

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE  
PLACE, REGENERATION AND HOUSING COMMITTEE  
HELD ON THURSDAY, 26 OCTOBER 2023 AT MEETING ROOM 1,  
WELLINGTON HOUSE, WELLINGTON STREET, LEEDS LS1 2DE**

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**Present:**

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| Councillor Denise Jeffery (Chair) | Wakefield Council                                    |
| Councillor Alex Ross-Shaw         | Bradford Council                                     |
| Councillor Scott Patient          | Calderdale Council                                   |
| Councillor Helen Hayden           | Leeds City Council                                   |
| Councillor Michael Graham         | Wakefield Council                                    |
| Councillor Ben Burton             | York Council   |
| Ben Aspinall                      | Private Sector Representative                        |
| Lisa Littlefair                   | Private Sector Representative                        |
| Stephen Moore                     | Private Sector Representative                        |
| Tamsin Hart Jones                 | Advisory Representative (Homes<br>England)           |
| Helen Lennon                      | Advisory Representative (LCR Housing<br>Partnership) |
| Richard Butterfield               | Advisory Representative (Historic<br>England)        |

**In attendance:**

|                   |                                   |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Liz Hunter        | West Yorkshire Combined Authority |
| Hannah Andrew     | West Yorkshire Combined Authority |
| Patrick Bowes     | West Yorkshire Combined Authority |
| Alison Gillespie  | West Yorkshire Combined Authority |
| Rebecca Greenwood | West Yorkshire Combined Authority |
| Myles Larrington  | West Yorkshire Combined Authority |

**1. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Masood Ahmed (Bradford Council) and Advisory Representative, Cathy Elliott (West Yorkshire Integrated Care Board).

**2. Declaration of Disposable Pecuniary Interests**

There were no declarations of pecuniary interests at the meeting.

**3. Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public**

There were no agenda items that required the exclusion of the public and press.

#### **4. Minutes of the meeting held on 2 March 2023**

**Resolved:** That the Minutes of the meeting of Place, Regeneration and Housing Committee held on 2 March 2023 were approved.

#### **5. Minutes of the informal meeting held on 31 August 2023**

**Resolved:** That members of the Committee noted the Minutes of the informal meeting of the Place, Regeneration and Housing Committee held on 31 August 2023.

#### **6. Chair's Update**

The Chair opened the meeting by stating that the Housing Accelerator Fund, which had been a follow-up item from the Housing Revenue Fund, was discussed at the Combined Authority meeting on October 12, 2023. She informed members that the Combined Authority had approved the programme, which was good news for the Committee.

#### **7. Monitoring Indicators**

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Operating Officer which advised members on the set of State of the Region indicators relevant to the Committee's mission, reflecting the outcomes it aims to improve, with updates provided when new data becomes available.

Officers introduced the report and explained that the indicators include health life expectancy, net additional dwellings, housing affordability, private sector rents, household energy efficiency, households in fuel poverty, gigabit-capable internet coverage, and mobile coverage. Healthy life expectancy in West Yorkshire is notably lower than the national average, with significant inequality in overall life expectancy within Leeds. Net additional dwellings saw a decline in 2020/21 due to the pandemic but increased in 2021/22, though still below the required housing target.

Housing affordability improved in 2022 but is expected to decline in 2023 due to rising interest rates. Private sector rents vary across local authorities but have been increasing rapidly. Energy efficiency ratings in West Yorkshire are below the national average, with variations among local authorities. Fuel poverty affects a significant portion of households in the region. Gigabit-capable internet coverage is progressing well, exceeding national averages, and mobile coverage is also above average, with Leeds having the highest coverage. These indicators provide valuable insights into West Yorkshire's socio-economic performance and areas that require attention and improvement.

Members made the following observations:

- A member expressed concern about the alarming issue of fuel poverty

and the slow progress of housing retrofit projects. She emphasised the need for strategic investment to address climate change implications and improve energy efficiency. The member also enquired about how to link data to social care and educational outcomes to assess the impact of the cost-of-living crisis more broadly. Officers responded by noting the difficulty of directly linking fuel poverty to specific outcomes but highlighted the importance of addressing deprivation in struggling districts compared to affluent areas. They emphasised the relationship between security, housing tenure, and the quality of housing stock. Efforts to incentivise developers to meet minimum housing standards were also mentioned. There was recognition of macroeconomic challenges related to retrofitting and their relevance to the broader goal of addressing affordable housing.

- A member discussed the specific challenges related to the age of the building stock, retrofitting issues, overcrowding, and tenure. He mentioned the publication of guidance on the Historic England website for homeowners available here: <https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/your-home/energy-efficiency/> and the need to address challenges within housing stock. The member also highlighted the existence of demonstrator projects across England focused on addressing retrofitting challenges. Officers responded that 23% of housing stock in West Yorkshire is pre-1919 and outlined the use of area-based schemes to test retrofitting for different property types, acknowledging the significant challenge and the diverse approaches to tackling this.

**Resolved:**

- i. That the Committee noted the contents of the report.
- ii. That the Committee noted the messages from the monitoring indicators.

**8. Digital Blueprint Update**

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Policing, Place and Environment which provided members with an update on the West Yorkshire Digital Blueprint.

The officers presented the report which sought the Committee's views on the emerging structure of the Blueprint. In 2019, the Leeds City region agreed on a Digital Framework with five outcomes aimed at boosting businesses, skills, the digital sector, digital infrastructure, and tech for good. However, due to various changes, the West Yorkshire Combined Authority now proposes a new Digital Blueprint to cover similar objectives and some new ones.

