

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE HELD REMOTELY ON FRIDAY 10 JULY 2020**

Present:

Cllr Peter Harrand (Chair)	Leeds City Council
Cllr Stephen Baines	Calderdale Council
Cllr James Baker (Deputy Chair)	Calderdale Council
Cllr Paul Davies	Kirklees Council
Cllr Stephen Fenton	City of York Council
Cllr Dot Foster	Calderdale Council
Cllr Jacob Goddard	Leeds City Council
Cllr Andrew Hollyer	City of York Council
Cllr David Jones	Wakefield Council
Cllr Peter Kilbane	City of York Council
Cllr Christine Knight	Leeds City Council
Cllr Betty Rhodes	Wakefield Council
Cllr Olivia Rowley	Wakefield Council
Cllr Rosie Watson	Bradford Council
Cllr Geoff Winnard	Bradford Council

In attendance:

Brian Archer	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Khaled Berroum	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Angela Taylor	West Yorkshire Combined Authority

1. Apologies for absence

The Chair welcomed new members Councillors Andrew Hollyer and Olivia Rowley to their first committee meeting.

Apologies were received from Councillors Richard Smith and Yusra Hussain.

2. Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests.

3. Possible exclusion of the press and public

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

4. Minutes of the meeting held on 17 January 2020

The Committee noted that the meetings on 20 March and 22 May 2020 were cancelled due to COVID-19 and two workshops for members had taken place in May and June for members to be briefed on mayoral devolution and to discuss how mayoral devolution preparations will be scrutinised.

The Chair noted that the consultation on mayoral devolution was still ongoing and members were encouraged to comment in their capacity as ward councillors.

Resolved:

- i) That the minutes of the last meeting held on 17 January 2020 be approved.
- ii) That an update on the sale of bus companies (Minute 35) be provided.

5. Governance arrangements for 2020/21

The Committee noted a report of the Scrutiny Officer explaining that, due to the absence of annual meetings in 2020 due to COVID-19, governance arrangements agreed by the Combined Authority at its annual meeting last year (27 June 2019) pertaining to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee shall remain the same for this municipal year (2020/21) – including retaining the current membership and chair.

Resolved:

- i) That the governance arrangements for 2020/21 be noted.
- ii) That new members be welcomed and parting members be thanked for their service and contributions.

6. Scrutiny Work Programme 2020/21

The Committee considered a report of the Scrutiny Officer outlining the proposed Work Programme for the 2020/21 municipal year, following discussion at a members' workshop held on 26 June 2020.

It was agreed that this year scrutiny should focus mostly on preparations and implementation of mayoral devolution while maintaining an overview of the impact of COVID-19 on the organisation and the region.

Two working groups were appointed to support this – a Governance & Scrutiny working group to be led by Cllr James Baker and a Finances & Corporate working group to be led by Cllr Stephen Baines.

Members suggested that a date be chosen for when working groups will report back their findings to ensure there is a clear timeline and work is

finished on time. Members also suggested that last year's reviews, interrupted by COVID-19, be revisited and completed.

Members also asked to see the LEP Board's forward plan and the LEP's annual delivery plan so that scrutiny can follow COVID-19 economic recovery planning.

Resolved:

- i) That the Work Programme in Appendix 1 of the report be agreed.
- ii) That two working groups ('governance & scrutiny' and 'finances & corporate') be appointed this municipal year with the following membership:
 - Governance & Scrutiny: *Cllrs James Baker (Chair), Dot Foster, Andrew Hollyer, Yusra Hussain and David Jones.*
 - Finances & Corporate: *Cllrs Stephen Baines (Chair), Paul Davies, Jacob Goddard, Olivia Rowley, Rosie Watson and Geoff Winnard.*
- iii) That the existing spokespersons be re-appointed:
 - Business growth – *Cllr Stephen Baines*
 - Corporate issues – *Cllrs Rosie Watson and Geoff Winnard*
 - Employment and skills – *Cllr David Jones*
 - Environment – *Cllr James Baker*
 - Financial & strategic issues – *Cllr Peter Harrand*
 - Transport – *Cllr Dot Foster*
- iv) That the LEP Board's forward plan and the LEP's annual delivery plan for 2020/21 be circulated to members.

