

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE TRANSPORT &
INFRASTRUCTURE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON THURSDAY 9
MARCH 2023 IN CONFERENCE ROOMS 1/2, WELLINGTON HOUSE,
40-50 WELLINGTON STREET, LEEDS, LS1 2DE**

Present:

Councillor Joanne Dodds	City of Bradford Council
Councillor Caroline Whitaker (Substitute)	City of Bradford Council
Councillor Amanda Parsons-Hulse (Chair)	Calderdale Council
Councillor Dot Foster	Calderdale Council
Councillor Mark Thompson	Kirklees Council
Councillor Andrew Pinnock (Deputy)	Kirklees Council
Councillor Kayleigh Brooks	Leeds City Council
Councillor Jessica Lennox	Leeds City Council
Councillor Tony Hames	Wakefield Council
Councillor Stan Bates	Wakefield Council
Councillor Ian Cuthbertson	City of York Council

In attendance:

Councillor Peter Harrand	Guest
Kirsty Atkinson	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Khaled Berroum	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Alison Gillespie	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Dave Haskins	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Hannah Scales	West Yorkshire Combined Authority

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Anna Watson, Tina Benton, Jackie Ferguson, Caroline Firth, Harry McCarthy, and Robert Finnigan.

The meeting was confirmed as quorate, with 11 members present out of 11 needed to meet the quorum.

2. Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests.

3. Possible exclusion of the press and public

There were no items requiring the exclusion of the press and public.

4. Minutes of the meeting held on 19 January 2023

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 19 January 2023 be approved.

5. Chair's comments and update

The Committee received a verbal update from the Chair who had attended a national meeting for Combined Authority Chairs at which good practice was shared. Inviting more members of the public to meetings was discussed and the Chair suggested this was something the Combined Authority might like to consider.

Resolved: That the Chair's verbal update be noted.

6. Transport and Planning

The Committee received a report which provided an overview of the role of the Combined Authority in planning.

Reactive vs proactive comments in planning applications:

- The Combined Authority was a non-statutory consultee on planning applications. This means that Local Planning Authorities are not required to consult us. This position is resource efficient as it allows us and partners to identify the circumstances where consulting us adds value. The CA provided two types of response, a view on alignment with policy and where funding for transport measures /infrastructure was sought.
- Applications were monitored and judgements made on which applications would provide an impact and therefore trigger the CA to provide a response.
- The CA created a developer guide, an online tool that indicated the types of applications that the CA would engage on and scale of interventions that the CA might request as a result of a new development.

Developer leverage, their wants vs community needs in terms of transport link:

- Historically, take up of the residential metro card scheme and wider incentive schemes had fallen short of expectations in some locations, so these were continually kept under review. Success rate figures could be provided outside of the meeting.

Progress of promised devolution planning powers:

- Planning powers were included in the 'minded to' West Yorkshire devolution deal but due to the national reforms to the planning system these were not carried forward in the devolution Order. A letter from the Minister for Regional Growth and Local Government proposed that these powers (or equivalent) will be conferred 'when the position is clearer.

- There remained uncertainty around national planning reforms, and the government's position on the role of Combined Authorities in strategic planning.
- The CA responded to the partial National Planning Policy Framework consultation in the previous week.
- There were currently 5 local plans and the CA's role was to support those local plans in coming forward and ensuring that cross-boundary implications were considered.

Inclusive growth element and overlap with other policy areas:

- The importance of inclusive growth running through all aspects of planning was emphasised, ensuring transport links, amenities and access must be considered.
- The Spatial Priority Area work included looking at the most strategic locations in our region where there was likely to be significant change, infrastructure in these locations would need to be planned in a coordinated way.
- The CA worked jointly with district partners and there were some areas of service provision that sat wholly with partners. The CA hoped that the funding being put together to do active work around Spatial Priority Areas would help to drive delivery in some locations with the CA playing a more active role in partnership with Local Authorities.

Active travel in planning applications:

- Active travel such as cycling and walking infrastructure were included in the Combined Authority's responses to planning applications where appropriate.

Assurance process:

- In the last few years, internally and at all authorities across the UK the Assurance Processes had been strengthened. This included best practice. It was important the Assurance Process had a level of rigour which was not always popular as projects sometimes had to be brought through at pace.
- When the authority became a CA there was a lot more devolved money responsibility from the government to ensure delivery of the 'right' projects efficiently and effectively. This also meant that it was imperative an efficient assurance process was in place.
- Internally processes included an Appraisal Team which reviewed internal and partner projects/business cases against an intensive set of criteria. Commentary was also provided as to whether projects were good to move forwards for approval.
- Every couple of weeks meetings took place reviewing projects that went through, (there had been 150 projects in January to March 2023 thus far), projects then found their way into committees.

