

Annual Report 2020/21

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

May 2021



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Introduction

This annual report provides a general summary of overview and scrutiny work undertaken during the 2020/21 municipal year and any conclusions and recommendations made.

What is 'Overview and Scrutiny'?

Overview and Scrutiny (shortened to scrutiny) acts as a check and balance to decision makers at the West Yorkshire Combined Authority, Leeds City Region Enterprise Partnership (the LEP) and their partners. It holds them to account for:

- the policies they adopt
- the money they spend
- the services they provide

Scrutiny **investigates, influences, reports and recommends** ways to strengthen policies, improve services, ensure best value for money and secure long-lasting positive outcomes for local people.

Although scrutiny does not have the power to make or block any decision of the Combined Authority (or the LEP), it does have the power to:

- 'call-in' decisions and make a case for them to be formally reconsidered or changed
- oblige the Combined Authority to respond to its recommendations publicly within two months
- require any member (or senior officer) of the Combined Authority to appear before it

All scrutiny work is led by an independent, politically-balanced group of elected councillors known as the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Membership 2020/21

Each of the five constituent councils (Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees, Leeds and Bradford) and the non-constituent council (York) nominate three members each to the committee.

The Chair of the Committee must also, by law, be a member of a different party to the mayor or the biggest party on the Combined Authority.

Due to the postponement of elections and annual councils in 2020 due to the ongoing pandemic, the membership for this municipal year was rolled over from the previous year.

Chair: Cllr Peter Harrand (June 2019 – present)

Deputy Chair: Cllr James Baker (September 2019 – present)

Members 2020/21

District	Member	Substitutes
Bradford	Cllr Sarfraz Nazir	Cllr Joanne Dodds
	Cllr Rosie Watson	Cllr Carol Thirkill
	Cllr Geoff Winnard	Cllr Naveed Riaz
Calderdale	Cllr Stephen Baines	Cllr Scott Benton (until March 2021)
	Cllr James Baker	Cllr Ashley Evans
	Cllr Dot Foster	Cllr Steve Sweeney
Kirklees	Cllr Paul Davies (until 25 Nov 2020)	Cllr James Homewood
	Cllr Eric Firth (from 25 Nov 2020)	Cllr Rob Walker
	Cllr Yusra Hussain	Cllr Michael Watson
	Cllr Richard Smith	
Leeds	Cllr Peter Harrand	Cllr Neil Buckley
	Cllr Jacob Goddard	Cllr David Jenkins
	Cllr Christine Knight	Cllr Kayleigh Brooks
Wakefield	Cllr David Jones	Cllr Harry Ellis
	Cllr Betty Rhodes	Cllr Lynne Whitehouse
	Cllr Olivia Rowley	Cllr Martyn Ward
York	Cllr Stephen Fenton	Cllr Anne Hook
	Cllr Peter Kilbane	Cllr Claire Douglas
	Cllr Edward Pearson	Cllr Simon Daubeney

Spokespersons

The committee also appoints a few members to act as spokespersons in key policy areas and so that they can maintain oversight of certain issues outside of committee and working group meetings.

Spokesperson(s)	'Portfolio'
Cllr Stephen Baines	<i>Business growth</i>
Cllrs Rosie Watson & Geoff Winnard	<i>Corporate issues</i>
Cllr David Jones	<i>Employment & skills</i>
Cllr James Baker (Deputy)	<i>Environment</i>
Cllr Peter Harrand (Chair)	<i>Financial & strategic issues (incl devolution)</i>
Cllr Dot Foster	<i>Transport</i>

Chair's foreword

Cllr Peter Harrand is a Leeds Councillor representing Alwoodley and has chaired Overview and Scrutiny since June 2019.

Last year I wrote about how eventful my first year as Scrutiny Chair had been with the unexpected and devastating COVID-19 pandemic which affected people and businesses significantly.

Continuing our work from last year, this year scrutiny continued to maintain an overview over COVID related recovery and support efforts, and also began to scrutinise the organisation's mayor-ready preparations including internal corporate matters and changes to governance structures.

We dedicated some time to finance matters as this year has provided some challenging budget setting and business planning decisions in a difficult post-COVID, post-Brexit, post-devolution transition.

One of our top priorities last year was to begin looking at how we could improve scrutiny itself to ensure that there is an active, strong and properly resourced scrutiny function at a Combined Authority which spends on average £1 million a day due to increase after the mayor is elected and new funding released.

