

Ideas for scrutinising the mayor directly

Lessons learned from other combined authorities

- **No mayors attend full council meetings or local authority scrutiny meetings.** They are exclusively scrutinised through the combined authority's scrutiny structure and local authority scrutiny members are able to coordinate with regional colleagues – though many are 'dual hatted'.
- Most areas implement some variety of a public **mayoral question time** where scrutiny committees invite the mayor to answer questions and/or present a report/update on their activities.
- Most accountability measures are usually **written into constitutions** and standing orders to ensure that mayors are aware and 'buy in' to the sessions as a means of beneficial public scrutiny.
- **Mayoral attendance varies** across the mayoral combined authority areas. In some areas the mayors attend every meeting or every other meeting, whereas in other areas they are invited once or twice a year for themed/focused sessions on a particular topic or item.
- In areas where the mayor attends more frequently, and it is **less structured**, the questioning is sometimes **perceived as being 'opposition bashing'** and not conducive to good non-partisan scrutiny.
- In these areas, the mayor's update item can also sometimes be **too informal** a conversation between members of a similar party and develop into a **'mayor's announcements'** item which mayors use as convenient press coverage time.
- In other areas with **more structured and organised** mayoral question time sessions, focusing on particular item (the budget) or theme (strategic/policy direction), the sessions can be perceived **as being 'too polished'** as the mayor is able to prepare answers.
- Some authorities operate a system whereby scrutiny members are allowed to **submit written questions to the mayor** or Combined Authority meeting agendas. This usually generates a large number of questions but does allow officers to give precise technical questions (on figures) to keep them outside of a meeting setting.
- Some mayors hold highly publicised **public question time** where the mayor engages in a 'town hall' style event where the public are able to question them on anything.
- **Mayors do not take all MCA decisions on their own** – most decisions are taken collectively by the mayor and leaders. Therefore some of the answers provided by the mayor are often on behalf of the wider authority and not **personal views**.

Suggestions for West Yorkshire

1. Ensure that any **accountability mechanisms are written into constitution** and standing orders to ensure that mayors must attend a certain number of times a year.
2. Ensure that **items involving the mayor are focused** (overview/budget/performance or strategy/policy or decision/project based) but lightly structured so that it is not too polished and not too conversational. Context must be taken into account so that **questions to the mayor are appropriate and yield productive answers** e.g. 'high level' strategic questions if the item is strategy/policy or more precise inquisitive questions if the item focuses on a particular decision or situation.
3. Encourage a preference on **asking questions on decisions that the mayor has the power to take personally** and direct questions that concern the entire combined authority, or portfolio holders, or council leaders, to those individuals. This can include questions relating to 'soft power' – that is **any issue with the mayor may be able to influence even if they do have direct power or responsibility**.

4. Ensure that such mayoral question times are an appropriate length **to allow every member to ask at least one question**, and a follow up.
5. Ensure that the **sessions are appropriately advertised and broadcast**.
6. Administer a '**scrutiny questions system**' where scrutiny **members can submit written questions** that the authority and the mayor must answered within a set number of days, which can then be published. These questions would not be questions of a 'case work' nature, which should be handled through **a different system set up to manage member queries and casework from all ward councillors**.
7. Scrutiny of **portfolio holders, the deputy Mayor/PCC** and chairs of decision-making committees must also take place as well either **alongside the mayor** or separately in their own right.
8. Public involvement in scrutiny mayor question time and/or scrutiny engagement with any **public question time 'town hall' events** managed by comms and engagement teams.
9. **Regular meetings between the mayor and the scrutiny chair** to develop a working relationship and an avenue to handle sensitive issues and situations in a 'critical friend' role in a non-public arena.
10. An attempt to create **greater parity between Scrutiny Chair and Mayor / portfolio holders** – e.g. to ensure that scrutiny chairs are given appropriate access to organisational resources similar to the chairs of other senior committees
11. Amendment of **communications protocols to allow scrutiny an opportunity to comment on any press releases** involving any issue which scrutiny has opted to add to its work programme or has made recommendations on.
12. The **Scrutiny Chair continues to attend Combined Authority meetings and briefings** as an observer and is able to field any questions scrutiny members or other members have on particular items or decisions.