



West Yorkshire ...and beyond

Calderdale Council's contribution to the West Yorkshire Combined Authority

Report of the Strategy and Performance Scrutiny Board - March 2018





Foreword

This review of Calderdale Council's work within the West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) was a departure from the usual way that the Council undertakes scrutiny reviews. The review was undertaken by the chairs and deputy chairs of all of the Council's Scrutiny Boards and Panel. This reflects the importance of working at a sub-regional level across the Council's activities. Most of the work was undertaken as a "scrutiny in a day" exercise – with officers and Members from the Council and the West Yorkshire Combined Authority talking to the review group in a series of discussions on 5 February 2018.

This report presents our findings and recommendations. Most of our recommendations are directed at our own Council. Some are made to the West Yorkshire Combined Authority. And we hope that other Councils who are members of WYCA and perhaps councils in other combined authorities will find this report interesting and useful.

Our findings and recommendations are presented as a "critical friend". We are presenting the Council's involvement within WYCA as something that works, but that with a few changes, could be improved. As sub-regional work becomes more and more important, so do our recommendations. We believe our recommendations will be straightforward to implement. But through their implementation, the profile of Calderdale's work within West Yorkshire will be raised and that itself will improve our contribution to the success of the combined authority, which will be good for West Yorkshire and for Calderdale.

West Yorkshire Combined Authority have been very helpful and cooperative throughout our inquiry. As have Calderdale councillors and officers. Our thanks to everyone.

Review Group Members

Councillor Mike Payne (Chair)

Councillor Jenny Lynn (Deputy Chair)

Councillor Paul Bellenger

Councillor Howard Blagbrough

Councillor Ashley Evans

Councillor Steve Sweeney

Councillor Andrew Tagg



Calderdale Council's Contribution to the West Yorkshire Combined Authority

Introduction

Although we recognise that there is a range of debates and projects both regionally and locally, we have deliberately set ourselves a narrow brief. This has enabled us to deliver a concise piece of work focussed on Calderdale Council's relationship with WYCA within a short timescale.

Currently, engagement with the Combined Authority is limited to a small group of expert Councillors and officers. However, we believe that our recommendations, while relatively minor at first glance, will broaden the engagement of all Councillors in Calderdale and local people with the work undertaken by the Council through the Combined Authority.

The Calderdale Councillors and officers who work within WYCA demonstrated to us that they work effectively and have significant influence within WYCA and have helped secure a number of initiatives to the benefit of the Borough. But much of their work is invisible to the wider Council and also to the people of Calderdale.

It is important for Calderdale that it works well within West Yorkshire. But other areas are also very important for us. In the west of Calderdale, Manchester is closer and more important economically and for work and leisure than Leeds.

However, we found that the decision making process is not always transparent to those who are not directly involved in it, and sometimes verges on the opaque. There is no formal way of Councillors involved in WYCA and its Committees of reporting back to the Council and to the people of Calderdale.

The structure of Committees, meetings and advisory groups is over complicated and the support given to Councillors who sit on WYCA's Committees could be more consistent.

Scrutiny is an important way in which executive bodies such as WYCA are held to account. We consider that the scrutiny arrangements within WYCA should be strengthened. We also feel that the Calderdale Scrutiny function needs to consider how it should hold to account Members and officers for their work within WYCA.

Leeds is a major city in the north of England and a successful Leeds brings benefits for the whole of West Yorkshire. There is a concern that smaller authorities like Calderdale will always "lose out" to Leeds when it comes to the allocation of resources. The evidence presented to us – that we accept – is that WYCA officers are very aware of this perception and take steps to make sure that this does not happen. And Calderdale has succeeded in some areas in "punching above its weight". One small way in which this concern could be addressed would be for WYCA to hold some of its meetings in towns and cities other than Leeds.

Findings and Recommendations

Finding 1 - Calderdale and WYCA work well together.

WYCA identified Calderdale Council as a good Council to work with. Members and officers are closely involved in the work of WYCA and there is a good working relationship between WYCA and Calderdale Council. We heard this directly from WYCA and it was apparent in the evidence given by Calderdale Council Members and Officers.

This is a good base to build increasingly effective relationships within WYCA.

Recommendation 1: The Council should continue to seek to work as effectively as possible within the West Yorkshire Combined Authority.

Finding 2 - Calderdale contributes well to WYCA and has organised its structure to enhance that contribution.