As a result of this work, the Combined Authority decided to triple the number of scrutiny committees and members, commit to employing more scrutiny officers and support scrutiny putting in place a number of plans for questioning and scrutinising the new mayor and their activities.

This means I will be the last *sole* Chair of Overview and Scrutiny at the Combined Authority and as always I would like to thank all members of the committee, who I hope will return next year, and all the officers who support scrutiny in its work and all those who gave evidence to the committee and the working groups this year – their contributions are invaluable.



Councillor Peter Harrand

**Chair, Overview and Scrutiny Committee
West Yorkshire Combined Authority**

Work Programme 2020/21

Scrutiny determines its work programme at the beginning of each new municipal year in July when members choose which issues from previous years to revisit and those coming up in the year ahead they want to look at more closely.

The Combined Authority and the LEP support scrutiny's work programming by outlining the key pieces of work and significant decisions planned or expected throughout the year.

Every year the Combined Authority and LEP agree a **Corporate Plan**¹ which outlines their ambitions and targets. Last year, the Combined Authority and the LEP committed themselves to four long term ambitions:

1. 'Enabling inclusive growth'
2. 'Delivering 21st Century transport'
3. 'Boosting productivity'
4. 'Supporting clean growth'

Other key priorities for the Combined Authority and LEP in the 2020/21 municipal year included:

- Finalising into law the mayoral devolution deal for West Yorkshire agreed in March 2020
- Ensuring the organisation is 'mayor-ready' and overseeing the first ever West Yorkshire mayoral election, following final approval by Parliament
- Continue to support people and businesses throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and lead the region's long term economic recovery
- Prepare the region for the country's exit from the European Union and support businesses during the transition
- Support the transport sector and transport users throughout the pandemic
- Continue developing the region's mass transit and connectivity plans in partnership with bus and train operators

The work programme of the main committee and its working groups are outlined below and highlights from some of the key issues considered are explained in more detail in the following section.

¹ <https://www.westyorks-ca.gov.uk/media/3362/corporate-plan-18-19.pdf>

Summary of 2020/21 Work Programme

10 July 2020	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Governance arrangements 2. Work programme approval 3. Annual report 2019/20 4. Mayoral devolution update 5. COVID-19 recovery plan 6. Corporate performance monitoring
11 September 2020	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mayoral devolution update 2. COVID-19 recovery 3. Working group updates 4. Corporate performance monitoring
13 November 2020	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mayoral devolution update 2. Working group updates 3. Scrutiny review report and recommendations 4. Corporate performance monitoring 5. Assurance Framework review
22 January 2021	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mayoral devolution update 2. COVID-19 recovery update 3. Brexit and economic update 4. Budget 2021/22 and corporate planning
19 March 2021	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Future scrutiny arrangements 2. Mayoral devolution update 3. WY mass transit and connectivity plan 4. Budget, gainshare and corporate performance
22 May 2021 (held as a workshop due to COVID-19 remote meeting legislation lapsing)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Future proposed CA committee structure 2. Future scrutiny arrangements and next steps 3. Annual report 2020/21

Working groups

To support its work this year, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee also set up two working groups to focus on reforming scrutiny and governance ahead of the first mayor’s election and oversight of corporate preparations to make the organisation mayor ready.

Working groups are smaller groups of members that undertake scrutiny work outside of committee meetings and then report back to the main committee either through periodic updates at committee meetings and/or with a final end-of-task report when their work is complete.

	Finances & Corporate working group	Governance & Scrutiny working group
Members	Cllr Stephen Baines* Cllr Paul Davies (until Nov 2020) Cllr Jacob Goddard (until Jan 2021) Cllr Rosie Watson Cllr Peter Harrand Cllr Olivia Rowley Cllr Geoff Winnard	Cllr James Baker* Cllr Dot Foster Cllr Peter Harrand Cllr Andrew Hollyer Cllr Yusra Hussain Cllr David Jones
Task	To scrutinise and maintain oversight of the development of new financial arrangements/strategies and organisational and corporate processes/systems – including workforce planning and any matters related to policing. To provide input or make recommendations regarding: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New assurance framework • Financial strategy and arrangements • Budget and business planning • Any changes to corporate systems/processes 	To scrutinise the development of new governance, decision making, and scrutiny arrangements – including any matters related to policing. To provide input into and/or make recommendations regarding: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New governance structure • New scrutiny arrangements

**Lead member*

2020/21 Highlights

This section outlines some highlights and contributions made by scrutiny in 2020/21.

