



AGENDA ITEM:

**EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW &
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: 21
October 2021**

CABINET: 2 November 2021

Report of: Corporate Director of Place and Community

Relevant Portfolio Holder: Councillor Gaynar Owen

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SUBJECT: GREATER MANCHESTER COMBINED AUTHORITY 'PLACES FOR EVERYONE' STATEMENT OF COMMON GROUND

Wards affected: Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To seek agreement of a Statement of Common Ground covering cross-boundary spatial planning matters with Greater Manchester Combined Authority partner authorities, as required under the Duty to Co-operate.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS TO EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

2.1 That the Committee consider the content of this report, and the 'Places for Everyone' Statement of Common Ground provided at Appendix A, and that the agreed comments of Executive Overview & Scrutiny Committee be passed to Cabinet for their consideration.

3.0 RECOMMENDATION TO CABINET

3.1 That regard be had to the agreed comments from Executive Overview & Scrutiny Committee (21 October 2021; provided at Appendix B) and the content of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority 'Places for Everyone' Statement of Common Ground provided at Appendix A.

3.2 That the Statement of Common Ground be agreed for signature by the Leader of the Council.

4.0 BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The Localism Act 2011 introduced the Duty to Co-operate (“the Duty”) on local planning authorities which requires each authority to co-operate with neighbouring authorities and with a number of statutory bodies as they prepare their Local Plans (and other Development Plan Documents). This Duty must be evidenced as part of the Local Plan submission for Examination. If the Examining Inspector considers that an authority has not fulfilled the Duty, then he / she can conclude that the Local Plan preparation has not complied with the necessary legal requirements and ‘fail’ the Local Plan, thus requiring the authority to start preparation all over again.
- 4.2 Even if the Inspector does not fail the Local Plan on legal compliance, the Duty can still be considered when the Inspector assesses whether the Local Plan is ‘sound’. If the authority is considered not to have co-operated with neighbouring authorities or the prescribed statutory bodies, or not to have arrived at reasonable decisions based on that co-operation, the Inspector may find the Local Plan unsound. Therefore, fulfilling the Duty is a key requirement of any authority preparing a Local Plan.
- 4.3 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) contains a requirement to help local planning authorities demonstrate that they have fulfilled the Duty:
- In order to demonstrate effective and on-going joint working, strategic policymaking authorities should prepare and maintain one or more statements of common ground, documenting the cross-boundary matters being addressed and progress in cooperating to address these. These should be produced using the approach set out in national planning guidance, and be made publicly available throughout the plan-making process to provide transparency. (NPPF, paragraph 27)*
- 4.4 The Greater Manchester Combined Authority, along with the ten local authorities that make up the Greater Manchester area, has been working on a spatial plan for the area for a number of years. In December 2020, Stockport Council withdrew from the process, and the remaining nine authorities have since prepared a new spatial plan for Greater Manchester (minus Stockport), entitled ‘Places for Everyone’.
- 4.5 Consultation on the ‘Publication’ (final draft) version of this ‘Places for Everyone’ document took place from 9 August to 3 October 2021. West Lancashire Borough Council (WLBC) submitted a formal response to this consultation, expressing the view that the document is ‘sound’ (as defined by national planning policy), but requesting a minor modification to the text of ‘Places for Everyone’ so that it acknowledges the proposals for the Skelmersdale Rail Link, in order to help support the case for the proposed scheme.
- 4.6 Officers from the Greater Manchester City Region Combined Authority and the nine local planning authorities involved with ‘Places for Everyone’ have also prepared a ‘Spatial Planning Statement of Common Ground’ to cover the Duty to Cooperate, and this is provided at Appendix A. The document sets out how the Combined Authority has engaged with its neighbours in preparing the ‘Places for Everyone’ plan; the strategic, cross-boundary, planning-related issues; and the

current position in the City Region regarding those issues. It identifies future approaches to working together on those issues, where relevant.

