



West
Yorkshire
Combined
Authority

Tracy
Brabin
Mayor of
West Yorkshire

**NOTES OF THE INQUORATE MEETING OF THE
ECONOMY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON FRIDAY 15 SEPTEMBER 2023 AT CONFERENCE ROOM 1/2,
WELLINGTON HOUSE, 40-50 WELLINGTON STREET, LEEDS, LS1 2DE**

Present:

Councillor Richard Smith (Chair)	Kirklees Council
Councillor Aneela Ahmed	Bradford Council
Councillor Bob Felstead (Deputy Chair)	Bradford Council
Councillor Helen Brundell	Calderdale Council
Councillor Colin Campbell	Leeds City Council
Councillor Katie Kimber	Calderdale Council
Councillor David Pickersgill	Wakefield Council
Councillor Matthew Robinson	Leeds City Council
Councillor Conrad Whitcroft	City of York Council

In attendance:

Khaled Berroum	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Peter Glover	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Felix Kumi-Ampofo	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Hannah Scales	West Yorkshire Combined Authority

1. Apologies for absence

The meeting was **inquorate**, with 9 members present out of 11 needed for quorum.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Iqbal, Lowe, Wallis and Almass.

2. Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

Skipped item 2 as the meeting was inquorate.

3. Possible exclusion of the press and public

One member of the public was present at the Chair's discretion as the meeting was not quorate.

4. Minutes of the last meeting held on 15 March 2023

As the meeting is inquorate, the minutes must be approved at the next quorate meeting (currently scheduled for 17 November).

A member reminded officers that a request for information regarding apprenticeship data noted in the minutes was not yet fulfilled and officers responded that all apprenticeships quoted were full time jobs and 90% of them led to full time employment, and that fuller data could be circulated to members if required.

5. Chair's comments and update

The Chair provided a verbal update and:

- welcomed new and returning members and suggested that new members read the minutes of the previous year's meetings and let scrutiny officers know if they had any questions or required further intros and briefings.
- brought the committee's attention to the legally set high quorum rate, with 11 of 16 members are required for a meeting to take place and that members should let scrutiny officers know if they will be absent and arrange substitutes if they can
- asked that Members read papers in advance of meetings.
- mentioned the importance of scrutiny being non-political, evidence led and objective

6. Scrutiny and Governance arrangements

Clarifications were provided on a number of issues:

- Cllr Manisha Kaushik was set to replace Cllr Gwen Lowe as the Labour Kirklees member.
- Cllr John Ford had stepped down as a member of the committee and would be replaced soon.
- Cllr Richard Hunt had now become an independent member and Wakefield Council would be asked to re-confirm their appointment as political balance rules require scrutiny membership to be proportionate to the number of councillors-per-party in the region.
- Allowances are paid monthly and are not tied to attendance records

7. Economy Scrutiny Work Programme

The Committee discussed and approved the Work programme and agenda items for the 2023/24 municipal year – subject to formal approval at the next quorate meeting. Members were reminded that the Work Programme was not set in stone and could be amended and updated as the municipal year progressed to reflect events as they develop.

8. LEP Board update

The Chair welcomed Felix Kumi-Ampofo, the new Director of Inclusive Economy, Skills & Culture who presented a report which provided an update on the future of the LEP Board and private sector engagement.

Discussion covered the following points:

- The previous arrangements of separate LEPs (local enterprise

partnerships) led by private sector representatives receiving money from the government is expected to end, with LEPs being amalgamated into their accountable bodies such as combined authorities.