Resolved: That the content of the report be noted, and the committee's feedback be considered further.

7. Consultations and EDI

The committee received a report which provided an update regarding 'Equality, Diversity and Inclusion' progress within consultation and engagement.

Seldom heard groups and local communities:

- Asking personal questions within the consultation process helped the CA understand the communities they served and more importantly identify hard to reach communities and seldom heard groups.
- EQIAs completed at the start of every consultation helped towards identifying seldom heard and accessibility groups so that the CA could reach out and involve said groups in the co-production of designs.

Promotion of Consultations:

- The earlier people were consulted the better, it did depend on the project team and the resource they had.
- The CA wanted to increase its co-production and co-produce plans with communities although this did make the process lengthier.
- There was a new section of the Consultation and Engagement Department, the new Communities Engagement Team which was solely responsible for making connections with communities face to face.
- The CA aimed to encourage neighbourhoods and communities to promote consultations through word of mouth, utilise social media and make it easier for the general public to promote consultations.
- It was clarified that social media was used as a tool to promote consultations but was not as yet used to analyse data. Comments were not used as part of the consultation.

Representativeness of Your Voice and consultations:

- There were 3000 people registered to 'Your Voice' compared to the 2.3 million population of West Yorkshire. Members questioned whether this was an accurate sample of the general public.
- The CA contacted specific groups through Your Voice through categorisation for relevance.
- Conversion rates were being looked at and the CA was hoping to involve more young people in the consultation process and converting clicks into responses.

Answering questions and tackling conflict:

- Important that a 'two-way' street was created where members of the public could ask questions with ease.
- If a few members of the public asked the same questions we can deduce that it something that may need looking into. All the data collected helped to support proposals.

Remuneration of consultees and possible future methods of engagement:

- There was not currently a consulting fee/renumeration, resource and funds was always going to be an issue for the CA in terms of paying particular groups for their views.
- There was the suggestion that the CA created various panels such as a young person's panel or disability panel that in the future could be a paid for resource.

Resolved: That the content of the report be noted, and the committee's feedback be considered further.

8. **Freight: rail and waterway**

The committee received a report which briefed the committee of Combined Authority activity in respect of rail and waterways freight, arising from previous questions raised by scrutiny committee members. The Chair shared evidence that uptake in water freight reduced carbon emissions necessary to meet the net zero target and brought the committees' attention to the 500-tonne capacity barge, the 'MMS Off-Roader' which had been transporting marine aggregate from ABP Humber's Albert Dock in Hull to Knostrop in Leeds.

Waterways forgotten about in strategy, especially when compared to other nations:

- The Director for Transport Policy and Delivery recently attended the Transport for the North Conference in Newcastle which included a session on freight. It was interesting that the main focus was on freight by rail.
- The CA had commissioned work looking into the use of waterways for moving minerals such as sand and gravel as part of minerals and waste planning activity.
- The Chair suggested that the CA liaised with stakeholders with the aim to include the consideration of the viability of using the commercial inland waterway for freight in the LTP4.

Freight's inclusion in "Local Transport Plan 4" (LTP4):

- There was ongoing work regarding in relation to freight, the LTP4 was currently in development although the CA was awaiting guidance from the Department for Transport (DfT).
- Consultation around the LTP4 was expected in the coming Autumn.
- The CA was looking at the 'first and last mile' in particular, and how we could make better use of other ways of getting deliveries into towns/cities without using road vehicles.

Reopening of old railway lines for freight:

- There were challenges around use of rail lines for freight in some locations where there were clear bottlenecks between freight and passengers.
- Freight lines would be looked at through the LTP4, it boiled down to capacity on the railway and the lack of particular railways which are suitable and conflicts with passenger railway.

- The challenge of re-opening old railway lines was huge, the rail team were aware of what opportunities were there.

Difficulty of progressing Leeds and Normanton port schemes (suggestions about freeport):

- The Leeds Inland Port Scheme was not a failed scheme, as the business case developed further it was clear it was not going to meet the certain amount of delivery objectives and freight transfer it aimed to meet.
- The Leeds Inland Port Scheme had evolved over time and was now in the CA's pipeline list. The CA would initiate discussions with the Canals and Rivers Trust around how they could adapt the project to make it easier for the CA to support.

Resolved: That the committee's feedback be considered further and an update on LTP4, with a particular focus on freight be carried forward and submitted to the committee in Autumn 2023.

9. Affordable housing

The committee received a report which gave an update on the progress towards the Mayoral Pledge to deliver 5000 sustainable, affordable homes.