Future scrutiny arrangements – conclusions and recommendations

The Committee set up a working group to undertake a review of current governance and scrutiny arrangements and make recommendations ahead of the finalisation of the devolution deal which would create an elected mayor to lead the Combined Authority as well as increase its powers, functions and funding.

The working group considered how scrutiny operates in other regional authorities including Greater Manchester and Greater London and also considered the differences between local scrutiny models and methods and what was different at a regional level and a much wider geography. Parliamentary and Assembly select committees were also taken into consideration.

Other issues discussed included greater training and support for members, member and chair role profiles, report formats including independent analysis and summaries, possible pre meetings for question planning, greater pre-decision scrutiny of key decisions/projects, the number (and role) of scrutiny officers, engagement with the public and stakeholders, and efficient use of working groups and spokespersons for overview.

In general, there was a consensus that any new combined authority scrutiny model will almost certainly need more resources and support staff, a higher public profile to better engage with the public/stakeholders and a more focused purpose that does not duplicate scrutiny-like work currently undertaken by other committees and advisory panels.

Ultimately the working group concluded by presenting three possible ways forward:

1. **Option 1 – one enhanced select committee:** A single committee (supported by permanent sub-groups focusing on certain areas such as pre decision scrutiny of key projects, public engagement and reviews) operating in 'select committee style' with a wider term of reference, greater operational resources, and significantly enhanced role profiles for scrutiny members and officers to support a more proactive, 'big picture' and strategic approach to scrutiny.
2. **Option 2 – three committees divided thematically:** Three co-equal committees each shadowing one of the main functions, directorates and committees of the Combined Authority in a more reactive, focused approach; one to look at economic policy/services/functions, one on transport policy/services/functions and one more generalist one to cover all other matters, incl. strategic (mayors plan), police and corporate issues. Each of these committees will also still be able to form subgroups and do reviews etc.
3. **Option 3 – two committees divided by function:** Two co-equal committees operating within a binary system where the overview (monitoring, reactive) and scrutiny (focused but proactive) parts are undertaken separately by different

committees allowing chairs, members and officers with particular experience to focus more closely on particular types of scrutiny which require different skills. Each of these committees will also still be able to form subgroups and do reviews etc.

On governance, the scrutiny working group had also concluded that the Combined Authority should review its governance structure ahead of the election of the mayor.

The Committee ultimately voted near unanimously for Option 1 – the ‘single select committee + working groups’ approach and recommended this to the Combined Authority.

The Combined Authority debated the options at its March meeting but ultimately chose to go for Option 2, in order to increase the number of scrutiny committees in operation as well as triple the number of scrutiny members and therefore backbench councillors involved in combined authority and mayoral scrutiny in future. It suggested dividing the three committees along the three themes of corporate, economy and transport.

The Combined Authority later discussed approaches for future committee structures, portfolio holder arrangements and decision making at its April 2021 meeting with a view to finalising a new structure, after the first mayor is elected at the June annual meeting.

Economic issues: COVID-19 impact and economic recovery

The biggest issue facing the region, the country and the world since March 2020 has continued to be how to support people and the economy throughout the worst of the pandemic in addition to planning for the recovery.

The Committee held several sessions with key directors and teams responsible with monitoring the economic situation and overseeing business support services and programmes.

The Committee highlighted, amongst other things, that:

- Local authority and LEP business advisors have done a very good job in difficult circumstances during the pandemic to support businesses through it.
- 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.
- The prospect of Brexit has reignited some challenges for local businesses with the most common being finances, supply chains and legal/staffing issues. 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.

- Helping newly unemployed people find new jobs or re-skill is a priority. 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.
- 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.
- 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.

The Committee will continue to monitor the economy throughout the next municipal year.

Transport issues: mass transit and connectivity plans

As part of the Combined Authority and Transport Committee's consultation into its much awaited plans for connectivity and mass transit in West Yorkshire, the Committee invited the Head of Transport Policy to answer questions on the consultation and plans.

