

**WEST OF ENGLAND COMBINED AUTHORITY COMMITTEE &  
WEST OF ENGLAND JOINT COMMITTEE**

**ITEM 21**

**19 JUNE 2020**

**REPORT SUMMARY SHEET**

**STRATEGIC PLANNING UPDATE**

**Purpose**

To give members an update on Strategic Planning and to seek the formal agreement of the constituent authorities of WECA and North Somerset on the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) (at Appendix A) which sets out the start of the process for strategic planning.

**Summary**

In addition to the above-mentioned MoU, this report also gives an update on the following;

- \* A proposed broad timetable for strategic planning activities, including the Spatial Development Strategy (SDS) and North Somerset Local Plan). This currently includes a workstream on transport modelling and a resources request (including funding from the Investment Fund - see report included in this agenda) to assist in supporting this joint strategic planning work.
- \* The steps for the formal duty to co-operate arrangements and the preparation of the WECA Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) as a precursor to starting the respective plan making processes.
- \* The proposed programme governance for the SDS.
- \* An update on the North Somerset Local Plan process and SoCG.

**Impact of Covid-19 pandemic**

The Combined Authority has actively reviewed its key activities and work programme to reflect changing priorities as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Specific issues relating to the Covid-19 situation that impact on or are addressed through this report are as follows:

- The SDS provides an opportunity to position the West of England for post covid recovery and renewal, by setting out the longer term spatial vision for the area.
- The scale of the challenge requires a strategic joined up approach through strong Leadership.
- Having a strategic SDS in place, followed by local plans, will provide certainty for our communities, investors, and the development industry. This will mean investment in our homes, infrastructure, jobs and communities.
- A strategic approach will enable the sub region to plan positively for economic recovery.

The ambition for the future development of the area will take account of Sustainable Development principles to promote clean and inclusive growth so that everyone shares in the future opportunities for growth and renewal.

### **Recommendations**

#### **The Joint Committee is asked to agree:**

1. The Memorandum of Understanding at Appendix A.

#### **The WECA Committee is asked to agree:**

1. The Memorandum of Understanding at Appendix A.
2. The proposed draft Spatial Development Strategy (SDS) programme subject to ongoing review, draft at Appendix B.
3. To note the funding request to support the strategic evidence base work required including the transport modelling work (as referenced in the Investment Fund report elsewhere on this agenda).
4. The process for progressing the WECA Statement of Common Ground and the cross-boundary issues to be considered. Officers are asked to work through the detail of the Statement of Common Ground with the Planning & Housing Board and to report back progress to a future WECA/Joint Committee (an example structure/contents page for a Statement of Common Ground is set out at Appendix C).
5. That officers work with the Planning & Housing Board and Transport Board to develop and agree the ongoing non-statutory engagement programme for the SDS and report back progress to a future WECA/Joint Committee.
6. The proposed officer support for the SDS process.
7. The governance and decision-making process for the SDS.
8. To note and support the North Somerset update on progress with their local plan.

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**REPORT TO: WECA COMMITTEE & JOINT COMMITTEE**

**DATE: 19 June 2020**

**REPORT TITLE: STRATEGIC PLANNING UPDATE**

**DIRECTOR: DAVID CARTER, DIRECTOR OF INFRASTRUCTURE**

**AUTHOR: LAURA AMBLER HEAD OF REGIONAL PLANNING AND HOUSING**

### **Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To give members an update on Strategic Planning and to seek the formal agreement of the constituent Authorities of WECA and North Somerset on the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) (at Appendix A), which sets out the start of the process for strategic planning.
- 1.2 The MoU sets out the intention to start preparation of a Spatial Development Strategy (SDS) process.
- 1.3 If WECA and the constituent Authorities agree to start the SDS proceedings, it should be noted that there will be two respective plan making processes, and two plans - an SDS for WECA and the constituent Authorities and a North Somerset Local Plan. This report sets out how joint working is proposed to be undertaken to ensure alignment and regard between the plans and processes.
- 1.4 This report also gives an update on the following;
  - a. A proposed broad timetable for strategic planning activities, (including the SDS and North Somerset Local Plan). This currently includes a workstream on transport modelling and a resources request (including funding from the Investment Fund as per the report elsewhere on this agenda) to assist in supporting this joint strategic planning work.
  - b. The steps for the formal duty to co-operate arrangements and the preparation of the WECA Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) as a precursor to starting the respective plan making processes.
  - c. The proposed programme governance for the SDS, and
  - d. An update on the North Somerset Local Plan process and SoCG.

