

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD REMOTELY ON FRIDAY 11 SEPTEMBER 2020

Present:

Cllr Peter Harrand (Chair)	Leeds City Council
Cllr Stephen Baines	Calderdale Council
Cllr James Baker (Deputy Chair)	Calderdale Council
Cllr Kayleigh Brooks (Sub)	Leeds City 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 Rachel Melly	City of York Council
Cllr Sarfraz Nazir	Bradford Council
Cllr Betty Rhodes	Wakefield Council
Cllr Olivia Rowley	Wakefield Council
Cllr Richard Smith	Kirklees 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
Alan Reiss	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Ben Still	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Angela Taylor	West Yorkshire Combined Authority

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Councillors Yusra Hussain and Christine Knight. Councillor Kayleigh Brooks attended as a substitute on behalf of Councillor Knight.

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 10 July 2020

Under matters arising, a member raised some issues with school bus services, including concerns over social distancing measures due to overcrowding. The Committee was told that local authorities were coordinating and seeking to run extra services, including duplicate services, and dedicated school buses where possible – which would require additional funding from government. A more detailed update can be provided to members as matters progress.

Resolved:

- i) That the minutes of the last meeting held on 10 July 2020 be approved.
- ii) That an update on school bus service overcrowding be provided to members.

5. Mayoral devolution – consultation outcomes and next steps

The Committee noted a report of the Director of Policy, Strategy and Communications which presented the outcome of the public consultation on the Scheme and a summary of the response to be submitted to the Secretary of State on the consultation's findings.

No amendments were made to the Scheme as a result of the consultation, but some additional contributions from partner councils would be submitted alongside the consultation results.

Following questions and discussion, the Committee noted that:

- The feedback from ward councillors in their own authorities was generally supportive of the Scheme with some reservations on key issues such as accountability of the mayor.
- Leeds passed a cross party motion ensuring that mayor cannot act alone on spatial planning matters and that each council be able to 'veto' spatial planning decisions which pertain to them – though this was already a component of the devolution scheme.
- Although it was the highest response rate of any combined authority so far, public engagement and awareness of the Combined Authority remains low – especially on the financial consequences of an additional mayoral precept.
- The response rate from 'digitally disconnected' people appeared low despite an external firm being appointed to reach out to digitally disconnected people in the pandemic.

Resolved:

- i) That the report be noted.

- ii) That a note outlining some of the difficulties around reaching digitally disconnected people be provided to members.
- iii) That a note outlining all the Yorkshire wide organisations, boards and groups the Combined Authority is involved in be provided to members.

6. COVID-19 economic recovery and analysis

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Economic Services providing the latest economic and business intelligence on the impact of COVID-19, an update on delivery and development of products/services in response to COVID-19 and the West Yorkshire Economic Recovery Plan.

Following questions and discussion, the Committee noted that:

- The prospect of Brexit has reignited some challenges for local businesses with the most common being finances, supply chains and legal/staffing issues.
- Access to finance continues to be an issue for business throughout the pandemic. Although the authority cannot provide more funding to businesses than the government has provided, it has been able to help and support the economy where it can; advice to businesses, matching graduates looking for work to the needs of companies and continuing to pursue inward investment opportunities. It is also part of the LEP's role to connect businesses with existing business support across the region, e.g. Chamber of Commerce.
- Local authority and LEP business advisors have done a very good job in difficult circumstances during the pandemic to support businesses through it.
- 340,000 people in West Yorkshire are currently furloughed and national schemes are expected to end in October. The unemployment rate has slowly increased and is expected to increase further after furlough scheme ends.
- The situation for graduates is looking increasingly challenging and student graduate retention is a large part of the region's economic and social profile. Analysis could be done to see the effect on graduates in the region.
- Entrepreneurship is one of the focuses of the economic recovery strategy with funding ringfenced for start ups and graduate support. Emphasis in training and 'kickstarter' programmes to ensure that they lead to employment.
- The negatives of the pandemic have created some positivity in that people are rediscovering their local economies and innovating in how they deliver business services and sell products. Local markets have benefited, and the use of home deliveries has helped others compete better.
- Although most of the focus has been on weathering and recovering from COVID, there is an opportunity for authorities to work together to support more local 'community economies' in procurement, supply chains and services in the post-COVID world. No additional funding or powers are necessary, only regional coordination and conscious mutual support.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

7. Corporate planning and performance

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Corporate Services presenting the current position on corporate performance including progress against corporate plan priorities, risk management and budget position.

Following questions and discussion, the Committee noted that:

- The risk register was updated since the last meeting to make COVID-19 related risks and issues clearer on the register.
- There has been little progress in discussions with government on the future of the bus industry and funding issue it is causing for the Combined Authority.
- This is on the hardest budgets the authority has had to set with Brexit, COVID-19 and new mayoral funding all arriving at once.
- Business planning will be limited with the election of the mayor in mind. There will be a clearer picture as the election process progresses, so that the authority can better assess what any successful candidate's priorities might be.
- Work is ongoing to manage the expected integration of staff from the Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner.
- The refurbishment of Wellington House is still underway and the plans include office space for the Mayor and their expected team, in space previously earmarked for the Chair of the Combined Authority.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

8. Scrutiny Work Programme 2020/21

The Committee considered a report of the Scrutiny Officer outlining the 2020/21 Work Programme and received verbal updates from working group leaders.

Working group leaders updated the Committee verbally on their group's work. Governance & Scrutiny working group expect to submit a report presenting different options for scrutiny going forward at the next committee meeting and the Finances & Corporate Working Group has begun planning their next few sessions, starting with the Assurance Framework.

Resolved:

- i) That the work programme be noted.
- ii) That the working group updates be noted.
- iii) That the forward plan of upcoming key decisions be noted.

9. Date of the next meeting – 22 January 2021