7. Annual Scrutiny Report 2019/20

The Committee considered the Annual Report for 2019/20 which summarises and highlights scrutiny's work in the 2019/20 municipal year.

Members discussed the importance of scrutiny in the context of regional democracy and how the role of scrutiny is still largely unclear to the public and even local councillors and officers. It was agreed that scrutiny would benefit from better promotion and suggestions included:

- that the annual report be promoted more widely and possibly sent to local authority scrutiny committees and officers in West Yorkshire as a precedent.
- In future, framing the annual report to focus more explicitly on the impact that scrutiny has had as a way of demonstrating scrutiny's value and importance.
- the Scrutiny Chair seek the advice of the Combined Authority's Head of Communications as to how scrutiny and its work can be better promoted.
- this topic be added to the purview of the Governance & Scrutiny working group.

Resolved: That the 2019/20 Annual Report be approved for publication.

8. Effect of COVID-19 and the Combined Authority's response

The Committee considered two reports from the Directors of Corporate Services and Economic Services outlining the impact COVID-19 has had on the Combined Authority as an organisation and the West Yorkshire economy.

In the first part of the discussion on 'corporate performance and budget monitoring' the Committee discussed and noted the following:

Finances & programme/service delivery

- Due to the statutory nature of much of its spending, the Combined Authority has less flexibility in how it manages its finances through the crisis. For instance, the Combined Authority continues to pay bus companies at pre-COVID levels, as required by government.
- Although the government has promised some financial support for local authorities, it has not yet announced anything for combined authorities – although some funding support is expected in particular service areas, e.g. business support. Discussions with government are ongoing.
- The risk figure is a potential £12m gap in the budget – the combination of loss of income and increased costs.
- Current total reserves are around £7m and a review of other earmarked reserves is ongoing to see if funds can be redeployed.
- Revenue from the usual sources such as bus stations, rents, and mcard sales have also been affected and reduced during the crisis.
- Business rates income is not collected or retained by the Combined Authority, but by the local authorities directly other than for the Enterprise Zones.
- The Combined Authority has not yet engaged in any active debt collection but has sought individual solutions with renters and customers in the interim.
- There has also been an impact on delivery of capital programmes and infrastructure projects due to the increased difficulty of conducting consultations during lockdown, cashflow problems in all sectors and difficulties around securing necessary supplies and workers to advance projects.

Workforce issues

- Local authorities were not able to furlough staff in the same way as the private sector and there are no Combined Authority staff currently furloughed. Affected staff were redeployed to other areas.
- Bus station and AccessBus staff have been working throughout the lockdown while travel centres were closed – but due to reopen soon.
- All office based staff have been working from home since the beginning of the lockdown. Thanks to the completion of much of the 'Corporate Technology Programme' prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, staff have the equipment needed to work from home long term if necessary.

- Working from home arrangements are expected to continue into Winter, but based on government advice there might be a partial return in Autumn, after measures to ensure that infection risk is mitigated are in place
- The organisation also anticipates an uptake for staff opting to work from home more regularly in the long term – which the organisation encourages and supports in the long term as it seeks to move all staff into the single location of the Wellington House head office. The accommodation refurbishment project of Wellington House is currently ongoing while staff are not in the building.
- Staff have been kept busy due to the Combined Authority's role in COVID-19 economic support and recovery efforts and the 'key worker' status of transport workers. Some staff were redeployed to areas with increased workflow, such as business support units.
- Working hours, flexi time and leave policies have been relaxed throughout the lockdown so staff have maximum flexibility in work-life balance and address any personal or care duties.
- Managers were asked to complete DSE assessments of their staff and practical help has been provided to those who need it.
- Managers and HR have also monitored mental health concerns as some staff have felt isolated and provided support as needed. –
- There are currently no plans to reimburse staff for any costs associated with increased bills due to home working, which is in line with other local authorities nationally who are also not doing so.
- Quarterly absence data is due soon and is expected to be lower due to the homeworking element allowing staff who might not have felt well enough to commute to work and back, do work at their home desk.
- The annual staff survey has recently closed and is currently being analysed by an internal staff working group. Preliminary results are positive – in particular, contentment with technology equipment which has made home working smooth. There are still areas of concern and improvement and the results can be shared with members when ready.

