

**EXTRACT FROM MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CORPORATE
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON FRIDAY 19 NOVEMBER 2021 AT
COMMITTEE ROOM 6/7, LEEDS CIVIC HALL**

Present:

Councillor Peter Harrand (Chair)	Leeds City Council
Councillor Geoff Winnard (Deputy)	Bradford Council
Councillor Mike Barnes	Calderdale Council
Councillor Andrew Cooper	Kirklees Council
Councillor Paul Davies	Kirklees Council
Councillor Jane Dowson	Leeds City Council
Councillor Jacob Goddard	Leeds City Council
Councillor Tony Homewood	Wakefield Council
Councillor George Robinson	Calderdale Council
Councillor Melanie Stephen	Kirklees Council
Councillor Jeanette Sunderland	Bradford Council
Councillor Carol Thirkill	Bradford Council

In attendance:

Khaled Berroum	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Mayor Tracy Brabin (Minute 8 only)	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Ben Still (Minute 8 only)	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Angela Taylor	West Yorkshire Combined Authority

Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors David Jones, Rachel Melly, Betty Rhodes, and Megan Swift.

The meeting was confirmed as quorate, with 12 members present out of 11 needed for quorum.

[...]

Mayor's Question Time – Tracy Brabin

The Chair thanked the Mayor Tracy Brabin for attending Corporate Scrutiny to answer the Committee's questions and outlined the format of the Mayor's Question Time. The session would be split into pre-agreed topic areas and members would be able to ask any questions under those topic areas, and any follow ups.

The topic areas were:

- Devolution settlement and powers vs Mayoral 'soft power'/influence
- Partnership working across West Yorkshire and strategic alignment
- Gainshare spending and Budget and business planning
- Internal corporate matters

Before questions, the Mayor provided an update on the government's announcement cancelling HS2 and its potential impact on the CA's work.

Following questions and supplementary questions, the following was reported to the committee:

1. **Direct mayoral powers:** Mayors' powers differ by area as each devolution deal is bespoke. Manchester and West Yorkshire have police powers, but Manchester also has health powers and additional spatial planning powers. 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.
2. **Soft power, profile and influence:** Most 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.
3. **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, in particular, the largest growth deal. The capacity to participate in bidding and securing funds is also under review. It can be time consuming and repetitive and many consider requiring central government approval for local plans is not quite within the spirit of devolution.
4. **Gainshare spending strategy:** is a new form of local government spending which a Mayoral Combined Authority can spend on anything at all. 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. 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 are subject to scrutiny call-in to avoid any undue favouritism and absence of rigour.
5. **Borrowing against Gainshare:** There is also the 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. It is possible to borrow, and 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. The CA currently borrows from the Public Works Loan Board, as all local

government, as per its treasury management policy overseen by the Audit Committee.

6. **Budget and business planning:** Budget planning across local government is difficult this year in the wake of COVID. 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, so work is ongoing to find savings to ensure the budget is balanced. Mayor and council leaders are working with opposition CA members on a budget working group to set the medium-term financial strategy. 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.
7. **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.
8. **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.
9. **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. On the other hand is 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 comms capacity to cater to the needs of a Mayoral operation.

Resolved: That the Mayor be thanked for attending and the Committee's feedback and conclusions be considered further.

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