### **Impact of Covid-19 pandemic**

The Combined Authority has actively reviewed its key activities and work programme to reflect changing priorities as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Specific issues relating to the Covid-19 situation that impact on or are addressed through this report are as follows:

- The SDS provides an opportunity to position the West of England for post covid recovery and renewal, by setting out the longer term spatial vision for the area.

- The scale of the challenge requires a strategic joined up approach through strong Leadership.
- Having a strategic SDS in place, followed by local plans, will provide certainty for our communities, investors, and the development industry. This will mean investment in our homes, infrastructure, jobs and communities.
- A strategic approach will enable the sub region to plan positively for economic recovery.

The ambition for the future development of the area will take account of Sustainable Development principles to promote clean and inclusive growth so that everyone shares in the future opportunities for growth and renewal.

## 2 Recommendations

### The Joint Committee is asked to agree:

1. The Memorandum of Understanding at Appendix A.

### The WECA Committee is asked to agree:

1. The Memorandum of Understanding at Appendix A.
2. The proposed draft Spatial Development Strategy (SDS) programme subject to ongoing review, draft at Appendix B.
3. To note the funding request to support the strategic evidence base work required including the transport modelling work (as referenced in the Investment Fund report elsewhere on this agenda).
4. The process for progressing the WECA Statement of Common Ground and the cross-boundary issues to be considered. Officers are asked to work through the detail of the Statement of Common Ground with the Planning & Housing Board and to report back progress to a future WECA/Joint Committee (an example structure/contents page for a Statement of Common Ground is set out at Appendix C).
5. That officers work with the Planning & Housing Board and Transport Board to develop and agree the ongoing non-statutory engagement programme for the SDS and report back progress to a future WECA/Joint Committee.
6. The proposed officer support for the SDS process.
7. The governance and decision-making process for the SDS.
8. To note and support the North Somerset update on progress with their local plan.

## 3 Background

- 3.1 The Four Unitary Authorities wrote to the Planning Inspectors on 7th April to formally withdraw from the Joint Spatial Plan (JSP) process.
- 3.2 Following withdrawal from the JSP, North Somerset will be proceeding with their Local Plan and commenced this process with the Pre-commencement document consultation in March 2020. They will now be undergoing consultation on the 'Challenges' in summer 2020 which will inform a subsequent 'choices' consultation.
- 3.3 There is a statutory requirement for the West of England to prepare a Spatial Development Strategy. The relevant act places a duty on WECA to prepare and publish this document. This requirement was enshrined in the Devolution Order which also set out that this would require unanimous agreement from each of the constituent Authorities of WECA.
- 3.4 Recent guidance published by Government has also directed Planning Authorities to have up-to-date local plans in place by December 2023.

