

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD REMOTELY ON FRIDAY 22 JANUARY 2021

Present:

Cllr Peter Harrand (Chair)	Leeds City Council
Cllr Stephen Baines	Calderdale Council
Cllr James Baker (Deputy Chair)	Calderdale Council
Cllr Stephen Fenton	City of York Council
Cllr Eric Firth	Kirklees Council
Cllr Dot Foster	Calderdale Council
Cllr Jacob Goddard	Leeds City Council
Cllr Andrew Hollyer	City of York Council
Cllr Yusra Hussain	Kirklees Council
Cllr David Jones	Wakefield Council
Cllr Christine Knight	Leeds City Council
Cllr Rachel Melly	City of York Council
Cllr Sarfraz Nazir	Bradford 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
Ben Still	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Angela Taylor	West Yorkshire Combined Authority

29. Apologies for absence

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Richard Smith.

30. Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests.

31. Possible exclusion of the press and public

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

32. Minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 2020

Resolved: That the minutes of the last meeting held on 13 November 2020 be approved.

33. Chair's update

The Committee noted a verbal update by the Chair in which he provided an update on progress with the future scrutiny structure the Committee recommended at its last meeting in November.

The Chair explained that the Committee's recommended model ('Option 1' – a select committee) was circulated to Combined Authority members for consultation and their preference was for a multiple committee model along the lines of 'Option 2' which involved far more members in scrutiny. The Chair agreed to explore the possibility of a compromise position which took the spirit of Option 1 and combined it with the scope and size of Option 2 to present to the Combined Authority in March 2021. Members will be informed of the final decision taken.

Members requested the chance to comment on any final option before it is submitted to the Combined Authority.

Resolved:

- i) That the Chair's verbal update be noted.
- ii) That the final proposed scrutiny model be circulated to members for comment prior to its submission to the Combined Authority.

34. Mayoral Devolution update

The Committee considered a report of the Managing Director providing an overview of work underway to become a mayoral combined authority and to implement the devolution deal agreed on 11 March 2020. Since the last meeting, the House of Commons had approved the Mayoral Order and it is now in the House of Lords. It will come into effect as soon as it is approved.

Points raised during discussion included:

- Election campaigning under COVID restrictions has proved challenging and political party leaders remain in contact with the government to ensure that democratic norms can go ahead with minimal interruption.
- The government has indicated that elections are expected to go ahead as normal in May and local authorities are ensuring voters are aware of the opportunity to register to vote by post.
- In the event that elections are delayed, the government would have to introduce emergency legislation to extend the terms of currently elected politicians and police commissioners.
- Work is ongoing between the Combined Authority and local authorities to develop a communications plan to explain and promote the mayoral election widely, and ensure the materials are accessible to all parts of the community.

- The election booklet which will be sent to every household in West Yorkshire is being drafted in accordance with the statutory requirements. All official candidates have the right to put an election address in the booklet. The ultimate responsible officer is the Returning Officer for the election, the chief executive of Leeds City Council Tom Riordan.
- The internal 'Mayoral Combined Authority Board' which is overseeing the workstreams to make the organisation mayor ready is made up of officers, including directors from local authorities and trade union representatives, and reports its activities to the Combined Authority, where all decisions are taken.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

35. Draft Budget 2021/22 and corporate performance

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Corporate Services presenting the draft Budget for 2021/22 and the current position on corporate performance including progress against corporate plan priorities, risk management and budget position.

Following questions and discussion, the Committee noted:

- Scrutiny's Finances & Corporate Working Group would look at the budget in more detail in the coming week before it is submitted to the Combined Authority on 4 February.
- Some funding from central government, in addition to other efficiency measures and redeployment of spending, has allowed a balanced budget to be put forward. Use of reserves has been largely avoided, with most mayoral devolution related preparations funded from the new Gainshare fund. This must be monitored as COVID progresses and if any budget pressures emerge beyond the identified tolerances, the budget would go back to the Combined Authority for reassessment mid-year.
- The police budget must be kept legally separate from the rest of the Combined Authority's budget and must go through a different statutory approval process involving the Police & Crime Panel.
- Like many authorities, the Combined Authority keeps some of its cash deposits with other local authorities as they are considered to be very low risk. It currently has £5m invested with Croydon Council and it is due to be returned in March 2021. Treasury management arrangements are monitored and approved by the Governance and Audit Committee and is monitored on the risk register and no further issues are expected.
- The budget has taken into account and earmarked potential unknowns including governance arrangements, meetings, scrutiny arrangements, the mayor's office, and legal costs.
- The commercial space referenced in the KPIs largely relates to industrial and manufacturing sites rather than office space, which is expected to see a change in demand following experience of home working during COVID.

- Public consultation on the budget has taken place through digital means, mainly on the YourVoice platform. An account of any feedback will be provided alongside the budget at the Combined Authority meeting.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

36. Economic update – COVID-19 and EU Exit

The Committee considered a report and presentation of the Director of Economic Services providing an overview of the latest intelligence on the impact of COVID-19 and the EU Exit on the West Yorkshire economy and measures being taken to support businesses.

Discussion took place around the following topics:

- Helping businesses navigate the post-EU regulatory landscape, which is in high demand, such as in determining point of origin and other new customs arrangements for European facing businesses. Some government funding is available to support this and business support teams at the Combined Authority have delivered workshops digitally during COVID and directed businesses to other available help.
- Digital divide, which COVID-19 has revealed the true extent of. The necessity of home working and home schooling has left many of the most disadvantaged families even worse off unable to access basic services, including support and other services such as banking. A number of Combined Authority schemes and services aim to help bridge the divide, for instance by providing ICT equipment. Members requested further information on these schemes.
- Helping newly unemployed people find new jobs or re-skill. Unemployment has disproportionately affected young people and people in service sectors. Even those still in employment have seen hours and wages reduced or have been furloughed unable to work. The Reboot programme in particular aims to help provide support in this area. Some questions about eligibility of furloughed or recently furloughed people being rehired or accessing support services. Members asked for clarification on these points and information on the impact of minimum wage increases in the current economic condition.
- How West Yorkshire compares with other comparable Combined Authority and LEP areas such as Greater Manchester, the North East and West Midlands. The Combined Authority does benchmark against other areas and currently fares well by comparison, in the upper quartile.

Resolved:

- i) That the report be noted.
- ii) That the further information and clarifications requested by scrutiny members be provided by officers following the meeting.

37. Scrutiny Work Programme 2020/21

The Committee considered a report of the Scrutiny Officer outlining the 2020/21 Work Programme.

Resolved:

- i) That the work programme and agenda for the next meeting be noted.
- ii) That the forward plan of upcoming key decisions be noted.

38. Date of the next meeting – 19 March 2021