

Council – 8 April 2019

Walsall MBC and the West Midlands Combined Authority

1. Summary

- 1.1 This report is to provide an update on the progress of the current West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) work and to review the achievements to date alongside future plans. This reflects a commitment made that Council will receive an update twice a year on WMCA matters.

The WMCA was formed in 2016, with all seven West Midlands Councils as constituent members, together with 10 councils joining as con-constituent members alongside the three regions LEP's.

WMCA has seen the devolution of a range of national programmes and funding streams and this report is an update on Walsall's involvement, and to outline future activity and plans that could impact on Walsall.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The Council note the report.

3. Report detail

3.1 Land and Housing Portfolio

Walsall continue to retain the lead for the Land and Housing Portfolio with the Leader chairing all WMCA Land and Housing Boards and having oversight and responsibility for the One Public Estate (OPE) programme.

3.2 Land Remediation Fund/Land and Property Investment Fund

The WMCA Board meeting on the 17th March 2017 gave approval for the Black Country LEP proposal in relation to the Black Country Strategic Brownfield Land Programme (now known as the BC Land & Property Investment Fund), that will through the initial tranche of £53m will deliver 46hectares of remediated land.

This is part of the initial approval for £150million of support as part of the agreed Black Country investment, with the WMCA on the 8th February 2019 commenting that the balance of £97million should be 'deployed as soon as possible.'

On the 22 March 2019 the four Black Country Authority Leaders formally requested that the WMCA made the balance of £97million available from April 2020 to support the successful ongoing delivery of our programmes.

The BC Land & Property Investment Fund LPIF is available to support projects that will contribute towards the Black Country's Strategic Growth Objectives of:

- Site Remediation
- Commercial Floor Space
- New Jobs
- Private Sector Leverage
- New Homes

The Walsall Phoenix 10 project has received approval for significant funding through this allocation to remediate the site, kick-starting the development of our Enterprise Zone sites in Darlaston.

3.3 Appointment of the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership's Single Accountable Body

On the 24th April Cabinet will be considering a request from the BC LEP to formally appoint Walsall Council as their single Accountable Body for all LEP funding, which will include the funding received from the WMCA, together with other funding streams including:

- Local Growth Fund (existing)
- LEPs Core, Strategic and Growth Hub funding (existing)
- Enterprise Zones (to be migrated)
- Growing Places Fund (to be migrated)

It is further intended that any future monies routed through the LEP would be managed by Walsall MBC to build upon the track record of delivery and good stewardship of public funding over recent years.

3.4 Investment Programme

Following an audit of the current WMCA Assurance Framework and processes, an enhanced Assurance Framework to support and ensure the secure future delivery of the WMCA Investment programme is currently undergoing a development and review process, which is due for completion in August 2019.

Funding approvals of £514.3 million progressed through the WMCA assurance process by Dec 18. Based on the current forecast profiles, documented in WMCA Board papers, the available WMCA funding will be fully committed by Q2 of 19/20, with a funding gap to March 2020 standing at £209 million.

Prioritisation work is currently being progressed, including work to secure alternative funding sources.

3.4 Housing and Land Town Centre Investment Package

The first phase of the Town Centre Programme was agreed by WMCA Housing & Land Delivery Board in October and December 2018. It proposes a comprehensive package of bespoke schemes submitted and endorsed by local councils that individually and collectively demonstrate the impact and pace of delivery of this critical regeneration programme for the region.

Walsall stands to benefit from this programme of investment but at the time of writing WMCA remain in commercially confidential negotiations with owners.

3.5 Skills

The devolution of the Adult Education Budget (AEB) to the WMCA has now been completed. We understand that Walsall will receive £7.875,710, to be distributed to current core providers of previous years, including Walsall College and a number of providers across Walsall.

A number of additional calls for proposals have also been released, providing skills organisations with the opportunity to bid for additional monies to deliver adult skills activities across the region.

Rathbone Training are currently delivering the WMCA led Employment Support Programme for Walsall. The £463,215 project is focussed in the Birchills and Leamore area of Walsall and aims to deliver support to unemployed and low paid individuals.

Rathbone, as a subsidiary of Newcastle College Group (NCG), are currently part of a recently announced major restructure, which includes wide-scale redundancies and the closure of a number of training centres. How the Walsall project will be affected is yet to be clarified, however officers are in contact and will seek to minimise any negative impact on Walsall.

3.6 Cycling and Walking

WMCA committed £6m to cycling and walking, potentially looking at a further call on the Transforming Cities Fund for additional allocation. Prioritised routes identified for Walsall include A454 Wolverhampton-Walsall, B4125 Rushall to Brownhills, A4038 Darlaston to Walsall Town Centre. Walsall-Willenhall route included in the prioritised Seven Core Walking Zones (CWZ), to be included in the Town Centre Programme.

3.7 Transport

The A34 Walsall to Birmingham route has been identified as a key route to support the Sprint, Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project. The service delivers predictable journey times and high frequency dependable timetables. The route is approximately 14.5km in length running along the A34 from Birmingham to Walsall via Great Barr. The Scheme has Outline Business Case Approval, with WMCA Full Business Case approval scheduled for January 2020.

The two new proposed train stations for the Walsall area; Willenhall & Darlaston are included as part of the £18m High Speed 2 Connectivity Package & Transforming Cities Fund. Access to these funds will be through the development of their business case / bids, and their submission and appraisal at the WMCA. Both stations have recently undergone public consultation ahead of planned planning applications in May 2019.

Simon Neilson
Executive Director

Councillor Bird
Leader of the Council

29 March 2019