

Annual Report 2021/22

Corporate, Economy and Transport Scrutiny Committees

June 2022



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Introduction

This annual report provides a general summary of overview and scrutiny work undertaken during the 2021/22 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 (CA) (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 2021/22

Our scrutiny function consists of three committees each with 16 cross-party councillors from across West Yorkshire and York who are 'backbenchers' – that is, councillors who are not members of a local council's cabinet or executive.

The three committees are:

- **Corporate Scrutiny Committee** (chaired by Cllr Peter Harrand, Leeds)
- **Transport Scrutiny Committee** (chaired by Cllr Amanda Parsons-Hulse, Calderdale)
- **Economy Scrutiny Committee** (chaired by Cllr Richard Smith, Kirklees)

Corporate Scrutiny Committee

Chair: Cllr Peter Harrand (2019– present)

Deputy Chair: Cllr Geoff Winnard (2019– present)

Members 2021/22

District	Member	Substitutes
Bradford	Councillor Geoff Winnard	Councillor Alun Griffiths
	Councillor Jeanette Sunderland	
	Councillor Carol Thirkill	
Calderdale	Councillor Mike Barnes	
	Councillor George Robinson	
	Councillor Megan Swift	
Kirklees	Councillor Andrew Cooper	Councillor Susan Lee-Richards
	Councillor Paul Davies	
	Councillor Melanie Stephen	
Leeds	Councillor Peter Harrand	
	Councillor Jane Dowson	
	Councillor Jacob Goddard	
	Councillor Tony Homewood	
Wakefield	Councillor David Jones	
	Councillor Betty Rhodes	
York	Councillor Rachel Melly	

Economy Scrutiny Committee

Chair: Cllr Richard Smith (2019– present)

Deputy Chair: Cllr Stephen Baines MBE (2019– present)

Members 2021/22

District	Member	Substitutes
Bradford	Councillor Aneela Ahmed	
	Councillor Bob Felstead	
	Councillor Zafar Iqbal	
Calderdale	Councillor Stephen Baines	
	Councillor Susan Press	
	Councillor Audrey Smith	
Kirklees	Councillor Richard Smith	
	Councillor Manisha Kaushik	
	Councillor Harpreet Uppal	
Leeds	Councillor Jonathan Bentley	
	Councillor Kayleigh Brooks	
	Councillor Dawn Collins	
Wakefield	Councillor Tony Hames	
	Councillor Olivia Rowley	
	Councillor Tony Wallis	
York	Councillor Andrew Hollyer	

Transport Scrutiny Committee

Chair: Cllr Amanda Parsons-Hulse (2019– present)

Deputy Chair: Cllr Peter Caffrey (2019– present)

Members 2021/22

District	Member	Substitutes
Bradford	Councillor Peter Clarke	
	Councillor Mohsin Hussain	
	Councillor Ruth Wood	
Calderdale	Councillor Amanda Parsons-Hulse	
	Councillor Peter Caffrey	
	Councillor Dot Foster	
Kirklees	Councillor Donald Firth	
	Councillor Yusra Hussain	Councillor Andrew Pinnock
	Councillor Anthony Smith	
Leeds	Councillor Robert Finnigan	
	Councillor Sharon Hamilton	
	Councillor Paul Wray	

Wakefield

Councillor Harry **Ellis**
Councillor Jackie **Ferguson**
Councillor Nic **Stansby**

York

Councillor Stephen **Fenton**

Chairs' Foreword



Cllr Peter Harrand



Cllr Richard Smith



Cllr Amanda Parsons-Hulse

We are pleased to present the first joint Scrutiny Annual Report for the 2021/22 municipal year. We have had a successful year investigating, influencing, and reporting ways to strengthen policies, improve services, ensure best value for money and secure long-lasting positive benefits for local people.

The 2021/22 municipal year saw the implementation of our newly expanded Scrutiny Function. It has been a year of learning and development and at the latter end of the year, reflection on lessons learned to influence work planning for the year ahead.

