

Notes of **Inquorate** Corporate Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 24 September 2021

Item 1 – Welcome and apologies

Attendees (9/11): Jeanette Sunderland, Carol Thirkill, Bob Felstead, George Robinson, Andrew Cooper, Mel Stephen, Jacob Goddard, Peter Harrand, Betty Rhodes

Apologies (8): Geoff Winnard (DC), Mike Barnes, Jane Dowson, Megan Swift, Paul Davies, Nadeem Ahmed, David Jones, Rachel Melly

Officers: Ben Still, Jon Sheard, Louise Porter, Khaled Berroum

Skipped items 2 and 3 as the meeting was inquorate.

Item 4 – Scrutiny and governance arrangements

Members received an outline of scrutiny standing orders and other governance arrangements established at the Combined Authority annual meeting.

In questions and discussions, members discussed a number of things, including:

- How the climate and environment brief was split between the three committees – due to the lack of a dedicated climate/environment focused committee, each of the three scrutiny committees would look at the environment from their POV. Economy would look at private / green sector, Transport at transport and Corporate would look at it from an internal corporate and strategic/assurance POV.
- Substitutes for parties that don't have alternate members from their party and district on another committee – it was agreed that the scrutiny officer will coordinate with governance team to find a compromise within the framework of current legislative and constitutional limits
- Work programme / remit overlap – Chairs will meet and liaise regularly to ensure the committees are staying within their remits and agree where there are overlaps or encroachments. It will help if the committees' workplans are presented in a unified way – one work programme, in three parts, so that members can clearly see what the others are doing.
- Hybrid meetings – Theoretically hybrid meetings are legally possible if there are enough voting members physically present for quorum and then additional members can attend and participate, but not vote, via zoom on a screen, at the Chair's discretion. However, the CA does not yet have the technology to do so. It is being explored in the new CA HQ building but that is some time away, 2022 at least.
- Number of meetings does not leave much time to scrutinise a lot – committee must prioritise strictly. Likely to be reactive to Mayor's agenda and activities but should take care to identify key issues and scrutinise them in the right format.
- Call-ins – It was noted that it has never happened. Scope for more proactive system where officers help members look at certain upcoming decisions in an informal manner and sound out members for any potential issues so that by the time call-in period begins members are in a stronger position to call something in.
- Quorum is a challenge – As evidenced by this meeting, even if a call-in is made, if the subsequent meeting is not quorate or cannot get enough members than the call-in will expire without proper scrutiny and a decision on whether to recommend it. It is important that meetings are quorate.

Item 5 – Chairs comments and announcements

The Chair, who previously chaired Overview & Scrutiny prior to the new expanded structure, introduced himself to new members and noted that:

- He and the Deputy Chair met with the other scrutiny chairs and senior officers to better understand the CA's corporate and strategy functions and activities going forward.
- the Transport Committee is currently under an internal review which is likely to change its terms of reference and membership significantly and effect the formal scrutiny of transport issues and services. Although the Corporate Scrutiny Committee's remit includes governance, it was agreed that Transport Scrutiny Committee would take the lead on responding to the review if required, after draft proposals were agreed.

Item 6 – Corporate functions and priorities overview

Members received a high-level overview of the corporate services and activity delivered by the CA as well as an outline of current corporate priorities, projects and strategies.

Questions and discussion centred around:

- How focus on equality and diversity has increased significantly since the Mayor's election as it's a key priority and pledge of hers. Many corporate priorities are being reviewed with that in mind. An equality and diversity officer has been hired. Overall, it is a work in progress.
- How often KPI data is collected and monitored: KPI data is collected monthly and reported quarterly. The current set is from Q1 of 2021/22 financial year (April-June). It was suggested that KPI data could be uploaded monthly to a suitable place where it could be monitored by scrutiny more regularly. Scrutiny might also find it useful to know which KPIs have improved, stalled, or regressed since the previous reporting period – in addition to the RAG ratings outlining if the overall targets are being achieved. Officers agreed to consider these suggestions.
- Opportunities to harmonise internal systems as each partner authority upgrades them: there is a 'Partnerships' workstream within the CA's internal 'MCA Ready' programme which is responsible for identifying corporate opportunities like that.
- Budget setting process and pressures on the budget: There are two budget working groups – one focusing on overall strategy, and one focusing on transport spending in particular. There are many pressures on the budget this year due to the aftermath of COVID on various industries. This could be a particular focus of scrutiny this year when it scrutinises the budget.
- Methodology of impact assessments – such as carbon: The CA is currently undergoing a project to audit the carbon impacts of all its service areas and projects as part of the wider climate action plan and internal carbon reduction plan. Officers agreed to check if local climate commissions are involved in consultations in this area, and also anyone else being engaged with.