Calderdale Council is well represented at political and officer level in the WYCA structures. The Leader of the Council is Deputy Chair of the Combined Authority with Members and officers well represented throughout the Committee and supporting structures.

The new Council structure should help co-ordinate activity within the combined authority. The Directorate of Regeneration and Strategy now pulls together all those services that currently have a direct relationship with WYCA. It will be interesting to see how effective this has been after the new structure has had time to bed in.

Recommendation 2: Strategy and Performance Scrutiny Board should review the effectiveness of the new structure in autumn 2018.

Finding 3 - Working with WYCA has benefited Calderdale People.

There have been some real benefits to Calderdale from working within WYCA, in particular in transport areas. Liz Hunter from WYCA, Cllr Tim Swift, Cllr. Barry Collins, Robin Tuddenham and Mark Thompson gave us good evidence of projects within Calderdale that have attracted significant investment and benefit to the people of the district.

WYCA told us about the following schemes:

Findings and Recommendations

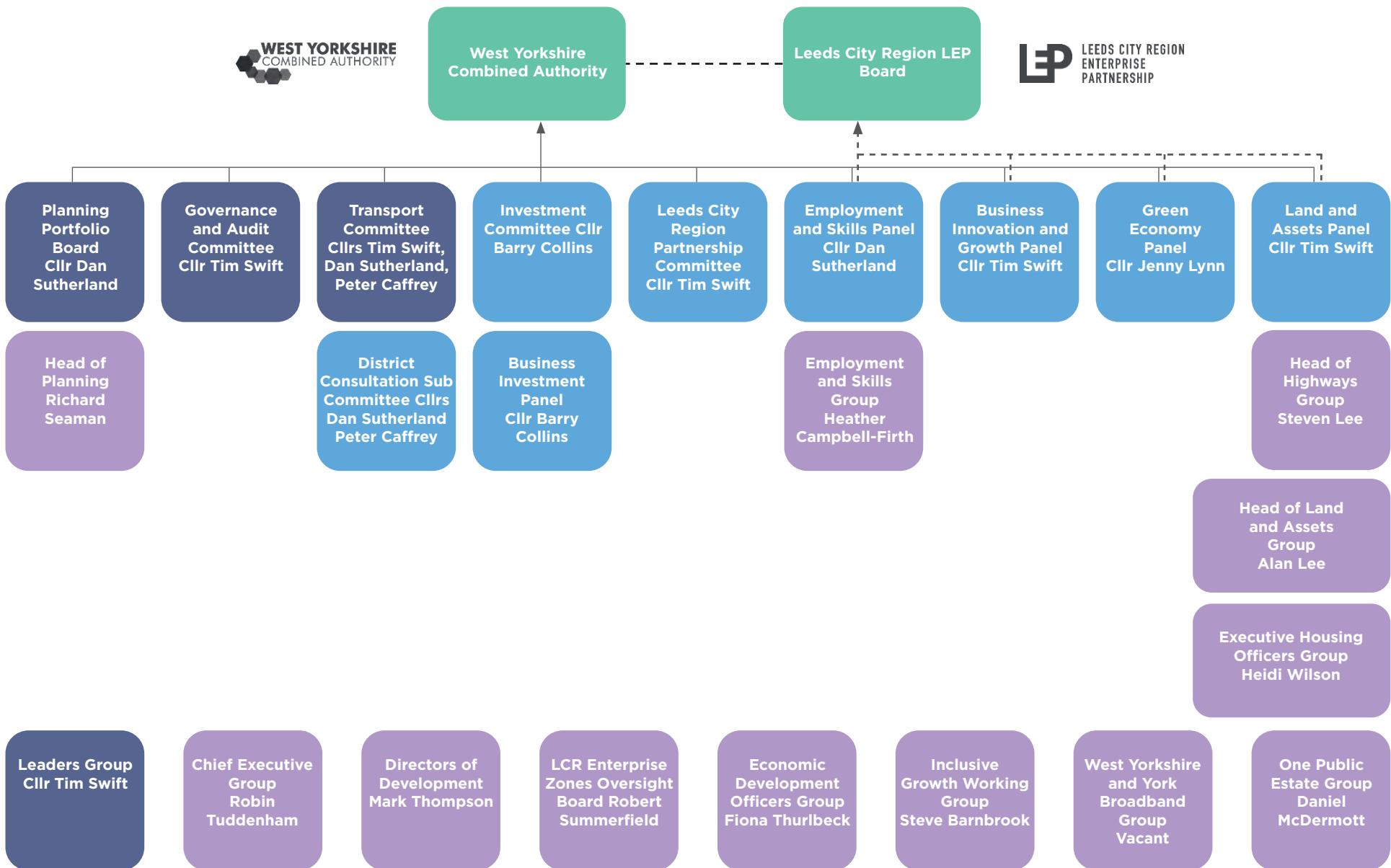
- Projects currently in development on the WY+TF pipeline include: Halifax Station Gateway, A641 Bradford to Huddersfield Corridor (this is being led by Calderdale), further phases of A629, the Corridor Improvement Programme (which is aiming to improve roads across WY) will include A58/A672 corridor and A646/A6033 corridor.
- Will shortly commence work on the A629 Phase 1a project which has been received funding of £8.5m via the Growth Deal.
- Invested over £1.3m to support 30 businesses recover from the 2015 Boxing Day floods.
- Contributed £2.5m towards the Mytholmroyd Flood Alleviation work in 2016/17. This is a major project that will be ongoing into 2019.
- Provided £4.98m to refurbish and upgrade the Percival Whitley Centre at Calderdale College which enhances the teaching offer in advanced engineering and manufacturing, digital and creative media and health and social care.
- Contributed £615k towards the Hebden Bridge Rail Park and Ride project due to commence in 2018. Further Rail Park and Ride projects are planned for Mytholmroyd and Sowerby Bridge.
- Completed and opened the £10.8m Low Moor train station in April this year – 90,000 passengers forecast by April 2018.
- Approved £1.3m for the demolition and redevelopment of Northgate House.
- Invested £196k to improved 29 properties with energy efficiency and heating measures in 2016/17 via the Better Homes Yorkshire Fund.
- Provided almost 400 homes with superfast broadband from 2015 until March 2017.
- Supported 23 businesses with over £850k capital grant investment in 2016/17 alone.
- Jointly funded 1 FTE Growth Manager, providing intensive support to help 56 SMEs grow in 2016/17.
- Invested £325k to support SMEs to recruit apprentices.