In the municipal year of 2021/22, we dedicated some time to financial matters, particularly receiving detailed updates on budget and business planning. We attended workshops on budget planning and inward investment (including Channel 4) and we focussed on behaviour change relating to the usage and service provision of public transport. We also held three successful Mayor's Question Times in which we questioned the Mayor on her direct and soft powers relating to each of our Committees' pre-agreed topics.

March 2022 saw the long-awaited re-opening of our newly refurbished and modernised Wellington House Offices for meetings. We are pleased to have held our final meetings of the municipal year face to face at Wellington House and we look forward to holding more in person meetings in the coming year.

We would like to thank the members of our Committees for their flexibility, commitment, and hard work, we do hope you will return next year. We would also like to acknowledge officers for their continued support, comprehensive reports and invaluable contributions.

We would also like to take this opportunity to invite the residents of West Yorkshire to provide suggestions of topic areas in line with our Terms of References to be scrutinised in the coming year. Contact the Scrutiny Team: Scrutiny@westyorks-ca.gov.uk

Councillor Peter Harrand
Chair, Corporate Scrutiny Committee
West Yorkshire Combined Authority

Councillor Richard Smith
Chair, Economy Scrutiny Committee
West Yorkshire Combined Authority

Councillor Amanda Parsons-Hulse
Chair, Transport Scrutiny Committee
West Yorkshire Combined Authority

Work Programme 2021/22

Each Scrutiny Committee determines its work programme at the beginning of every 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 in more detail.

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. Five key areas of focus were identified as follows:

1. Boosting productivity
2. Enabling inclusive growth
3. Delivering 21st century transport
4. Tackling the climate emergency
5. Policing and Crime

Summary of 2021/22 Work Programmes

Committee	Topics
Corporate Scrutiny	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Partnerships and mayoral soft power2. Budget and business planning3. Overall strategic and financial decision-making4. Workforce and corporate systems
Transport Scrutiny	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Buses (franchising and improvement plans)2. Behaviour change in decarbonisation3. Freight (including waterways)4. Road management and policy5. Rail reforms
Economy Scrutiny	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. COVID-19 recovery: growth, jobs and skills2. Impact of inward investment (Incl. Channel 4 & culture)3. Rural issues4. Housing pledge and powers
All Committees	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. (Relevant) Mayors Pledges2. Work programme

¹ [West Yorkshire Combined Authority Corporate Plan 2021 - 22 \(westyorks-ca.gov.uk\)](https://www.westyorks-ca.gov.uk)

All information correct at time of print (June 22)

2021/22 Highlights

This section briefly outlines some highlights of each scrutiny committee in 2021/22.

Corporate Scrutiny Committee

Budget Workshop

The Committee received an in-depth presentation on the budget, Gainshare and business planning. Members discussed in detail the Gainshare spending breakdown and the five corporate priorities: boosting productivity, enabling inclusive growth, tackling the climate emergency, delivering 21st century transport and securing money and powers.

Integrated Corporate Systems (ICS)

Members received updates on the implementation of ICS which was one of the key corporate projects for the year. The project aimed to upgrade current HR, finance and monitoring systems with a new 'off the shelf' system – which could also be customised if necessary. Members discussed the challenges installing the system and how robust the plan was in place to monitor progress and how future proof the system's cloud-based infrastructure was.

Assurance Framework

Members were provided with an update on progress relating to the changes proposed to the Leeds City Region Local Assurance Framework arising from the 2022 annual review. Members discussed how overspends were addressed through the flexibility in the Assurance Framework within tolerances set out for each project individually by the CA. The complexity, size and value of each project determined which criteria it was subject to and which decision points it would go through and where the decision would be made. Members were informed that the Carbon Impact Assessment Tool was due to come into place on 28 February 2022 it was suggested that the Tool was sent to members when available.

Mayor's Question Time

The committee posed questions relating to four pre-agreed topics: devolution settlement and powers vs 'soft power', partnership working across West Yorkshire and strategic alignment, Gainshare spending and Budget and business planning and internal corporate matters.