In the second part of the discussion on 'COVID-19 economic response and recovery' the Committee discussed and noted the following:

- Access to finance: In the beginning access to finance for businesses was a major issue. The LEP Chair held discussions with local banks and the LEP itself helped coordinate schemes and action that saw an estimated £450m reach 34,000 businesses. More directly, the LEP business support unit supported over 3,000 businesses through its helplines.
- PPE: Another immediate concern at the beginning of the lockdown period was the lack of available PPE for NHS staff due to international shortage and supply line disruption. The LEP took part in regional efforts to help coordinate local businesses in producing reusable PPE with locally sourced materials.

- Data and future planning: The availability of economic data is a challenge. The impact of COVID will be carefully assessed as more information materialises – in particular localised data that provides a picture of the impact across West Yorkshire to ensure that those communities and groups that do not usually engage with local government are not overlooked. The LEP has also begun reaching out to BAME business communities.
- Economic recovery boards: Coordination between the newly formed West Yorkshire Economic Recovery Board and each local authority area's own economic recovery task forces must be carefully managed to ensure that resources are diverted to the right places based on need.
- Unemployment: Looking forward, the LEP is preparing for the anticipated 60-70,000 people entering the labour market looking for work in this region by scaling up the LEP's Employment Hub and existing programmes such as the '#futuregoals' programme which provides support to people seeking to change careers.
- Further Education spending: The Adult Education Budget which is due to be devolved in 2021 is currently £63m. The Combined Authority is putting together a case to government suggesting an increase in funding considering the economic conditions
- Support for FE sector: Training and further education sectors have been affected, particularly apprenticeships. The government announced £2,000 grants to encourage apprenticeships and a 'traineeship' scheme which aims to provide 6 weeks-6 months work experience opportunities.
- Youth unemployment: It is feared that young people – school leavers, apprentices and university graduates in particular – will be disproportionately affected by the pandemic. Scrutiny has expressed concerns in the past about young people and apprentices being 'left behind' and it was suggested that the Committee consider how it can best help monitor a quickly changing skills landscape.
- Government support: The government has sought to provide financial support for certain hard-hit sectors. Financial support for construction and cultural sectors was announced, with details to follow on how this funding would be distributed to the regions.
- Consumer spending: Apart from ongoing projects which aim to revitalise town centres and local economies, local authorities are limited in how much they can encourage people to 'go out and spend money' – a necessity for any long term economic recovery particularly in the retail and service sectors. Even prior to COVID, high streets and town centres were struggling – particularly any retail shops that did not have an online presence.

- Local economy: Some positives did emerge from the COVID-19 crisis in there is now a greater awareness and change in thinking amongst consumers towards the value of locally sourced materials and businesses as international and national supply lines were interrupted during lockdown. It is hoped that this trend will help lead to a strengthening of spending and retention of the 'local pound' in the local community and economy.
- Innovation: Past economic downturns have seen an increase in self-employed people, new businesses and existing businesses innovating to supply a new demand. One example of this was a local mattress manufacturer in Morley which managed to use its resources to make reusable, medically reliable gowns for the local NHS trust. They are now selling these to other NHS trusts nationally and have had queries from health providers in the United States.

Resolved: That the report be noted and the topic be revisited at the next committee meeting.

9. Date of the next meeting – 11 September 2020