## 4 Proposals

### Broad timeline

- 4.1 To achieve both the SDS and the Local Plans to be completed by 2023, there will be a challenging timescale required. A proposed timetable is set out in the draft timeline attached at **Appendix B**.
- 4.2 This seeks to accelerate as far as possible the production of a robust, evidence-led SDS. Alongside the programme for the SDS is an indicative programme of what local plan preparation could look like for each of the WECA constituent authorities, based on a part parallel/part integrated evidence base preparation phase (the shared strategic planning evidence base). Finally, the North Somerset current timetable is also set out.
- 4.3 It will be important that this process is evidence led, and undertaken in an open minded way, that doesn't start with the answer, and ensuring that we test the reasonable alternatives against the evidence.
- 4.4 It is also important to note this process is different to the joint working under the JSP. Whereas previously the approach was a shared approach to address shared issues, now there are two separate processes – an SDS and a North Somerset Local Plan. The timetable seeks to ensure alignment and regard between the plans and processes and to reduce the risk of not getting agreement through the duty to cooperate process.
- 4.5 The draft programme for the SDS (Appendix B), makes the following assumptions:
- a. That the SDS is a high level spatial strategy (any more detailed content would elongate the timetable).
  - b. That the evidence base can be prepared on this timescale in a robust way - this is currently being tested through soft market testing with specialist consultants where necessary.
  - c. It should be noted that in respect of this, the current position on Covid-19 may impact the timelines for producing a robust evidence base. This is because existing trend based data will need to be reviewed and may impact on the ability to collate an evidence base and interpret it, in the context of what significant socio-economic changes there may be.
  - d. One round of formal public consultation is required, (although the duration of the consultation is 12 weeks not 6 to conform with the SDS regs). This will also be supplemented with non-statutory engagement opportunities.
  - e. That sufficient resource (see Investment Fund report) will be available to deliver the required evidence base on which to inform the Plan, including but not limited to:
    - Procurement of a new model for Transport and carbon modelling for the sub-region.
    - Local Housing Needs Assessment.
    - Employment Needs Assessment.
    - Habitats Phase 1 study and baseline.
    - Energy & Sustainability study.
    - Sustainability Appraisal.
    - Habitat regulation assessment.
    - Viability assessment.
    - Heath inequalities/social value.

- Engagement and consultation.

- 4.6 An ask for funding is made to the June WECA Committee in the Investment Fund report to enable commissioning work to commence, with a further ask in October for the remaining costs, which will be clearer at this time when the programme costs are more fully developed. There will also be UA funding as part of the normal ongoing local plan process.
- 4.7 That decision and governance will react in a timely manner to progress the Plan through key stages of decision making notably agreement and testing of reasonable alternatives regarding housing and employment numbers and the spatial strategy, an agreement on the approach to affordable housing and the ongoing preparation of a SoCG.

## 5 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)

- 5.1 Leaders and Mayors have asked that an MoU is prepared to provide assurance on joint working in the Strategic Planning process. This is attached at Appendix A.
- 5.2 The MoU is a high level, non-technical document, it is not a statutory requirement.
- 5.3 The MoU is intended to be produced ahead of a SoCG.

## 6 Statement of Common Ground (SoCG)

- 6.1 There is a statutory requirement for local planning authorities to co-operate with each other and with other prescribed bodies on strategic matters that cross administrative boundaries. This process is set out in a statement of common ground (SoCG) as part of the plan making process. At the start of the plan making process, there is a requirement to publish a first draft SoCG to act as a statement of intent on what cross boundary issues will be considered. A statement of Common Ground will be prepared to accompany both the North Somerset Local Plan and the WECA UAs' strategic plan making (SDS and Local Plans).
- 6.2 An example structure/contents page for the WECA SoCG is set out at Appendix C. To progress the SoCG, it is proposed that officers are asked to work through this high-level structure and the detail of the SoCG with the Planning & Housing Board and to report back progress to a future WECA/Joint Committee. The first draft is anticipated to be published by the Autumn, to formally set out the intention to undertake an SDS and to set out the associated first draft of the SoCG. This will provide a level of visibility that the Authorities are in the plan making process.
- 6.3 This will help demonstrate that each UA and WECA are putting in place appropriate arrangements to have plan coverage (a requirement recently published by Govt in Feb 2020), and to help with responding to speculative planning applications. In addition to this, the Authorities will continue to work proactively with MHCLG on exploring planning freedoms to support the plan making process, and the development of a robust and effective Strategy that can be delivered.
- 6.4 The WECA SoCG will be a key document at examination and will need to be updated as required at key stages and throughout the plan-making process. The first draft WECA SoCG will set out process including governance and cross boundary issues. Other key stages include; a further draft required to be published alongside the consultation on the plan (currently proposed for June 2021). A final WECA SoCG is required to be submitted at the submission of the plan for examination (Currently proposed Feb 2022).