Finding 4 - The reporting lines are complicated.....

We were provided with a structure diagram setting out the involvement of Members and officers from Calderdale. The structure diagram demonstrates that the structures of WYCA can seem complex and opaque. For anyone not directly involved the picture is confusing and it is not easy to see what is done where. This may be inevitable, but it makes the task of holding Members and officers to account and understanding what is going on challenging to say the least.

Recommendation 3: **WYCA should re-examine its decision making structures to ensure that they are as clear and as simple as possible. It should ensure that any revised structures are made publicly available and are widely communicated.**

Findings and Recommendations



Findings and Recommendations

Finding 5 - Keeping Councillors involved.

Our case study on the decision making process concerning CityConnect leaves us concerned that there could be more political oversight of officer decisions. Although there was some discussion at Transport Committee, WYCA officers seem able to change spending priorities with little Member involvement. WYCA and Calderdale officers may not have communicated sufficiently with everyone who needed to know what was going on.

WYCA have informed us that the City Connect scheme that was used as the case study by the scrutiny inquiry began before the Combined Authority's current assurance processes were adopted and therefore the early stages of that project were not implemented pursuant to the governance arrangements that are now in place. We understand this, but we still think that WYCA and Calderdale Council need to work more proactively to ensure that there is as much transparency as possible. What may seem perfectly clear to experienced Councillors and officers used to working through local government governance may still appear opaque to those less familiar with the way we work. This is particularly relevant when this important work is "one step removed" from the normal ward Member - Executive relationship.

We consider that WYCA should review its protocols and working arrangements to see where improvements can be made in this area. Calderdale officers also need to consider how and when they discuss WYCA activity with a wider group of Members, including ward Members where a matter affects their ward.

We learnt from officers that the Council was supporting the Northern Powerhouse Rail route through Bradford as the best option for Calderdale that is likely to succeed. We understand why this approach might have been adopted, but it is an example where a wider discussion within Calderdale involving Members across parties could and perhaps should have taken place. A later finding in this report raises issues about scrutiny. Place Scrutiny Board would be an ideal venue for such discussions to take place.

Recommendation 4: WYCA should review its protocols to ensure that decision making processes become fully transparent.

