2017, £53m would be managed by the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership (BCLEP).

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Target outputs for the fund included 1,860 new jobs, 1,600 new houses and 126,000 sqm of commercial floor space. The framework set out the eligibility criteria and the process for the assessment and approval of bids. Delegated authority for decisions on funding applications had been given to the BCLEP with the condition that a member of WMCA sat on the funding sub-board of the BCLEP when land and investment fund bids were being considered.

Key sites that Sandwell wished to develop with assistance from West Midlands Combined Authority included:-

- sites in Smethwick including potential for hundreds of homes near the new Midland Metropolitan Hospital in the Grove Lane/Cranford Street area, plus regenerating parts of North Smethwick;
- the area around Bescot Rail Yard and Friar Park – creating a road to rail freight interchange and a rail related manufacturing facility along with hundreds of new homes;
- continuing to regenerate West Bromwich – building more town centre homes, attracting more businesses, supporting industry, creating better paid jobs, a night-time economy and encouraging visitors.

Linked again to the Vision and ambitions, specifically Ambition 9, relating to industries of the future WMCA presented opportunities in assisting with growing the industries of the future.

At the WMCA Board in September 2017 the creation of a Digital Board was approved to bring strategic drive and influence to drive and support the development of the digital strategy. Outcomes from this work could assist the Borough in preparing for, and attracting new industry.

The planned metro extension from Wednesbury to Brierley Hill would allow local residents to access employment opportunities in neighbouring areas with greater ease. Whilst it was accepted that not all employment opportunities created through WMCA schemes would be located in Sandwell, the aim was to improve transport links to key employment areas to ensure that Sandwell residents could access such opportunities.

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This work correlated to ambition 6 of the Vision which focussed on transport that would connect residents to local centres and employment opportunities.

In addition to the metro extension, the implementation of the following schemes would contribute to delivery of the Vision:

- Birchley Island/M5 Junction 2 upgrade;
- rebuilding Dudley Port rail/metro interchange;
- upgrading Sandwell and Dudley station - including additional car parking;
- making better use of the Bescot Rail Yard by creating a rail freight interchange to serve the whole Black Country;
- improving the Snow Hill line with a new platform at Rowley Regis station;
- SPRINT Bus Rapid Transit on A34 Walsall Road and A456 Hagley Road;
- A4123 upgrade (junction upgrades bus priority, safety improvement, enhanced cycle facilities);
- M5 Junction 1 upgrade;
- Blackheath town centre interchange improvements;
- connecting Wednesbury Great Western Metro station with the town Centre;
- Metro Extension Wednesbury to Walsall.

Whilst formal approval for the above projects was not in place, all featured in Transport for West Midlands' Movement for Growth 2026 Delivery Plan and it was hoped that they will be delivered as the WMCA worked to deliver its strategic priorities across the region.

The Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), along with Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton councils and the Homes and Communities Agency, were working together to create a new 21<sup>st</sup> Black Country Garden City, which would connect into existing communities and infrastructure. The Garden City would utilise existing green, cultural and economic assets to develop attractive places where people wanted to live, transforming the reality and perception of the Black Country.

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There was an opportunity to lever £6 billion of investment and deliver 45,000 new homes over the next ten years, by applying the garden city principles of:

- well-connected communities by car, public transport, cycling and walking;
- green streets and easy access to green space;
- mixed use, mixed tenure and mixed density attractive neighbourhoods;
- chances for engaging the local community;
- space for enterprise and creative industries to flourish.

Whilst creation of the garden city would directly impact upon ambition 7, providing new homes that met housing need, it would also contribute to other ambitions including ambition 9, improving Sandwell's national reputation for getting things done.

With regard to scrutiny, Councillor P Hughes confirmed that the Overview Scrutiny Committee had set up four task and finish groups and appointed two Vice Chairs to each lead on two of the task and finish groups.

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### **Annual Report of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee 2016/17 (formerly known as the Audit Committee)**

The Chair of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, Councillor Preece, presented the Annual Report of the former Audit Committee for 2016/17.

The purpose of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee was to provide independent assurance to the Council on the adequacy of the risk management framework and the internal control environment providing an independent review of the governance, risk management and control frameworks and overseeing the financial reporting and annual governance processes.

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The Committee also monitored the work of both the internal and external auditors, helping to ensure that efficient and effective assurance arrangements were in place. The key benefits of the Committee could be seen as:

- increasing public confidence in the objectivity and fairness of financial and other reporting;
- reinforcing the importance and independence of internal and external audit and similar review processes;
- providing additional assurance through a process of independent review; and
- raising awareness of the need for internal control and the implementation of audit recommendations.

One of the main areas of work that the Committee played an active role in during the year was in helping the Council deal with the issues arising from the publication of the Gowling WLG report (also known as the “Wragges report”).

