

**NOTES OF INQUORATE THE MEETING OF THE ECONOMY SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE HELD ON 12 JANUARY 2024 IN CONFERENCE ROOMS
1/2, WELLINGTON HOUSE, 40-50 WELLINGTON STREET, LEEDS, LS1
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Present:

Councillor Richard Smith (Chair)	Kirklees Council
Councillor Aneela Ahmed	Bradford Council
Councillor Helen Brundell	Calderdale Council
Councillor Katie Kimber	Calderdale Council
Councillor Manisha Roma Kaushik	Kirklees Council
Councillor Colin Campbell	Leeds City Council
Councillor Mathew Robinson	Leeds City Council
Councillor David Pickersgill	Wakefield Council
Councillor Tony Wallis	Wakefield Council
Councillor Dave Merrett	City of York Council

In attendance:

Mayor Tracy Brabin	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Khaled Berroum	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Sarah Bowes	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Sarah Eaton	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Felix Kumi-Ampofo	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Katie Wright	West Yorkshire Combined Authority

21. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bob Felstead, Peter Caffrey, Conrad Whitcroft and Gohar Almass.

Councillor Dave Merrett substituted for Councillor Conrad Whitcroft.

The meeting was **inquorate** with 10 members present (out of 11 needed for quorum).

22. Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests.

23. Possible exclusion of the press and public

There were no items requiring the exclusion of the press and public.

24. Minutes of the meeting held on 15 March 2023

As the meeting is inquorate, the minutes must be approved at the next quorate meeting, currently scheduled for 8 March 2024.

25. Notes of the inquorate meeting held on 17 November 2023

As the meeting is inquorate, the notes will be considered at the next quorate meeting.

26. Notes of the inquorate meeting held on 15 September 2023

As the meeting is inquorate, the notes will be considered at the next quorate meeting.

27. Chair's comments and update

The Chair expressed his disappointment that the meeting was, again, inquorate and reminded members of the importance of quoracy and planning ahead for attendance and substitution. The Mayor also offered her support in ensuring meetings are quorate in future due to the importance of scrutiny to her work.

28. Mayors Question Time

The Chair thanked the Mayor for attending to answer the committee's questions.

Future Mayoral Pledges:

- The Mayor is unable to go into detail at this stage on possible future Mayoral Pledges, as it is an electoral matter, but suggested they will be informed by work already underway, her experience in the role to date, and the latest opportunities around further L4 devolution possibly on offer.

Devolution and more autonomous finances:

- The long-term goal is to attain "single settlement funding", which would give the CA full autonomy and flexibility over funding.
- The current Level 4 Devolution offer includes greater powers and some greater autonomy around how the CA manages funding from particular departments as single pots i.e. Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) funding as one pot and Department for Transport (DfT) funding as another pot.

Decision-making on where to invest:

- Decisions on where to invest funding in the region are taken by the CA as a whole, and not the Mayor alone, based on the West Yorkshire Plan 2040 which considers the needs of each area and West Yorkshire as a whole at a strategic level.

- Strategic logic is the main criteria in decision making, but projects may need to be phased to ensure the areas of highest need are invested in sooner.
- Many members and the public are unaware of projects and investment in their areas, and there is a role for the CA to ensure that members are informed so that they can inform their constituents.

Partnership with central government, mayors and local governments:

- A challenge for the CA is local authority partner's capacity to deliver, with many local authorities currently facing financial difficulties. Several CA schemes and services are delivered by, or with, the local authorities.
- £51 million from the Transport Levy has been returned to local authorities from the CA to provide some financial support.
- The Mayor has also raised her concerns with government directly that local authorities need increased funding and support, not just Mayors and combined authorities.

Mayoral role in supporting businesses.

- The Leeds City Region Enterprise Partnership (LEP) has been reformed and is now the West Yorkshire Business Board. The Chair (currently Mandy Richard) also doubles as a new Mayoral Business Advisor.
- The Mayor and Business Advisor recently went on a trade mission to North America as part of her role to champion and advocate for the region, encouraging business to establish their UK headquarters in West Yorkshire, not just in Leeds.
- A direct line between the Mayor and interested businesses allows local authority partners to offer “wrap around” support to businesses looking to expand into West Yorkshire, including providing connections with Leeds City Council, central government, links to workers with the right skills, and support to navigate any ‘red tape’ that would smooth their relocation.
- The Mayor has used her ‘soft power’ to champion the recently launched the “Fair Work Charter” which currently has 80 businesses signed up, with many more interested.
- The West Yorkshire Plan 2040 and the incoming Economic Strategy also clarify the direction of travel for business support and the digital skills plan (launched in 2022) encourages businesses to upskill their workforce.
- The Mayor reiterated her view that a good airport is important for business, students and tourism to remain competitive as a region and she was pleased to see that £100 million had been committed by Leeds Bradford Airport for a needed renovation.