Budget, Business Planning and Funding Priorities

Members received several updates and assisted by providing constructive feedback which had been incorporated into future papers. Members sought clarification on a number of things such as clarity of definitions in target setting and methodology when assessing achievement/performance, impact of inflation and EDI target setting.

Transport Committee Review

The committee received an update on the Transport Committee Review, members sought clarification on several things and provided feedback on the proposal. Key areas of clarification included allowances, the aim of the review, role of Deputy Chairs and cross-boundary working. Members wished to know who was responsible for setting the parameters, where ideas originated from and whether the conclusions were motivated by evidence or influenced by political concerns. This was considered to be a potential future topic of enquiry for the Committee.

Introductory Reports

The committee received introductory reports on workforce, social value in procurement and cyber security which will be scrutinised in the coming year.

Economy Scrutiny Committee

COVID-19 Economic Recovery Plan

Members received several updates on the COVID-19 Economic Recovery Plan including business support schemes, access to funding, entrepreneurship programme, fair wages and working conditions, retired workers re-entering work force, disadvantaged communities and inclusion, climate action, green jobs/skills, assets and infrastructure and research development and intelligence.

Rural Issues

The committee discussed and focussed on digital infrastructure and delivery and support for businesses in rural areas.

Members discussed the following:

- Fuel poverty - the particular issues that rural communities face that can lead to fuel poverty such as proximity to the gas network and building types in rural areas usually being larger and older buildings.
- Funding – the continued uncertainty around funding as the Combined Authority waited to hear from government on continued growth hub funding and details of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, amongst others. The Growth Hub was vital to cross-council working in business support and growth.
- Broadband – viability in rural areas, how broadband needs are assessed, the thinking behind the Government targets for roll-out and the challenges with broadband provision on unadopted streets in relation to the Gigabit rollout. It was acknowledged that some for businesses are in hard-to-reach 'disconnected' areas and although business relocation was an option it was not something being advocated for strategically.

Housing Pledge and Powers

The Committee investigated the early work on fulfilling the Mayor's pledge on affordable housing. In particular, the Committee discussed the achievability of the affordable housing pledge, the Combined Authority's housing role and powers and the Combined Authority's 'developers note'.

Inward Investment Workshop

Members received a detailed presentation which was split into two sections, part one on wider inward investment and part two which gave an update on Channel 4. Members looked at performance, an overview of return on investment, additionality, Economic Impact Report findings and the Creative Catalyst.

Mayor's Question Time

The committee asked questions relating to five pre-agreed topics: partnerships and delivery, skills and jobs, businesses, culture and housing.

Transport Scrutiny Committee

Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) and Enhanced Partnership

The committee raised various questions on the bus recovery grant, BSIP funding shortfall, zero emission buses, flexi bus and the overall concern of service reliability.

Discussion included:

- Implementation date and numerical targets
- HGV and bus driver shortage
- Digital accessibility and information
- Audio-visual accessibility on buses
- Demand led transport services
- Mcard and general ticketing pricing
- Connectivity and planning
- Zero emission fleet
- Promotion of public transport in schools

Mayor's Question Time

The committee posed questions relating to five pre-agreed topics: Mayor/CA's powers and funding, buses (including franchising, service routes/reliability and fares), mass transit system, rail (including HS2/3 and IRP) and active travel (including infrastructure).

Rail Update

The committee received updates on the latest national and regional rail restructuring and questioned officers on the below:

- **Governance Structure and Model:** Members discussed the Williams-Shapps White Paper (published last summer) and expressed concern that it focussed on 'branding' rather than service provision and infrastructure. It was discussed that the purpose of the changes is to create greater accountability in a single body across infrastructure and services which has been missing under the previous arrangement to help ensure the previous rail timetable chaos doesn't happen again.
- **Ownership of Rail Stock:** The ownership of the rolling stock was unclear, and the Officer confirmed he would seek clarification.