The Committee highlighted, amongst other things, that:

- York's place in the strategy as the transport link is mutually important to York and both West and North Yorkshire. The elements of the connectivity plan relating to East Leeds in particular seek to connect to York and North Yorkshire and further work will be done to consider how to improve those links further when developing the mass transit plans.
- After the Transport for the North (TFN) integrated/smart ticketing project was ended by the government, the Combined Authority has continued conversations with the government on similar issues and the Williams Rail Review, which featured smart ticketing. The Combined Authority has also made its own progress in further developing its own ticketing offers and policies.
- Reliability of public transport and the systems being developed to support the network is integral to convincing people to continue using or switch to public transport in future. There have been improvements in real time tracking technology recently in terms of accuracy and also further information such as telling commuters how full the buses are is being introduced.
- As transport services are still delivered by different privately owned companies with different priorities, withdrawing an unprofitable service on one route will disrupt the entire connection that relies on that route's service. This makes the parts of the connectivity plans which include building on existing partnerships with transport operators including the Rail Forum and Bus Alliance, which seek to entrench a culture of joint decision making and consultation on things that effect multiple partners, vital to its success.
- In the past, mass transit plans for the region have been perceived as being Leeds-centric and effort should be undertaken to make it clear to the public that it is a regional plan that covers all of West Yorkshire – but still takes into account the numbers, where people are travelling to and from, which leans towards Leeds currently.
- It is important that the transport system supports economic habits, not just in terms of connecting residential areas to employment areas, but also in the timing of services so that shift workers who work 'irregular' shifts are still able to use public transport to travel to and from work.
- Historically transport funding was often ward based and led to situations where certain services stopped at a ward border. For future connectivity plans, although ward data and needs will provide context, they won't inform funding decisions directly. The aim is to approach connectivity at a regional strategic level.
- Although the connectivity plan and mass transit is concerned with a 'macro' level and strategic approach to the whole region, localised 'micro connectivity' issues and 'micro services' within certain areas should not be forgotten. E.g. smaller buses running shorter localised routes to local amenities such as leisure centres.

- Inclusion of 'seldom heard' groups has been a welcome priority in the consultation. Webinars were chosen as they achieved greater engagement than usual paper surveys. Invites and materials have been sent through partners and their distribution networks across the board including in education and business sectors.
- Other matters around inclusivity include the seeming disappearance of paper timetables from many bus stops which is not helpful for people without phone and internet access. Colleagues will look into proposals being developed in Greater Manchester about disabled passenger badges to help passengers who need priority seating even if they have non-visible disabilities.

The Committee to revisit this issue again after the consultation had concluded.

Next steps in 2021/22

Next year, scrutiny will look and feel very differently as the Combined Authority triples the number of scrutiny committees and scrutiny members which will ensure that a lot more specialised scrutiny can take place on important corporate, transport and economic issues.

The Mayor

Mayoral devolution is the biggest change to the Combined Authority since its establishment in 2014 and scrutiny has a clear responsibility to scrutinise and maintain oversight of the newly elected powerful mayor.

It is expected that each scrutiny committee will hold a Mayor's Question Time at least once within the municipal year in order to question the Mayor on their priorities and scrutinise their performance in delivering those priorities and services efficiently.

The main priorities

COVID-19 remains one of the biggest crises the region has had to contend with in generations. The full implications of COVID-19 on the region and its economy are still to be determined but it is already clear that it will continue to have a significant long-term impact.

Now that the vaccination programme is progressing, the attention is once again shifting to economic recovery efforts which will have been overseen by the West Yorkshire Economic Recovery Board, a working group of the West Yorkshire Combined Authority, and scrutiny will continue to monitor the economy and actions being taken in support of recovery.

The other priorities around the climate emergency, improving transport, boosting productivity and inclusive economic growth must also be considered as well as any new priorities chosen by the incoming Mayor.

Postponed reviews

Just prior to the outbreak of COVID-19 in the UK, a scrutiny working group begun speaking to key private sector members and local academics and experts in order to gain some insight into what work on climate emergency is being done and what could be done better. Although COVID-19 interrupted the initial work, the committee has resolved to pass the issue onto the new committees in the coming year to consider continuing that work.

Prior to COVID-19, another working group had also just completed the evidence gathering stage of its review into the business grants and support schemes by making a series of site visits to local businesses across the city regions to interview SME business owners before the lockdown was imposed as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak. This naturally affected not just the review but the economic conditions and the experience of businesses that the review was investigating. Consequently, the committee will also pass this review onto the new economy scrutiny committee to consider as part of its wider COVID-19 recovery related scrutiny work.

Find out more and get involved

Find out more about scrutiny at the Combined Authority and view agendas, reports and minutes, please visit the website here: <https://westyorks-ca.gov.uk/>

Scrutiny committee meetings take place in public and anyone is welcome to attend.

Get in touch

Scrutiny is keen to hear from members of the public on issues of concern in the West Yorkshire and York area that relate to the functions and responsibilities of the Combined Authority and Leeds City Region Enterprise Partnership (LEP).

You can contact scrutiny:

By email: scrutiny@westyorks-ca.gov.uk

In writing: Scrutiny Officer
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