



Report to:	Governance & Audit Committee
Date:	20 January 2025
Subject:	Governance, Empowerment and Accountability
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Is this a key decision?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for call-in by Scrutiny?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information or appendices?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If the report does contain exempt information, what is the reason for exemption: <i>(indicate in the adjacent box the relevant paragraph of Schedule 12A, Local Government Act 1972, Part 1 – see Access to Information Rules)</i>	

1. Purpose of this Report

- 1.1 To update the Committee on changes to internal governance arrangements introduced from January 2025, including a new officer board structure and changes to officer decision making with the aim of facilitating the Combined Authority to achieve accelerated delivery to realise its ambitions through the further empowerment of decision makers within a framework of robust accountability.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Committee endorses the new officer board structure to expedite faster decision making.
- 2.2 That the Committee endorses the changes to officer decision making arrangements to empower the appropriate officers to make decisions at pace to deliver the Combined Authority's ambitions.



3. Information

- 3.1 The Combined Authority has been on a development pathway which has seen significant growth in its devolved powers. As a result, it has ambitious programmes to improve the lives of the people of West Yorkshire across a range of services and communities. The Authority expects its officers to undertake their duties with integrity and rigour, safeguarding public money to ensure services for the good of West Yorkshire and its people are delivered on time and in the most appropriate manner. An effective governance framework is essential, with protections in place that ensure decisions are evidence based, transparent and for the greater good.
- 3.2 In particular, during this mayoral term the Combined Authority is intending to deliver on large programmes of work that are substantial in scale. It is therefore imperative that the ambitions and the organisation's ability to deliver are aligned. This can only be achieved through a new approach and capacity building to decision making and officer accountability. This will enable the Authority to deliver outcomes for the people of West Yorkshire, at pace, within a clear framework of governance and accountability.
- 3.3 In recognition of this identified step change, the Committee may recall that the Governance Improvement Plan for 2024/25 (approved by Members as part of the Annual Governance Statement for 2023/24) included the following action in relation to officer decision making: -

“An internal review of the current officer board structure has commenced in tandem with a review of the internal scheme of officer delegations. Amendments have been made to the Officer Delegation Scheme to realign the decision-making arrangements to ensure that there is effective and proportionate empowerment at the different levels of the officer structure. This will enable agile and informed decision making at the right level whilst ensuring sufficient safeguards and oversight are retained through a clear and transparent accountability framework. Further work is underway with the officer sub-delegation scheme to strengthen this work.”

- 3.4 To address this, changes have been in development during 2024 and are currently being rolled out from January 2025 in respect of both the internal governance structure and the Chief Executive's scheme of delegation to undertake the business in hand.

Officer Boards and Purpose

- 3.5 The new senior officer structure, developed from 2023 provides the opportunity for a step change in the level of empowerment and accountability for officers at director and head of service level to exercise more wide-ranging decision-making powers. This will see decisions being made by the most relevant officer at the most appropriate level, to drive forward their respective business plans, within a clear set of budget parameters and controls and in furtherance of the plans, policies and strategies set by Members.

- 3.6 The new Officer Board structure (**Appendix 1**) ensures robust accountability and includes a new set of strategic boards: **Strategic Leadership Board, Investment Board** and **Performance Board** with specific pan organisation functions that will play a vital role in strengthening the accountability framework.
- 3.7 Complementing the pan organisational boards are the strategic outcome boards: **Economy Board** and **Transport Board**. These are formal decision-making forum for the Executive Directors. The focus is to provide strategic leadership for ‘outcomes’. In addition, each Director will chair a directorate outcome board responsible for the delivery of their directorate business plan and role in delivering on the corporate priorities.
- 3.8 Each board will comprise directorate specialists and senior colleagues from key enabling services such as Finance, Legal etc. They will act together with directorate colleagues to provide oversight, advice and challenge. Their role will be to proactively participate as a key part of the team, delivering on shared organisational objectives. The outcome will be well evidenced decisions being made at pace.
- 3.9 The board structure is not intended to be hierarchical in function, and it is not intended that reports will cascade up through the boards as a matter of course. Rather, the intention is to provide a framework which ensures decisions are taken by the most appropriate decision maker, whilst recognising that there will always remain a role for escalation where matters are flagged which have wider consequences e.g. risk and budget pressures. Cross-cutting strategic decisions will remain with the Chief Executive and be taken in consultation with the Mayor/Members/Executive Directors or Strategic Leadership Board (SLB) as appropriate.
- 3.10 The new structure will be kept under review to ensure it is meeting its intended objectives. It is recognised that the changes being introduced plays a role in a broader cultural change programme which is underway in relation to ways of working and will be an evolutionary process.
- 3.11 Further governance changes occurring in 2025 will be the addition of non-executive directors (NEDs) to the Strategic Leadership and Investment Boards. NEDs will be joining the Boards to offer additional insights to the deliberations of the boards. They will provide an extra layer of check and challenge to board decision, acting as a critical friend whilst bringing identified expertise to the work of the Board. It is anticipated that NEDs will be appointed by the end of this financial year.
- 3.12 The new officer board arrangements will also make more explicit the relationship and dependencies between the activity of the Combined Authority’s internal governance and the member governance structures. The internal boards will be driven by the direction set by the Mayor and Combined Authority while maintaining strong governance and accountability.