- **Peak and Off-peak Rail Fares:** Members were concerned due to the lack of clarity of the current Peak and Off-peak rail fare pricing system which seemed to penalise workers and students. Peak and Off-peak fares were introduced around six years ago to mitigate overcrowding on trains. Members heard that the commuter market continued to be lower than pre-covid but rail travel for leisure had increased significantly.
- **Zero-carbon Ambitions:** Members noted that there is an in-built carbon impact from rail infrastructure and from the power supply and that rail travel is expected to grow as people return to places of work.
- **Impact of HS2:** Members discussed the impact of the HS2 plans being re-looked at again. The decision was being assessed and next steps negotiated by the Managing Director and Mayor with the Department for Transport.
- **East-West Rail Links:** The importance of rail links between East-West, West Yorkshire, Yorkshire and the Humber and North-West as opposed to further links with London was discussed. The East-West rail link was described as the Transport for the North 'showpiece' to underpin the need for greater economic activity.

Behaviour Change

The Committee had a detailed discussion about behaviour change, associated psychology, young people and education, motivators/perceived barriers of public transport, importance of infrastructure and reliability. The committee looked forward to developing this piece of work in the coming municipal year.

Key aspects of the discussion were as below:

- **Psychology:** Members heard about various psychology studies such as 'Pavlov's Dog' and 'Bandura's Bobo Doll' and a case study utilising gamification. Members also discussed the application of a rewards system such as discounts, for public transport to encourage higher patronage and increase usage.
- **Young People and Education:** The importance of targeting young people was discussed, using the education system and initiatives in schools. An example of this was 'Own Our Streets' run recently in Wakefield which encouraged the use of buses or active travel to travel to and from school. With younger people becoming increasingly digitally connected, Members considered the use of apps and building a travel network based on the needs of the next generation.
- **Time:** Members thought there was a lack of emphasis on the time consumed by different modes of travel, whilst monetary price was the main major motivator/demotivator, the length of time a journey takes was also important. Members discussed methods to encourage people to walk to their destination such as using signage with journey time information.

- **Motivators / Perceived Barriers:** Members discussed in detail motivators and perceived barriers for people using public transport and active travel. The importance of promoting benefits such as monetary savings and fitness as well as environmental advantages was also considered. The use of common marketing techniques was discussed in addition to utilising the new luxury branded electric two-wheelers to motivate greater use.
- **Infrastructure:** The importance of service quality and infrastructure was emphasised, prior to promotion of the service it needed to be of high standard, reliable and meet key motivators to ensure people would consistently use and transition to using public transport and active modes of travel.

Mayor's Question Time

In the 2021/22 municipal year the Scrutiny Committees each held one Mayor's Question Time to question the Mayor on the full range of matters within her remit and relating to her pledges relevant to each Committee.

Corporate Scrutiny Committee

Direct mayoral powers: Mayors' powers differ by area as each devolution deal is bespoke. West Yorkshire's planning powers may be expanded following national planning reforms planned by the government and it is felt that additional powers on climate related issues are important to tackle environmental issues, in particular when related to buses and other existing transport issues, which still require government's final approval.

Soft power and influence: A significant part of mayoral power is 'soft power' that is based on profile, influence and relationships. The Mayor spends a lot of time building and maintaining relationships with a range of stakeholders, from the partner councils, to local transport operators, and government ministers. As a former MP the Mayor has a number of pre-existing relationships with ministers and council leaders, and the goal of current communications activity is to raise the authority and mayor's profiles to increase soft power capacity. There is a balance to be made between working with central government constructively and criticising some decisions as necessary.

Bidding for funding: A lot of the Combined Authority time is spent identifying or bidding for funding. Officer capacity for this has increased over the years and the CA has been relatively successful in the level of funding won. The capacity to participate in bidding and securing funds is also under review.

