

Notes of Inquorate Economy Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 21 September 2022

Item 1 – Welcome and apologies

Attendees (10/11): Aneela Ahmed, Bob Felstead, Helen Brundell, Gwen Lowe, Richard Smith (Chair), Tyler Hawkins, Gohar Almass, Colin Campbell, Isabel Owen, Tony Wallis.

Apologies (5): Ian Sanders, Sam Firth, Audrey Smith, Zafar Iqbal, Andrew Hollyer.

Officers: Patrick Bowes, Liz Hunter, Hannah Scales, Phil Witcherley.

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 agreed at the Combined Authority Annual Meeting in June 2022. The main change was a reshuffle of committee remits to ensure that Transport Scrutiny covers more place and environment issues more pertinent to transport infrastructure and network.

Item 5 – Scrutiny and governance arrangements

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 March 2022 will be brought forward to the next quorate committee meeting to be formally agreed – alongside informal notes of this meeting so that the discussion is a part of the public record.

Item 6 – Chairs comments and announcements

The Chair welcomed new members, introduced himself and reiterated that Scrutiny is non-political and non-partisan and its objective is to provide constructive and objective challenge to the mayor and authority.

Item 7 – Economy functions and priorities overview

Members received an update on the latest economic and business intelligence within West Yorkshire, focussing primarily on the issues relating to the cost-of-living crisis across the economy, and the upcoming increase in energy prices.

Questions and discussion centred around:

Businesses and rising costs:

- Enquires to the CA's "Rebis Scheme" have tripled in recent months.
- A proposal from the government to cap energy prices for businesses is aimed to help with the current energy price crisis.
- The Manufacturing industry is disproportionately affected by the energy cost rise and the hospitality industry is not covered by government support, so the CA is looking at how it can support them further through available funding.

- The importance of advertising and the CA's ability to successfully direct businesses to relevant schemes and assistance was emphasised as being vital.
- All the CA's thematic decision-making committees have private sector members so that their views and needs can be considered as part of all decision making and policy development.

Recruitment issues, potential 'skilled' labour shortage and education:

- 1 million skilled workers over 50 had left the labour market since the pandemic. The O&S statistics are quantitative rather than qualitative, so it is possible to know *who* but not *why* they left the job market.
- Adult Education Budget (AEB) was devolved to the CA and the committee will look at it at its next meeting in November.
- It was important to focus on longer-term solutions to recruitment and the skilled labour shortage alongside future economic resilience, based on possible scenarios.
- The CA is developing a long-term strategy with businesses, authorities, and academics that scrutiny would be welcome to look at.
- A follow-up with regards to 'Skills Connect' and the Apprenticeship Levy was requested on the work programme.
- The CA works closely with different local authorities on skills, currently looking at digital skills.
- West Yorkshire did not have the national average qualification figures and it would be interesting to know how attainment differed across the WY districts.

Cost-of-Living Crisis and influencing the government:

- Energy standing charges affect households and businesses alike and the charges are the highest rate in West Yorkshire. The Mayor has requested the CA looks at this and is due to make discuss it with Ofgem.
- The CA doesn't have the resources the government has, but the CA is preparing a report on the cost-of-living crisis and what it can do to help and is making representations to Government about our region specifically, particularly with regards to region-specific issues like the manufacturing sector.
- Influence at Westminster is important and letters had been sent to build relationships new ministers.
- The M10 (the ten Metro Mayors) chaired by Tracy Brabin remains a strong united voice for devolved areas and CAs across England.

Item 8 – Economy Scrutiny Work Programme discussion

Members noted the appended work programme which was the result of workshops and discussions over the summer period and noted that the agenda for January has been left blank and to be confirmed at the November meeting due to the fast-changing nature of the current economic situation and activity.

Next meeting date – 16 November 2022