- 6.5 Setting out a clear strategic plan-making process will also help position the West of England Authorities to secure funding, and support the recovery and renewal phases, following the Covid-19 emergency.
- 6.6 The draft timetable attached at Appendix B also sets out the proposed steps for the WECA SoCG (rows 9-13) which in summary are:

**March-June 2020**

- Scoping Strategic Matters
- Individual / Joint Commissioning Evidence – scoping
- Agreement on governance
- Liaison with other bodies and infrastructure providers

**July 2020-May 2021:**

- Continued liaison with other bodies and infrastructure providers

**7 Formal consultation and on-going non statutory engagement**

- 7.1 To ensure that communities and stakeholders have the opportunity to engage with the Plan at an iterative stage, officers recommend the preparation of an Engagement Strategy. This will set out how the SDS will be prepared and highlight opportunities for public participation, and help to ensure the relationship between SDS and local plans is clear. This will be a further dedicated workstream of the SDS. It is proposed that the suggested format of the engagement strategy will be brought back to a future joint Transport and Planning & Housing Board. The Director of Infrastructure will approve the engagement strategy in consultation with the Boards. The engagement strategy will draw on learning and feedback from the JSP consultations, best practice, and regard to constraints including the ambitious SDS timetable and availability of resources.
- 7.2 The engagement will be delivered into three phases which reflect the three broad stages of SDS plan preparation:
- 7.3 Phase 1: Engagement on plan preparation and evidence base. This will ensure that key evidence is developed in a collaborative manner, drawing on expertise, knowledge and input from relevant stakeholders. An opportunity to engage the public on draft strategic principles is proposed, based on an online engagement platform.
- 7.4 Phase 2: Statutory Consultation on the proposed Plan. The regulations require an SDS to have one round of formal public consultation which will be 12 weeks. Representations will be made available publicly and sent to the panel of Inspectors. Additional engagement to encourage participation in the consultation will be targeted to meet the agreed objectives of the engagement strategy.
- 7.5 Phase 3: Plan Examination. Whilst this process is led by the panel of Inspectors, ongoing resource to provide information updates and signpost to Local Plans and the statutory process will be required.
- 7.6 Further to these distinct phases of engagement, the SDS proposal recommends that an ongoing communications strategy is resourced to support and promote the plan, and that ongoing collaboration and joint working is recorded to feed in to the Statement of Common Ground.
- 7.7 For the North Somerset Local Plan, the process will include several stages of consultation. The initial stage will take place in Summer 2020 on the issues facing the district 2023-



2038, recognising the challenges of engagement during the current situation. This will inform a subsequent consultation on the spatial strategy in Autumn 2020.

- 7.8 Officers will ensure that the engagement strategies for the respective plan processes have regard to one another.

## **8 Officer support for joint working and SDS Governance**

8.1 The SDS will be programme managed by WECA with Directors being responsible for managing the governance with the nominated Senior Responsible Owner. Laura Ambler is the lead and SRO for WECA, Lisa Bartlett is the lead for the UAs and Sophie Donaldson (WECA) is the Project Manager.

8.2 Officer groups comprising the Heads of Planning and Heads of Planning Policy from all 5 Authorities will support joint working on strategic planning in respect of alignment of both the SDS, the WECA constituent UAs Local Plans and the North Somerset Local Plan.

8.3 For the Constituent Authorities of WECA, the Governance for decision making on the SDS is the WECA Leaders and Mayors (WECA Committee) who will agree key decisions, which require unanimous agreement. The Planning and Housing Board is the advisory board with the remit for this work area and will make recommendations to the WECA Committee. The governance is supported by officers led by the WECA SRO, working through the Directors/ CEOs of WECA and the constituent authorities.

8.4 There are 4 stages for the SDS that will require a formal decision by the WECA Committee these are:

- Commencement of the SDS process.
  - Agree draft for consultation\*.
  - Agreement to submit with amendments if necessary
  - Agree to publish final Plan after Inspectors report\*.
- [\*required by the Order to be the subject of a unanimous vote]

## **9 Consultation details**

9.1 Heads of Service and Directors in each Authority have inputted into this paper and are recommending the proposals within it to Members for their consideration.

## **10 Risk Management/Assessment**

10.1 A risk register is held at project level and will be reported as required through the P&H Board.

## **11 Public Sector Equality Duties**

11.1 None arising directly from this report. The plan making process will need to follow statutory requirements to ensure public sector equality duties are met.