Chief Executive's Scheme of Delegation

- 3.13 It may be helpful for Members to be aware of the principles underpinning the new scheme of officer delegation, introduced January 2025. The Combined Authority and, for mayoral functions the Mayor, approve strategies and policies which determine the framework in which operational decisions are made. The principles and proposals set out below relate solely to officer decisions and delegations.
- Officers implement decisions made by the Combined Authority (or any decision-making committee of the Combined Authority) and the Mayor. Officers also take measures to carry out these policies and decide day-to-day operational matters, within the framework of these decisions.
 - Officers must comply with the Constitution, Financial Regulations and relevant Standing Orders, organisational values, the anti-fraud, bribery and corruption policy, and internal audit and risk management arrangements when exercising authority delegated to them.
 - When exercising their delegated authority, an officer must:
 - ensure that the decision conforms with and furthers strategies and policies approved or endorsed by the Combined Authority and the Mayor,
 - ensure that all relevant parties and officers are engaged ahead of a decision being taken, and
 - follow approved practices and procedures of the Combined Authority including the Assurance Framework, relevant Government guidance and industry/professional best practice.
 - The three statutory officers: the Head of Paid Service, the S73 Chief Finance Officer and the Monitoring Officer all have additional specific personal statutory duties.
 - The Chief Executive has a broad delegation and is authorised to exercise any: -
 - Non-mayoral function which is not expressly reserved to the Combined Authority or is a
 - function of any officer in their capacity as a statutory officer.
 - Formal decisions taken by an officer require a written report (Decision Authorisation Report): -
 - Such decisions will normally be taken at the relevant Board in consultation with appropriate service areas (e.g. Finance/Legal/Commercial/HR), who will be represented at all such boards.

- A recording and monitoring process has been introduced, cataloguing decisions taken and accessible to all Directors.

3.14 The previous scheme of officer delegation was sufficient for the former size of the Authority and the scale of decision making. It also saw ILB as the default arena for decision making, taking up valuable senior leadership capacity. Moreover, the additional powers and responsibilities consequent of further devolution require a new approach to reflect the volume of decisions and their time critical nature. The magnitude of projects, such as Mass Transit and Bus Reform cannot be managed effectively within a more limited scheme of delegation powers. Therefore, under a new officer delegation scheme officers will be empowered to make faster, more agile decisions that facilitate pace in programme delivery. This will mean that the most appropriate senior officers relative to the decision are empowered and have responsibility for the decisions vital to their service and projects. The scheme of delegation will permit officers to make decisions, but it does so with the assurance for the Mayor and the Combined Authority that robust governance arrangements are in place to manage and record decisions being taken, enabling the Combined Authority to deliver on its ambitions.

3.15 To further enhance decision making bespoke sub-delegation schemes within each Directorate in relation to their functional responsibility, are under development. This will enable Directors to identify appropriate competent roles to undertake a level of formal decision making as part of their area of functional responsibility, which would include but not be limited to the Head of Service role. Formal sub-delegation schemes will be put in place, documented and published for the purposes of transparency.

4. Risks and Mitigations

4.1 To ensure all officers have a full understanding of the processes and deadlines regarding the new governance arrangements guidance has been developed. Governance leads have attended officer meetings to explain the new officer structure and decision-making process. Drop-in sessions have been scheduled post implementation and further involvement at officer meetings is being arranged to pick up directorate specific queries.

5. Tackling the Climate Emergency Implications

5.1 The remits of the internal boards will embed Climate Emergency in decision-making.

6. Inclusive Growth Implications

6.1 The remits of the internal boards will embed Inclusive Growth in decision-making.

7. Equity and Diversity Implications

7.1 The remits of the internal boards will embed Equity & Diversity Implications in decision-making.

8. Financial Implications

8.1 There are no financial implications directly arising from this report.

9. Legal Implications

9.1 The Assistant Director Legal, Governance & Compliance has led the drafting of the new officer scheme of delegation and legal colleagues have assisted in the development of guidance materials to support the change. Business Partners from Legal will be directly involved in providing advice when making decisions.

10. External Consultees

10.1 No external consultations have been undertaken in the preparation of this report.

11. Background Documents

11.1 [Item 10 - Committee Governance](#) - 7 December 2023 Combined Authority Report: Committee Governance and Membership

12. Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Officer boards structure