Delivery of the pledge (remains a challenge):

- The delivery of the Mayor's Pledge of 5000 sustainable, affordable homes remained a challenge (the target figure was at least 2000 units over past delivery figures). There would need to be a significant increase in delivery rate to meet the target and therefore remained a risk around the CA meeting the pledge.
- There was value in setting high ambitions and it had provided the ability to continue to build and shape programmes in a way that drives delivery of affordable housing. It helps to build momentum and push for those delivery ambitions to be met in the region.
- Although monitoring aligned to the mayoral pledge was important, the work of the CA went beyond this as driving an increase in provision of affordable housing was a long-term aspiration.
- A new Strategic Place Partnership with Homes England was due to be launched.
- The CA was in the early stages of writing a housing strategy and community housing was one of the things so far in consultation with partners that had been raised by partners that they would like to profile amongst others.

Risk:

- On delivery risks aligned to construction, the CA's ability to spatially monitor risks, at the current time local authorities were monitoring those risks on a site by site, district by district basis, but it could be useful to look at whether risks seemed to be layered in particular locations more than others.

Brownfield Housing Fund:

- The CA was working in partnership with local authorities on the Brownfield Housing Fund. The land supply and delivery of housing sat with local authority partners as a responsibility. The CA assisted in identifying the pipeline of sites.
- There were some constraints on the programme which included the inflexibility of the way that government had designed the programme. There were only certain things the CA could spend funding on and specific rates that the CA had to hit in terms of return on investment which were limiting especially as brownfield sites often already had viability challenges.
- A further constraint was that housing had to be built by 2025 (or the money would be returned to government) and for long-term stalled sites or very difficult brownfield sites it was an extremely hard deadline to meet. This resulted in more viable sites, often private sector led, schemes being eligible and funded but prevents means that the fund could not be applied to some of our priority brownfield sites across the region.
- The Brownfield Housing Fund had not been designed to drive affordable housing delivery specifically.
- The CA had not responded to the media directly on the matter of inflexibility in application of the Brownfield Housing Fund however in conversation and interview The Mayor may have raised points regarding the issues.
- Letters had been written by the 10 Mayoral authorities to push the point and try to explain that the inflexibilities around the programme were making it very difficult to meet local needs.
- Everyone across the country had the same level of challenge around how to spend the funding and how to ensure it was meeting local needs.

Region's needs & housing waiting list:

- Calderdale had 8000 people on the waiting list and in Leeds, there were approximately 26,000 active 'bidders' on the housing waiting list, (6000 of which were band A). Only 2000 properties were available in Leeds each year.
- The responsibility to assess housing need was a local authority function and in turn setting policies through planning to help deliver for that need. There was a balance to be made, particularly on brownfield sites, where there were other viability challenges, affordable homes was one infrastructure type across a series that had to be brought into the balance around what could be secured, and this was a function that was led by district partners with CA support where possible.
- Some members felt that the 'right to buy' and 'buy back' schemes were a significant issue, removing homes from the housing stock, hindering housing growth.

Definitions of 'affordable' and 'sustainable':

- The CA was using the National Planning Policy definition of affordable which included all categories of affordable (not just social housing).

- The reason the CA was using it was because the data was monitorable against the national data set. The CA and Mayor were mindful of all of the categories of affordable housing and the need in West Yorkshire for additional social housing.
- The CA was working with local district partners around local provision and local need.
- Sustainable was even less easy to define, there was not an easy way for the CA to monitor the sustainability of new properties. EPC data was used for the housing stock across West Yorkshire to feed into the programme development activity such as retrofit, but the data was not yet available for new build only.
- There was a live conversation within the district partnership regarding our ability to define a measure of sustainability for properties that were being built and whether there was something we could do locally to monitor our progress and the pledge.

The West Yorkshire Housing Partnership (the Partnership):

- The Partnership was a voluntary partnership (it was not facilitated by the CA).
- The Partnership continually sought additional partners. It would be positive if it were a comprehensive group of all the providers in the region but as they are private organisations it had to be done on a voluntary basis.
- The private organisations were obviously operating in a commercial context so even though they may be part of the Partnership, it wouldn't be appropriate for them to share all of their data with partners.
- The Partnership had various workstreams, working proactively together across the region on various issues and affordable housing delivery was one of them.

Resolved: That the committee's feedback is considered further, and affordable housing is brought back to the committee in the following municipal year as an update on the progress of the Mayoral Pledge.

10. Work Programme

The Committee discussed the summary Work programme and potential topics for the following year. 2023/24.

Members agreed to add freight to next year's agenda, as part of bigger scrutiny item on LTP4 in Autumn 2023 and affordable housing, as part of an update on the progress of the Mayor's Pledge.

Resolved: That the appended 2022/23 Work Programme be noted and aforementioned topics of freight and affordable housing be added to the following year's (2023/24) agenda.