Gainshare spending strategy: a new form of local government spending, Gainshare is not ringfenced but must be spent on agreed priorities. There are concerns that Gainshare spending would be used as a 'slushfund' or be distributed along 'political' lines. There is a debate as to whether the money should be distributed equally between council areas or spent strategically to fulfil the Mayor's manifesto pledges and schemes with the highest overall impact, focusing on outcomes/outputs. However, the CA formally agreed to spend the funding strategically and did not consider equal distribution.

Current plans are to ensure that all Mayors Pledges have spending and activity against them and all Gainshare spending requests be judged against how they will achieve strategic objectives. All spending will go through the usual decision-making processes at public committee meetings and will be subject to scrutiny call-in to avoid any undue favouritism and absence of rigour.

Borrowing against Gainshare: There is potential to borrow against Gainshare to increase level of long-term investment. This possibility is being explored as part of budget planning for next year and medium term. There are advantages to using it to raise extra money for investments, especially as Gainshare is not indexed to inflation over the 30 years. Borrowing also has its risks and downsides which must be explored

thoroughly, not least ‘tying’ the hands of successors and increasing the organisation’s debt commitment costs over time.

Budget and business planning: Budget planning across local government is difficult this year in the wake of COVID-19. At the CA, the biggest challenges are risks in transport funding, potential pay award, and the risks arising from uncertainty about government funding as Growth Deals and European funding comes to an end this year. Commitments have been made not to introduce a mayoral precept or increase the transport levy in this financial year, so work is ongoing to find savings to ensure the budget is balanced. The current target is to plan to mayoral term lengths – the first term being three years and then the four years after as most business planning is now being aligned to mayoral pledges which have informed corporate priorities.

Partnership working and strategic alignment across councils: The Mayor and council leaders work closely. Council leaders are not only members of the CA, but the Mayor and leaders meet frequently to lead the organisation and ensure that activity, policies and investments are aligned and in the region’s benefit. This level of partnership is a core part of the CA’s decision-making structures and good working relationships between the leaders and Mayor is vital. The Mayor does not instruct council leaders on policies for their area, which they are best placed to know.

ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) / EDI (Equality, Diversity, Inclusion): ESG/EDI issues have increased in prominence as a key Mayoral strategic priority. Work is underway to recruit a regional Inclusivity Champion and inclusivity impact and assessment has now been deployed in all reports (and assurance framework analysis) and new services and policies are being developed to plug inclusion gaps (e.g. quotas in programmes targeting individuals/communities). There is still work underway to assess and determine a way forward in terms of ESG and procurement and seeking living wage accreditation in the organisation’s suppliers and partners (as the CA already pays living wage to employees). It is considered vital that the authority ‘practices what it preaches’ in this area.

6 months in – first impressions: The Mayor’s role is very diverse. Sometimes there is a lot of focus on PR and building profile, meeting people and representing the region in the media and at events, together with the decision making and strategizing and building ideas in meetings. There has been a steep learning curve but the organisation has been well equipped to onboard a new Mayor. Some changes were needed, in building a new bespoke Mayor’s office and in increasing external communications capacity to cater to the needs of a Mayoral operation.

Economy Scrutiny Committee

Partnerships and Delivery

- Quality of partnerships: the Mayor felt that the Local Authorities were aligned and working well together, they all had similar challenges and agreed on solutions.
- Delivery capacity: Gainshare was being used to support each member authority in developing a pipeline of projects ready for bidding in new government funding

announcements. Councils which had projects ready had an advantage when funding was announced. The Mayor felt government didn't understand delivery capacity issues facing local government and was too demanding in the number of funding announcements and the limited deadlines associated.

- York: West Yorkshire worked with York on various joint schemes, not just in transport, but also in business. Further devolution to York was supported as it would also benefit West Yorkshire.
- Leeds-centricity & West Yorkshire levelling up: Members had the perception of Leeds centricity. Other cities and towns felt side-lined, particularly on office space. Wakefield Council was bidding for the new Rail HQ, but it was bidding against larger areas/authorities such as Doncaster, Preston and York.