Recommendation 5: WYCA should ensure that it is clear when Members are taking decisions and when decisions are delegated to officers.

Recommendation 6: WYCA should establish an effective information process and structure which will enable local Members to comment and contribute when an issue affects their ward.

Recommendation 7: The Chief Executive should ensure that ward members are aware when WYCA is considering an issue that impacts particularly on their ward.

Findings and Recommendations

Finding 6 - Supporting our Councillors.

Nine Calderdale Councillors sit on 14 Committees, Panels or Boards. It is important that all these Councillors receive good support to assist them in these roles. We consider that Cabinet Members may be better supported than other Councillors who are involved. We would like to see an automatic allocation of officers to brief (and debrief) elected Members serving on WYCA boards and panels. These officers should ensure that key outcomes are reported to the Chief Executive and Leader to facilitate coordination and communication of activity within WYCA.

We understand that Cabinet members who sit on WYCA and its Committees have a particular function, but we consider it important that “opposition” members are also well briefed by officers. This will enable there to be a fuller contribution from Calderdale in WYCA.

We think there is a wider issue of how Members who sit on any number of external bodies are supported in those activities and we recommend that Governance and Business Committee consider how this should be done.

Recommendation 8: **The Chief Executive should ensure that briefing arrangements are in place for all Members involved in WYCA and its Committees and Sub Committees. These arrangements should include mechanisms for Members to feed back key issues that arise from their activity in WYCA.**

Recommendation 9: **Governance and Business Committee should consider whether there are adequate arrangements to support Members who are appointed by Council to serve on external bodies.**

Finding 7 - How do Councillors know what's going on?

There are no formal reporting back mechanisms from WYCA or its Committees to the Council. Whilst it is open to anyone to examine WYCA agenda and minutes, these are not always easy to follow and to get a sense of the broader issues. Members may, of course, question any Cabinet Member at full council about their activity within WYCA, but if information about WYCA is not easily available, it makes it difficult to ask meaningful questions. Leeds Council has a standing item on its full Council agenda which is informed by a report by their Chief Executive providing an update on matters in the Leeds City Region Local Enterprise Partnership and through the West Yorkshire Combined Authority. Kirklees Council receives the minutes of the West Yorkshire Combined Authority. We consider that we should adopt the practice of Leeds Council and consider a report on the Council’s activity within WYCA at every full Council meeting.

WYCA circulated a first email bulletin for elected members across West Yorkshire after we met in February. This is a welcome development.

Recommendation 10: **Consideration of a report by the Chief Executive on WYCA activity and particular issues of concern to Calderdale should be considered as a standing item at every meeting of full Council.**

Findings and Recommendations

Finding 8 - There can be benefits to Calderdale from investments in other parts of West Yorkshire.

A question is often asked about whether Calderdale “punches above its weight” in sub-regional work. We received evidence that in some areas of activity Calderdale has been disproportionately successful. We were reminded that benefits to Calderdale from WYCA investment are not limited to initiatives within the Calderdale boundaries. The new Low Moor Station and improvements to Leeds Station were given as examples of initiatives outside Calderdale that have a positive impact on our economy. It was also suggested to us that “going into WYCA to extract as much benefit as possible” was an approach adopted by some partners, but risks being counter-productive and that more benefit to our area can be achieved by being an effective and collaborative partner.

We can see value in all Calderdale Members who sit on any WYCA body doing some work together about how Calderdale Members should work within a WYCA setting, perhaps resulting in a written protocol encapsulating this philosophy, sharing information that comes from that activity and involving local ward Members whenever an issue impacts on their ward.

Recommendation 11: **Members who sit on WYCA and its Committees should be encouraged to continue to work for the overall benefit of West Yorkshire within WYCA, rather than to take a parochial approach. This should be reflected in the priorities of the Council and Cabinet.**

Finding 9 - Looking west as well as within West Yorkshire.

Particularly in the west of the Borough, economic activity and initiatives outside the WYCA boundaries is often of more significance than activity within it. Manchester is closer to Todmorden in economic impact, travel time and employment opportunities than Leeds. Todmorden to Manchester is 30 minutes by train; to Leeds is an hour.

The Council needs to ensure that operating effectively as a member of WYCA does not limit our capacity to work effectively with neighbour areas, particularly in Manchester and East Lancashire. As well as undertaking our own initiatives, we need to make sure that WYCA helps us cooperate more effectively across boundaries.