Item 7 – Corporate Scrutiny Work Programme discussion

The Chair and members discussed a number of principles and approaches to work programming, topic selection and future meetings – including:

- Acknowledging the level of resource capacity and time available to scrutiny – one scrutiny officer and three further committee meetings, with limited support from the wider officer corps when needed.
- responsibility to read reports which are requested and take up officers' time, otherwise officers scarce time is taken up inappropriately

- Chair suggested consideration of any mayoral pledge directly related to corporate and in general looking at the financial, resource and deliverability capacity of the CA in general.

Members' discussion, questions and suggestions included the following:

Partnerships, soft power and other opportunities:

- WY internal: how well does the Combined Authority work with the five constituent authorities (and York) in all matters – from officer liaison, policy development, project and service delivery, communications and any other cooperation? What are the 'joined-up working' processes like? How effective is joint working currently? Where are the gaps, obstacles and areas of improvement? What are relationships like between the CA and between councils? How is knowledge sharing by officers across the five councils?
- External: what other partnership opportunities exist? What is being done to foster greater relationships between WYCA and central government, the public, key stakeholders and operators? Or relationships between combined authorities and metro-mayors? How well does the mayor cooperate with the other mayors, particularly on pan-northern and cross-CA border issues, such as through the M10 (which has its own secretariat and workstreams)? Are any new partnerships and being pursued?
- Comms/engagement: what is the focus of the CA's current comms/marketing/engagement strategy, particularly since the Mayor's election? How well does the CA engage with elected members and the public on its schemes during consultation stages?

Strategic and financial decision-making:

- Budget and business planning process: what are the biggest pressures on the budget this year and how are they being mitigated? What are the biggest risks (and mitigations)?
- Financial/spending: How does the Mayor and CA decide what to invest in, how are spending priorities determined? For example, how are decisions about what Gainshare is spent on arrived at? How does the strategic investment framework fit in with this? What is the process for consideration and monitoring?
- Sources of funding: availability of funding determines what can be done. What opportunities for new or extra funding are available to the CA to potentially pursue? What are other MCAs doing? What is the current progress on business rate retentions or plans on precept?
- Overall priorities and consistencies: How are priorities ultimately determined – particularly when a conflict between two different priorities arises? (E.g. it could be argued that commitment to carbon reduction vs road building. Or something like creating jobs / economic growth vs climate action and carbon reduction). What priorities have been left out – and why?
- Impact assessments (E.g. carbon impact, EDI etc assessments): what is the methodology and process, how is it assessed during decision making (E.g. in committee meetings etc.)
- Evolution and effectiveness of new governance and scrutiny structure: these have changed significantly since the Mayor's election – how are they coming along? Are there any concerns already evident? When will they be reviewed for effectiveness – and how?

Workforce and internal systems:

- How was the workforce evolved over the last few years – particularly since the MCA was established? What are future expectations and current plans to prepare for

them? What are the biggest challenges? Are there any areas of concern – such as resources, recruitment/retention or overall delivery capacity?

- How are we utilising and attracting talent (local talent in particular) during recruitment? How well are we retaining this talent within the organisation? How well are staff developed and 'up skilled' long term?
- What's the internal approach to apprenticeships and across the five councils? Is there cooperation?
- Which internal systems are due for an upgrade? Is there a capacity to engage in more harmonisation between the constituent authorities on corporate matters and systems used such as HR, finance, etc or a shared project management hub?
- What is the CA's approach to cyber security and ICT resilience? How has this approach evolved since the pandemic as reliance on technology and vulnerability to system/information security has increased?

Next meeting date – 19 November 2021, MAYORS QUESTION TIME, venue to be confirmed (most likely Leeds Civic Hall – Committee Room 6/7)