Jobs and skills

- Members heard of the use of the AEB budget to respond to reactive labour needs such as the HGV driver training during the recent shortage.
- Green jobs: There was demand for green jobs in the development of EV charging infrastructure and EV mechanics, retrofitting homes opportunities and the use of AEB funding to help. Members wished to know the definition of a 'green job'; to ensure it was not the marketing industry 'greenwashing' campaigns, but direct jobs for example as EV related workers and electric boiler fitters.
- Members were informed that the number of people in work and claiming Universal Credit had increased significantly.
- Parent workers: The importance of support for parent workers, particularly women.
- Over 50s: The CA wanted to support people to reskill as their careers progressed. Older workers had been positively targeted through the employment Hub to help people get back into work.
- University Engagement: The Mayor had regular meetings with Vice Chancellors encouraging positive engagement. The Mayor emphasised the importance of careers advice, working with businesses and helping young people make important choices.

Business

- Support for small businesses: historically the government focussed on businesses with growth potential. There were various versatile initiatives to support small/medium sized businesses including integral local, community businesses such as 'corner shops'.
- Cost of living: the cost of living crisis was affecting business costs/expenses and there were schemes in place to advise/fund businesses helping them in reducing energy costs through greater efficiency.
- Grants vs advice – Members felt that on occasion, businesses needed invaluable advice rather than money which the CA did provide.
- Late payments: Businesses and in particular small businesses struggled with late/backdated payments which was a recognised issue. Members heard this problem was addressed as part of the Fair Work Charter.
- Inclusive growth – Members felt there was a lack of clarity around the definition of 'inclusive growth', did the CA seek to make only the growth element inclusive or, was it seeking to make the entire existing economy increasingly inclusive? Members heard that the goal was to grow the economy further and in an inclusive way that

shared the benefits of growth. Some work such as the fair work charter sought to make the existing economy fairer and more inclusive.

- Leeds Bradford Airport (LBA) – LBA was considered an example of the tension and conflict between economic growth and the climate emergency action. Expanding the airport would lead to increased carbon emissions but the Mayor felt that the region couldn't remain competitive with other regions without its own airport.

Housing

- House production rate: The rate of housing development hadn't increased in 10 years, which had contributed to the rising house prices.
- MCA housing powers: Members understood that the CA/Mayor can't build houses, but the CA could help Local Authorities deal with issues such as land-banking through CPO or develop less viable land through devolved funding.
- Viability of land: The majority of land especially in districts such as Calderdale was harder to develop due to the area's terrain. The Brownfield Fund was designed to help councils develop such difficult land, that requires a lot more funding to make viable.
- Social/council housing: 5000 'affordable' homes target did not include a specific proportion as social housing. Members of the public often viewed affordable housing as social housing for rent. Members thought the affordable housing definitions were too subjective – what was affordable for one, may not be affordable for another.
- Developers: Members discussed that far too often developers agreed to develop affordable housing, then under technicalities renege on their agreements by citing lack of profitability due to 'unforeseen' viability costs after the fact. Members heard that an area in Horsforth gave up greenbelt land for a development of affordable housing and did not get any in the end. Members discussed the possibility of Mayoral soft power being utilised by identifying good and bad developers who adhere to agreements.
- Wellness and place: Price was not the only factor for good housing, also access and connectivity to amenities such as food and transport were equally as desirable. It was not just about houses, it was also about the area and space, an example being those fortunate to have garden space during the pandemic compared to people who didn't.

Culture

- Networking and inclusivity: Creative industries was centred around networking, contacts and relationship building. This could put people from various social classes at a disadvantage. It was suggested that peer networking opportunities should be part of the Creative Catalyst and Channel 4 programmes.
- Culture and wider regeneration: This could create a wide range of jobs in acting, producing, writing, digital, marketing, building, logistics and hospitality.