Whilst concerns were expressed regarding the issues raised in the Gowling WLG and associated reports, many of these were of a historic nature and it was noted that strong action was being taken to address the issues identified and therefore, the Committee were able to confirm:

- that the system of internal control, governance and risk management in the Council was adequate in identifying risks and allowing the council to understand the appropriate management of these risks.
- that there were no areas of significant duplication or omission in the systems of internal control, governance and risk management that had come to the Committee’s attention, that had not been adequately resolved.

The Annual Governance Statement operated throughout the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017, and up to the date of the approval of the annual report and accounts. Based on the Council’s established risk management approach, the following issues were assessed as being significant for the purpose of the Annual Governance Statement.

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Over the coming year appropriate steps to address these matters and further enhance governance arrangements would be taken:-

- Children's Services
- Children's Trust
- Resilience of the Medium Term Financial Strategy
- Land Sales and Other Matters
- Compliance with Contract Procedure Rules and Allocation of Grants
- Business Continuity

The Committee regularly received and reviewed the Council's Strategic Risk Register, and assessed the assurance provided in order to demonstrate how risks were being mitigated. It may also, where required, call in individual risks for a more detailed review.

The Committees key achievements during the year were:

- helping the Council deal with the issues arising from the publication of the Gowling WLG report and other associated areas, in particular making sure that the governance and control framework was improved;
- maintaining a good working relationship with the Council's internal and external auditors;
- maintaining an awareness of the likely changes to the appointment of external auditors through the Local Audit and Accountability Act;
- reviewing the Committee's terms of reference in order to ensure they remained fit for purpose;
- providing additional assurance through a process of on-going independent review;
- raising the profile of internal control issues across the Council and of the need to ensure that audit recommendations were implemented;
- regular consideration and review of the Council's strategic risk register and accompanying assurance map;
- maintaining a detailed focus on the actions being taken to combat fraud;

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- building the skills and knowledge of Committee members through regular technical updates and the consideration of related guidance issued by CIPFA;
- the continued presence of an independent member as Vice-Chair in order to broaden the Committee's experience and independent view point. In 2017/18, an additional independent member would also be recruited onto the Committee;
- reviewing the Internal Audit Charter in line with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards.

The Chair took the opportunity to thank the former Chair, Councillor Sidhu, members of the Committee, internal and external auditors and to highlight the fantastic work of the Counterfraud Team.

**94/17 Minutes and Policy/Strategic Recommendations of the Cabinet**

The Council received the minutes of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 26<sup>th</sup> July, 30<sup>th</sup> August and 20<sup>th</sup> September, 2017.

In relation to the Cabinet meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> September 2017, the Leader of the Council advised of an amendment to Minute No. 153/17(1), in relation to designation and de-designation of nature conservation sites, which should read Woden Road South, Wednesbury.

No questions were asked of the Leader.

**95/17 Minutes of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board**

The Chair of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board, Councillor P Hughes presented the minutes of the meetings of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board held on 7<sup>th</sup> July and 15<sup>th</sup> September 2017.

No questions were asked of the Chair.

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**96/17 Minutes of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee**

The Chair of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, Councillor Preece, presented the minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee held on 17<sup>th</sup> August 2017.

No questions were asked of the Chair.

**97/17 Minutes of the Ethical Standards and Member Development Committee**

The Chair of the Ethical Standards and Member Development Committee, Councillor Lewis, presented the minutes of the meeting of the Ethical Standards and Member Development Committee held on 8<sup>th</sup> September, 2017.

No questions were asked of the Vice Chair.

**98/17 Appointment of Representatives to Other Bodies**

From time to time, the Council was asked to consider appointments to outside bodies.

A request had been received for a Partner Governor Nomination to a shortly to be created Trust incorporating the BC Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (BCP), Birmingham Community Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust (BCHC) and Dudley and Walsall Mental Health NHS Trust (DWMH). Four member nominations were proposed on the group (one from each of the local authorities) and these nominations would be made through the Association of Black Country Authorities and represent the Black Country.

Councillor Piper was nominated as the Sandwell representative. Nominations would be reported to the next Association of Black Country Authorities Leaders meeting in November 2017.

In relation to Barlow Homes Committee of Management, it was proposed to replace Councillor Frear with Councillor Goult as a trustee for the remainder of the current municipal year.



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**Resolved:-**

- (1) that Councillor Piper be nominated as the Partner Governor Nomination for Sandwell and the nomination be submitted to the Association of Black Country Authorities for consideration at its meeting in November 2017;
- (2) that Councillor Frear be replaced by Councillor Goult as trustee on the Barlow Homes Committee of Management, for the remainder of the municipal year.

(The meeting ended at 7.39pm)

This meeting was webcast live and is available to view on the Council's website (<http://sandwell.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>).

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