## **12 Climate change implications**

12.1 Climate Change is a key priority of the West of England Authorities and this will be considered through the strategic planning process, as part of the statutory plan making process that Authorities are required to follow.

## **13 Finance Implications**

(Finance advice given by: Malcolm Coe; Director of Investment and Corporate Services.)



13.1 It is recognised that the preparation of a Strategic Plan and its supporting evidence base fulfils a statutory requirement of the WECA and its constituent Authorities. It is also recognised that this work will help to shape growth of the sub-region, in terms of housing, employment, and necessary infrastructure and will have a role to play in positioning the sub-region for clean and inclusive recovery post covid-19. In this regard this strategic planning will also help to inform the prioritisation of investment programmes moving forward. At the June Committee some £2m will be sought initially to support the strategic planning process, with a further ask in October for the remaining costs, which will be clearer at this time when the programme costs are more fully developed. Plan-making is a core activity of all plan making authorities and it is recognised that alongside this, WECA and the authorities will need to continue to resource their respective plan making processes including Local Plans. Local contributions to support will be sought on an equitable basis.

#### **14 Legal Implications**

(Legal advice given by: Shahzia Daya; Director of Legal Services)

14.1 This report seeks views from Members on strategic planning which is already set out in regulations. There are no direct legal implications arising directly from this report.

#### **15 Human Resources Implications**

(HR advice given by: Alex Holly, Head of People & Assets)

15.1 As above, resources to support this activity will be sought in part from the Funding secured through the Investment fund- WECA HR advice will be sought for any staffing resources required. As Plan-making is a core activity of all plan making authorities, it is recognised that alongside this, WECA and the authorities will need to continue to resource their respective plan making processes including Local Plans.

#### **Appendices:**

Appendix A – Memorandum of Understanding

Appendix B – Draft broad timetable and project plan

Appendix C- Example structure /contents page for the WECA SoCG

#### **West of England Combined Authority Contact:**

Any person seeking background information relating to this item should seek the assistance of the contact officer for the meeting who is Ian Hird / Tim Milgate on 07436 600313; or by writing to West of England Combined Authority, 3 Rivergate, Temple Quay, Bristol BS1 6EW; email:

[democratic.services@westofengland-ca.gov.uk](mailto:democratic.services@westofengland-ca.gov.uk)



## APPENDIX A

### West of England Joint working on Strategic Planning Memorandum of Understanding

#### Introduction

1. The four local planning authorities of Bath & NE Somerset, Bristol City, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire and WECA, will continue to work together and with other relevant bodies and public agencies to plan positively on strategic cross-boundary matters. This will demonstrate the implementation of the duty to cooperate requirements for the constituent authorities of WECA and North Somerset. Joint working will continue to take place constructively, actively and on an ongoing basis to deliver effective strategic planning to support sustainable development.
2. Given the scale of the challenges we face, it is imperative that we focus our joint efforts on the pillars of sustainable development to achieve our shared aspiration for the West of England.
3. To support economic recovery post covid-19 and to achieve clean, inclusive growth for our communities, it is recognised that a strategic, joined up approach will be required. We will demonstrate leadership on this through the West of England authorities working together to produce:
  - An approach to spatial planning that has clean and inclusive growth at the heart of our strategic priorities.
  - Joint working on strategic planning issues and aligning work to guide future growth and development across the West of England. This will involve the constituent authorities of the Combined Authority working jointly on a West of England Spatial Development Strategy, alongside working with North Somerset on their Local Plan, and on each Authority's respective individual Local Plan.
4. The plan-making process will be evidence led. There will be significant evidence base preparation undertaken. Joint evidence base studies and/or aligned local studies will be procured to support this process including:
  - A **new West of England Strategic Local Housing Needs Assessment** to replace the 2015 SHMA using the most up to date evidence available. The new West of England Local Housing Needs assessment will cover the period 2021-2041 (but will provide UA level evidence and which can be used for different plan periods). This will provide the strategic context for strategic spatial planning policy and the review and updating of local plans. The five authorities will prioritise and resource this process to ensure that a robust LHNA is prepared in 2020. The LHNA will provide a key evidence base for both strategic planning policy and local planning policy for all local plans (including North Somerset).
  - **Employment land/spatial needs assessments** to understand the strategic context for employment issues in the West of England.
  - **Transport modelling work** to understand the baseline transport network and use, and strategic modelling of potential impacts of future growth patterns.