Employment and Green Jobs

- There is no official definition of a ‘well paid’ job, however the Mayor is encouraging employers to pay the Real Living Wage or more through the Fair Work Charter campaign, which is in businesses and the region's interest to better recruit and retain staff – and an official working definition could be considered.
- A definition of a ‘high skilled’ job is a job that requires a Level 3 qualification or above (previously ‘A-level’) or provides training to achieve a Level 3 qualification.

- The CA needs to persuade businesses to prepare for 'future skills' which will be needed for major investment such as Mass Transit and EV charging infrastructure.
- There also needs to be clear commitments from government regarding increasing Electric Vehicles (EVs), after the recent pushing back of their target year, as businesses are reluctant to commit to investment if there is a period of policy uncertainty.
- The CA uses the government's definition of a green job which is defined as 'employment in an activity that directly contributes to - or indirectly supports - the achievement of net zero emissions target and other environmental goals, such as nature restoration and mitigation against climate risks'.
- To date the CA has enabled the creation of 1,074 green jobs, surpassing the target of 1,000 and the CA has approved funding for £6.5 million for the delivery of programmes and courses for green jobs. Further information can be provided on the breakdown of the green jobs created, including the businesses.
- The CA's careers service provides an opportunity for young people or those returning to the workforce to consider what a green job is. A full breakdown of those who are over 50 and economically inactive will be useful to see further.
- It is difficult to isolate the impact one job may have on carbon output. However, the CA is moving to an evidence-based approach to measure the impact of projects more widely and has launched a business carbon footprint calculator. Businesses can now understand the impact their activities or projects will have on output of carbon.
- Many people in West Yorkshire left the workforce due to ill health and so the focus of the CA will need to be on the link between health and the workforce. The Mayor has appointed an Inclusivity Champion, and committed to a Mayoral Pledge, part funded by the Integrated Care Board (ICB) to improve health inequality.

ESL Learning, skills and education and the Apprenticeship System

- In West Yorkshire, there is an estimated 51,000 adults who cannot speak English which impacts on access to employment opportunities. There has been an increase in demand for English as a Second Language (ESL) courses and the Mayor would like to ensure everyone has access to a course.
- 90,000 learners have received skills and employment support since the Mayor was elected and the CA has cut subcontracting fees for the Adult Education Budget saving £9m in costs for businesses and providers.
- The apprenticeship system is a national programme and so has limited direct influence but the Mayor does recognise that businesses often find the system challenging to navigate.
- The Mayor reaffirmed her view that MCAs should have more power to design and manage local skills programmes, like apprenticeships and the redistribution of the levy funds, that reflect their region's needs and that capacity for the delivery of training is key.
- The CA has a skills support service to provide advice to businesses engaging with the apprenticeship system and Apprenticeship Levy

funding includes £6 million for training, 147 businesses in West Yorkshire and York have been supported through the levy to date.

Bradford UK City of Culture 2025 and the promotion of local creative jobs/opportunities

- The Year of Culture gives Bradford and West Yorkshire an opportunity to develop culture and creative sectors locally and to learn from other Years of Culture and events.
- The Kirklees Year of Music had national organisations involved (such as Artichoke who built the “HERD” exhibition), they ensured local musicians, composers and manufacturers were involved and this event had the highest footfall for an event in Kirklees to date.
- The challenge is ensuring that the impact from the Year of Culture is sustainable beyond that year and benefits are felt across the region not just in Bradford.
- The deadline of 2025 supports leaders to deliver investment in time for the Year of Culture, for example improved transport links from London to Bradford in time for 2025.
- The CA has allocated £2.3 million for the “You Can Make It Here” programme encouraging young people with talent and ability to get into creative industries. The skills bootcamps provide 16 weeks training for young people in creative industries on topics such as events management and advice around being self-employed.

29. Work Programme

Next meeting:

- The next meeting will cover an update on the economic strategy and the CA’s future approach to business investment.
- It was agreed it would be useful to cover the high-level strategic direction, funding levels, any background data and consultations with businesses and the public.

Scrutiny Protocol:

- A Working Group, made up of members from all three scrutiny committees, has been established under the Corporate Scrutiny Committee’s remit to review the government’s newly published Scrutiny Protocol and make recommendations to the CA regarding the future scrutiny system.
- Members who are not on the working group will be consulted on the report developed by the working group.
- The Mayor noted that scrutiny needs more staff support to help members better fully understand and scrutinise the work of the CA.

30. Date of the next meeting – 8 March 2024