- Separate LEP funding (previously used for things such as the Growth Hubs) is expected to come to an end.
- However, the Government still expects private sector voices to remain part of local/regional economy policy making and services.
- New arrangements will aim to fit in with existing business voices and forums, such as the chambers of commerce, FSB, CBI etc who may be included as representatives/members in the new board arrangements in future.
- A new board like structure will be established, but its name and remit is yet to be decided, including the role/title previously known as LEP Chair.
- There was an open recruitment process, where people in business were invited to apply, and then shortlisted and interviewed by a mixed panel – which was recently concluded.
- Efforts were undertaken to ensure that the membership suitably represented all parts of the region and a range of different sectors, but the focus is on getting the best representatives and often people can live in one place and work in another. It is not policy to reject a good candidate due to their location. Details of members, their background and geographical areas can be shared.
- The Chair (and Mayoral Business Advisor) is due to be appointed in the coming weeks or months.
- Functional economic areas go beyond council/county borders and will be taken into account in ways of working and partnership efforts.
- York/North Yorkshire is expected to get its own mayoral combined authority (in May 2024), and has its own LEP, and the precise nature of partnership working will be determined by the new board when it is assembled and the new leadership in York/NY when it is elected

9. Economic update and next steps

(a) Economic outlook and strategic challenges

(b) Economic Strategy and next steps

The Economic Evidence Manager presented the report.

Discussion covered the following points:

- **Unemployment:** Different council areas have different unemployment counts with Bradford and Leeds being higher than the others, Bradford being double the national average and one of the highest in the country – linked to historical issues around the decline of the mill industry. Youth unemployment is a particular concern to Members. Unemployment in general has improved since the pandemic, when it was 10%. CA programmes aim to make an impact through jobs/skills programmes, and on the new workforce coming from the school system through colleges and Adult Education Budget and in

connecting businesses to universities. Successful programmes which reduced unemployment elsewhere required the resources to have staff go into communities and engage directly identifying 'NEETs' and linking them with existing support services.

- **Health:** One possible barrier to people getting into, or back into, work is health. Many assume health barriers mainly impact older workers, but data shows the most effected are over-60s and also the youngest cohort who struggle, especially with mental health barriers. It's possible the youngest cohort are those most comfortable in admitting to these issues compared to other age groups. CA has less influence over direct health matters, but some impact can be made on adjacent areas such as housing quality, transport/pollution etc.
- **Over 50s returning to work:** Some over-50s are happily retired/semi-retired, but many were pressured or forced out of work. Many councils around the country have set up schemes, e.g. Deliveroo work for over-50s, which don't appear to have made an impact. Others who tried to get back into work, were unable to get back in at similar salaries as before, regardless of their experience, which has been a barrier. Part of the issue is the lack of clear evidence/data as to why this is the case and still require further study e.g. the pandemic simply accelerating previous trends, such as focus on 'quality of life'. Some argue that it is more socially advantageous for older retirees to be more active in communities and families e.g. supporting younger working parents with childcare and other communal volunteering.
- **Childcare:** A major factor impacting people's decision to work, or work fulltime is childcare, and those who cannot afford it full time rely on flexible working, part time work, or older relatives to support them – who would then also need to be working flexibly or not at all. Any solution to helping enable more workers to return to work must involve support for working parents.
- **AI and digitalisation:** Pursuing AI and digitalisation for the sake of AI and digitalisation shouldn't be the strategy, as AI is only as good as the data input into it and is subject to the same biases as other systems. Digitalisation without the necessary infrastructure and connectivity will leave people behind. A study has also been commissioned to produce a deep dive into the impact of artificial intelligence as the current outlook is highly uncertain. To date, aggregate employment has not been affected by AI but the growth of the AI sector is large.
- **Green Economy:** It is estimated that the green economy would need to double in size to meet the 2038 target. 9% of the total jobs in West Yorkshire are classified as high carbon jobs. Green jobs are not just those directly working on green infrastructure like turbines or renewable energy but come in many forms, and a clear definition and categorisation is needed.

- **Investment Zones update:** South Yorkshire and Liverpool City Region CAs have already determined and announced their investment zones. There are 5 gateways, and the CA is currently working on gateway 3 (tax, investment and business rate incentives to attract business). Gateway 4 involves the interventions/policies needed to attract businesses and the benefits. It was hoped that the Combined Authority would be able to agree details/incentives with Government before the Autumn Statement and an update can be provided in future.

10. Date of the next meeting - 17 November 2023