4.7 The Greater Manchester Combined Authority and its constituent Councils (most notably Wigan, which directly borders West Lancashire) have engaged periodically with WLBC under the Duty over the past few years. To summarise, the following issues have been raised by WLBC during the preparation Places for Everyone (and its preceding draft Greater Manchester Spatial Framework):

- i. West Lancashire cannot help meet Greater Manchester's future needs for office, industry and warehouse growth;
- ii. WLBC expressed concern over the high levels of economic growth proposed in earlier versions of Places for Everyone; these could drive up demand for housing in this Borough and elsewhere;
- iii. West Lancashire is unable to accommodate any of Greater Manchester's proposed housing growth;
- iv. WLBC raised concern that the proposed housing figures in earlier iterations of Places for Everyone did not match the ambitious proposed employment growth and this could lead to more pressure on neighbouring authorities to release more land for housing;
- v. WLBC raised concerns over the flexibility in housing land supply and recommended that safeguarded land be released for longer-term housing needs and to demonstrate that Green Belt boundaries would not need to be altered at the end of the Plan period;
- vi. In terms of Green Belt, WLBC made a similar point about flexibility and safeguarded land;
- vii. WLBC has notified Greater Manchester Combined Authority of its intentions for rail at Skelmersdale, linking both to Merseyside and to Greater Manchester.

4.8 In relation to the above points, Greater Manchester Combined Authority's response has been:

- i. Greater Manchester's (i.e. the nine districts of Greater Manchester, excluding Stockport) employment land needs will be met within Greater Manchester's boundaries;
- ii. The nine 'Greater Manchester' districts consider that the evidence supporting Places for Everyone 2021 now meets WLBC's expressed concerns;
- iii. Greater Manchester's housing land needs will all be met within Greater Manchester's boundaries;
- iv. As per the response for (ii), the most up-to-date evidence is considered to meet these concerns;
- v. There is now a 16% buffer in housing land supply and a safeguarded land policy in 'Places for Everyone';
- vi. As for (v), there is now a safeguarded land policy;
- vii. The Statement of Common Ground (paragraph 15.40) acknowledges the proposals for the rail link to Skelmersdale.

4.9 In the light of paragraph 4.8 above, it is not considered that there are any unresolved cross-boundary issues between WLBC and our neighbours in Greater Manchester, and it is therefore recommended that the Statement of Common Ground be signed by the Leader of WLBC.

- 4.10 The Statement of Common Ground is an important component of the suite of documents that will be submitted to central government along with the 'Places for Everyone' development plan document itself, and will be considered as part of the government's independent examination of 'Places for Everyone'.
- 4.11 As well as co-operating with neighbouring Greater Manchester City Region Authorities (in particular, Wigan), WLBC also has a duty to co-operate with neighbouring authorities in Lancashire and in the Liverpool City Region, and continues to do so. In particular, Members will recall the Portfolio Holder for Planning signing the Liverpool City Region Statement of Common Ground in December 2019.

5.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 This report has few or no implications for sustainability.

6.0 FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no financial and resource implications of the Statement of Common Ground other than a small amount of Council officer time.

7.0 RISK ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 There are no risks associated with the recommendations above, although there are risks associated with not contributing to / being a part of such a Statement of Common Ground, as the Council's evidence of fulfilling the Duty to Co-operate would be considerably weaker.

8.0 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no direct implications for health and wellbeing from the recommendations in this report.

Background Documents

There are no background documents (as defined in Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) to this Report.

Equality Impact Assessment

The decision does not have any direct impact on members of the public, employees, elected members and / or stakeholders. Therefore no Equality Impact Assessment is required.

Appendices

Appendix A – Greater Manchester Combined Authority 'Places for Everyone' Statement of Common Ground

For Cabinet meeting only:

Appendix B – Agreed Comments of Executive Overview & Scrutiny Committee
(21 October 2021)