- **Habitat and environmental information** to deliver strategic policies that enable clean and inclusive growth to respond to the challenges of climate change and ecological emergencies.
  - **Sustainability appraisal** each respective plan (both the SDS and each Local Plan) is required to have an individual SA to ensure reasonable alternatives are assessed and considered to ensure a sustainable spatial strategy is delivered. Work will be undertaken to ensure the SAs have regard for one another and other relevant plans.
5. To facilitate this, the West of England authorities will prioritise and resource a joint process of assessing the implications of the evidence base outputs. This will provide an opportunity for each Council to work with the other West of England Unitary Authorities in identifying future needs and, through the Duty to Co-operate, pursuing complementary strategic and local policies that are aligned and capable of delivering and supporting cleaner and inclusive growth across the sub-region.

### Strategic Planning

6. The strategic planning implications resulting from the updated evidence base will be addressed by the five authorities, working with adjoining authorities external to the West of England where necessary. The West of England Authorities will work together on any resulting joint strategic planning policy and on aligning strategic policy in local plans.
7. The West of England strategic planning policy work will identify: the overall quantum of housing and jobs within the West of England; the overall approach for a spatial strategy for the constituent Authorities of the West of England Combined Authority; shared strategic priorities including clean and inclusive growth to respond to the climate change and ecological emergency declarations; and strategic infrastructure necessary to deliver the policy framework.
8. Resourcing for the initial scoping of this work has been agreed at the WECA committee on 31st January 2020. Further resourcing for the plan making process will be prioritised and brought back to the Joint Committee as required.
9. For the Constituent Authorities of WECA, the Governance for decision making on the SDS is the WECA Leaders and Mayors (WECA Committee) who will agree key decisions, which require unanimous agreement. The Planning and Housing Board is the advisory board with the remit for this work area and will make recommendations to the WECA committee. The governance is supported by officers led by the WECA SRO, working through the Directors/ CEOs of WECA and the constituent authorities.
10. The West of England authorities are committed to work together on the basis of the following initial broad timetable. This will be refined as work progresses:
- Scoping of evidence base requirements: January 2020-May 2020
  - Commissioning initial evidence base and starting the SDS process : June 2020 and throughout 2020
  - Respond to evidence and review implications for setting strategic policy and local policy – Autumn 2020-Summer 2021

11. An engagement strategy will be developed and a jointly agreed communications protocol is in place to support the respective plan making processes. This demonstrates the continued shared commitment and Leadership for strategic planning in the West of England.

Dated:xxx

Signed

Bath & NE Somerset

Bristol City

North Somerset

South Gloucestershire

WECA

DRAFT



## **Appendix C**

### **Contents**

#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

##### **1. Introduction**

The requirement for a SoCG covering the WECA area

##### **2. Parties Involved & Signatories**

Initial Signatories

Additional signatories

##### **3. Strategic Geography**

Description/justification of the area

##### **4. Governance and Joint Working regarding cross-boundary strategic matters**

Governance and the SoCG process in the West of England area

Joint Working Arrangements

Governance relating to cross-boundary discussions beyond the West of England Area

##### **5. Strategic Planning Matters requiring cross boundary collaboration**

Definition - considerations

Strategic priorities and cross cutting issues:

- Clean and Inclusive
- Carbon emissions and air quality
- Health inequality

Housing including affordable housing, quantity and distribution

Employment, including retail, leisure and other commercial development

Green Belt

Development Quality

Infrastructure:

- Transport & connectivity including digital, and international via port and airport
- Utilities – energy/water/sewerage/waste



- Social Infrastructure - health, cultural and educational facilities of sub-regional significance
- Green Infrastructure

Sub-regional economic, place-making and ecological assets:

- Natural environment
- Historic Environment
- Minerals

## **6. Timetable for Review and Update**

Key SDS gateway decisions

Other review dates

Next Steps