The digital economy plan is essential for the region, as it can improve productivity, reduce skills gaps, enhance connectivity, attract investment, and improve residents' lives. The strategy for the Digital Blueprint focuses on three 'horizontal' elements: 'Place,' 'People and Education,' and 'Business and Organizations.' Seven 'vertical' themes interwoven with these three horizontals include showcasing digital opportunities, making day-to-day life easier,

benefiting from advanced technologies, tackling digital exclusion, using data to connect West Yorkshire, tackling climate change, and working collaboratively with digital stakeholders in West Yorkshire.

A public consultation will commence in October to gauge public responses to elements that will be included in the Blueprint. The first draft of the Digital Blueprint will be presented at a future Committee meeting, aiming for a Summer 2024 approval.

Members made the following observations:

- A member expressed support for the comprehensive plan addressing connectivity gaps, particularly in rural areas. He highlighted the need for rapid progress to ensure that areas with poor connectivity were not left behind, especially in terms of education and competitiveness.
- A member raised concerns about the withdrawal of investment from City Fibre in Calderdale and questioned how the West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) can address this issue to support the expansion of broadband services.
- A member highlighted the challenge of identifying clear gaps in broadband connectivity. They mentioned that rural areas with poor connectivity will face difficulties accessing homes, schools, and businesses until 2030. The member expressed support for efforts to improve connectivity and focus on supporting investment in the market, particularly transitioning from copper to fiber infrastructure. They emphasised the need for public and private sector cooperation in achieving this outcome. The member also highlighted the importance of avoiding duplication and minimising overbuilding as the industry evolves.
- A member enquired about communication and collaboration between the Combined Authority and the industry, to which officers confirmed there were ongoing discussions with network providers.
- A member underscored the need to bridge the digital divide, particularly for areas lacking access to public transport. She mentions challenges related to data management, smart technology, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and the importance of upskilling the local workforce.
- A member highlighted the opportunity for digital infrastructure to complement broader digital initiatives, with a focus on inclusion and alignment with existing priorities.
- A member stressed the importance of making the network ubiquitous across West Yorkshire and investing in skills development, from schools to advanced AI usage.
- A member advocated for open-sourced data and involvement of universities in data incubation, to promote accessibility and innovation.

- A member emphasised the need to inspire ambition, especially in schools, to prepare young people for new roles and opportunities in the digital age.
- A member suggested the need to use effective communication, especially to those with concerns about new technologies. She emphasised the importance of highlighting the benefits and addressing potential harms of advancements like artificial intelligence.

**Resolved:**

- i. That the Committee noted the contents of the report.
- ii. That the Committee provided feedback and endorsed the direction of the Digital Blueprint, ahead of full drafting.

**9. Housing Strategy**

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Policing, Place and Environment which sought comments and endorsement from members for the high-level draft of the West Yorkshire Housing Strategy 2040.

Officers presented the report which sought the Committee's agreement to proceed with an online public consultation of the draft of the West Yorkshire Housing Strategy 2040, which will directly contribute to the development of the final strategy. The focus of the strategy is to provide homes in the right places, with good connectivity to support people in accessing wider opportunities such as employment, and to develop sustainable and resilient places.

The West Yorkshire Housing Strategy 2040 represents an opportunity to present a regional strategy that aligns with the wider strategic focus on inclusive growth, productivity, skills and training, connectivity, transport, digital, climate change, and health, which are all linked to the West Yorkshire Plan. The strategy has been co-developed with partners, with regular engagement via structures and specific sessions to ensure all partners have had the opportunity to feed in and shape the strategy. The guiding principles of sustainability, equality and inclusive growth were identified as central threads that underpin their programs and the outcomes that the strategy aims to achieve. Each objective will demonstrate how these principles are embedded in their delivery.

Members made the following observations:

- A member appreciated the clarification on the role of the Combined Authority in local authority plans and suggested enhancing this aspect to emphasise how the strategy aligns with housing and funding goals. He recommended streamlining objectives for better measurement and demonstration of achievements.
- A member raised concerns about rising rental costs and the upcoming

energy efficiency requirements for rental properties in 2028, emphasising the need to address these challenges in the consultation. He also highlighted the skills gap in construction as a crucial issue for the strategy. Officers responded by acknowledging the need to address local energy efficiency standards and the skills gap, particularly in green construction. Officers also highlighted that the Prime Minister had signalled that there would be reduced requirements on landlords in a recent speech.

- A member emphasised the importance of quantifying the strategy's ambitions and providing tangible examples to demonstrate how partnerships will ensure resident safety in communities.
- A member emphasised the importance of cohesive place and active travel development and highlighted the need for a clear and unified approach to engagement and consultation.
- A member suggested incorporating more local distinctiveness, especially in addressing challenges and opportunities in industrial towns and dormant mill sites.
- A member suggested enhancing the focus on skills development, supply chain, and investment in the housing sector.
- A member highlighted the need for the strategy to demonstrate the value added by the Combined Authority with consideration of the implications of Mass Transit on housing.
- A member underscored the importance of simplifying bureaucracy and enhancing the economic development role of the Combined Authority to attract developers and investment in the region. He also emphasised the significance of building strong relationships with local members and chief executives to support district partners and home builders.

**Resolved:**

- i. That the Committee noted the contents of the report
- ii. That the Committee provided comments and endorsement of the high-level draft of the West Yorkshire Housing Strategy 2040 including the mission statement, objectives.
- iii. That the Committee endorsed the proposal to proceed with an online public consultation of the high-level West Yorkshire Housing Strategy that will directly feed into the development of the final strategy.

**10. Date of the Next Meeting**

It was noted that the next meeting of the Place, Regeneration and Housing Committee was scheduled to be held on 29 February 2024.