Transport Scrutiny Committee

Mayoral and Combined Authority's powers: Members noted that although the Mayor had some direct powers, relatively she had more soft power than direct. Mayors across the regions work together through the M8 and M10 groups to pool 'soft power' influence and leverage relationships in parliament and government to influence policy and

decisions and secure funding. The Mayor also works alongside the 5 local council leaders and considers herself “one of a group of six” part of a collective approach, as expressed in the CA’s governance structure. Members discussed which additional transport powers the Mayor might need going forward such as powers around climate change and electric bus fleet management, as well as possible rail and road powers.

Buses: The FlexiBus (“demand led” bus service) pilot in East Leeds was discussed along with the importance of ensuring access to buses for people in all areas of West Yorkshire. The Mayor outlined how the Bus Service Improvement Plan planned to support West Yorkshire’s rural communities, although an announcement on funding for the BSIP was still awaited. It was hoped in the meantime that the Enhanced Partnership would give the Combined Authority more insight and opportunity to influence bus companies to provide a reliable and desirable service.

The government and the Combined Authority supported bus companies during the pandemic to keep services running. The government had yet to announce how funding would continue after March and as a result bus companies are planning ahead, with possible reductions in timetabled services due to uncertainty. The Mayor confirmed she had written to bus operators about this.

It was noted that travel behaviours have changed since the pandemic and long-term impact is still being analysed. The pandemic reduced journeys, but patronage had returned back to approximately 80% of pre-pandemic patronage before the Omicron variant. This means that demand is still there initiatives such as free bus Sunday, the £1 Boxing Day offer and cheaper summer tickets for young people had helped with that.

Inclusivity in the network was noted as being crucial and Members noted the Network Navigation Project, including real time navigation screens on bus stops across West Yorkshire. Printed timetables (removed as a result of Covid-19) were due to be re-installed. Audio-visual information on all buses and the telephone contact centre available for people who prefer speaking to a real person regarding buses were other changes. Improvements such as investment in ‘tap in, tap out’ payment systems, the disparity of pricing across the region and extra bus priority lanes mitigating delays caused by traffic were discussed.

The Mayor acknowledged the challenges in having a network focusing on a core city such as Leeds and Members were informed that Leeds specific transport funding awarded by government 5 years ago was the reason for the seemingly large number of Leeds-focused schemes being delivered compared to the other areas. The mass transit and connectivity plans hoped to bridge current gaps in connecting more areas to the network.

Mass Transit: It was noted that Leeds – and by extension WY as an urban area – was the only city in Europe that doesn’t have a mass transit system. Funding for a Mass Transit system was contained within the current government’s manifesto and the Combined authority has been indicatively allocated £200 million to begin work on this, following consultation and public engagement. It is key that the plan is future proofed and that each individual locality had the best mode of transport for the area to enable

seamless routes. The proposed mass transit system is going to the CA in March for approval. Members noted that the Mayor had written to ministers to emphasise the long term nature of the project and the need for funding commitments so that future mayors and local governments could see it through to completion.

Rail: The Integrated Rail Plan, and its impact on the whole region and Bradford in particular, was discussed and the Mayor explained that she had written to ministers expressing disappointment at the decisions and work was underway to assess the full impact and identify mitigations. Region-wide rail station accessibility and inclusivity concerns were discussed as proof of the necessity of investment in rail station infrastructure after years of seeming neglect. The Mayor expressed her support for electrification of the Calder Valley line and had written to ministers but had not yet received a response.

Active Travel: The importance of active travel was discussed as being vital to meet climate targets, though it was acknowledged that areas with varying topography can be more challenging to adapt for inclusive active travel. Some members detailed their experience with consultations on transport schemes and discussed the need to incentivise earlier and wider public and member participation in consultations in future. Behaviour change was identified as key to any success in this area and some ideas included investment in pavement markers and safer segregated cycle lanes.

Next steps in 2022/23

After a year of implementation and establishment, the scrutiny committees are entering into the new municipal year with greater workloads and with the hopes to establish working parties to drive positive change.

Find out more and get involved

Find out more about scrutiny at the Combined Authority and to 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
Legal & Governance Services
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Find out more

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