Recommendation 12: **Cabinet should include approaches to partnership working with neighbouring areas outside West Yorkshire within its strategies and, in particular, within economic and transport strategies.**

Recommendation 13: **WYCA should identify those activities that would benefit from collaboration with neighbouring areas, in particular Greater Manchester and East Lancashire and adopt clear strategies for developing such collaboration.**

Findings and Recommendations

Finding 10 - Scrutiny Committee - in WYCA and in Calderdale.

One member of our group observed a WYCA Scrutiny Committee meeting, which, amongst other things, examined the CityConnect programme. This was a well-run meeting, but it felt that the impact of the scrutiny was limited. Calderdale Members who sit on the Scrutiny Committee receive little support from WYCA, although we understand that WYCA is about to appoint a Scrutiny Officer which should improve this situation. These Members do not currently receive any support in their role from the Calderdale Scrutiny Support Team.

Scrutiny is one way in which the public and Councillors not directly involved in WYCA can learn more about what is being decided within WYCA and can observe democratic accountability. We consider that the WYCA scrutiny process needs strengthening.

We also consider that Calderdale Scrutiny Boards need to give more emphasis to the work of the Council within WYCA in their work programmes. Cabinet Members and senior officers should ensure that Place Scrutiny Board is kept updated about current issues within WYCA that affect Calderdale.

Recommendation 14: WYCA should take the opportunity of the appointment of a Scrutiny Officer to review the effectiveness of their scrutiny arrangements.

Recommendation 15: Calderdale Scrutiny Boards - and Place Scrutiny Board in particular - should ensure that sufficient consideration is given to WYCA matters in their work programmes.

Finding 11 - Meeting in places other than Leeds

The work of WYCA is not easily accessible by the public or by Councillors not directly involved, although some of the meetings are webcast. All WYCA meetings and main Committee meetings are in Leeds. We consider that – from time to time – WYCA meetings and Committee meetings should be held in other parts of West Yorkshire. As a target, at least one meeting a year should be arranged in each constituent authority. Clearly, the first venue chosen for such meetings should be Halifax!

Recommendation 16 : WYCA should arrange occasionally to hold its meetings and Committee meetings in towns and cities other than Leeds.



City Connect Programme – Decision Making Case Study

As part of the detailed review Cllr Sweeney examined the decision making process concerning the CityConnect programme – and, in particular, the Phase 2 of the Calderdale Canals Project (Rochdale Canal between Hebden Bridge and Todmorden). The objective of this case study was not to assess whether decisions about this project were correct, but the way in which the decisions were taken. This is a brief summary of the decision making process in relation to this scheme, extracted from a note provided by WYCA officers:

- As projects within the second phase of the programme progressed, it became clear that the funding available would be insufficient to deliver the whole programme. There had also been concerns raised about the quality and design aspiration of some of the projects. This was reported to Transport Committee in April 2017.
- A Programme level review was reported thought the WYCA assurance process, with the conclusions presented to the Programme Appraisal Team for a steer on a recommended approach and then to the Transport Committee in July 2017. The review concluded that the highest performing projects should proceed and the remaining projects put on a “reserve list”. This recommendation was approved by Managing Director delegation following a meeting of the Transport Committee.
- Phase 2 of the Calderdale Canals Project was included on the reserve list due to concerns relating to the quality of design as well as the scheme not performing well for value for money as a stand-alone project.
- Between July 2017 and November 2017 further work was concluded on the four projects that remained on the reserve list. It was recommended to Transport Committee that Phase 2 of the Calderdale Canals Project should remain on the reserve list at this time. Alternative funding options for the scheme were being pursued.

The key points arising from this case study are:

- The decisions relating to Phase 2 of the Calderdale Canals Project have been taken properly , in accordance with WYCA governance arrangements.
- The role of members of the Transport Committee has effectively been to endorse officer recommendations. The final decision has been taken by the Managing Director under delegated powers.
- Although there was consultation on the proposal with local people and local Councillors at an early stage, there has been little opportunity for local Councillors to get involved or indeed informed at key decision points.
- The decision making processes of WYCA are complex and not transparent to the public and to local Councillors, except to those directly involved in them.
- If local people can find their way through the decision making process to the reports, it is not easy for them to identify the decision that has been taken.
- Some Calderdale officers have been involved at the decision making points. This presents opportunities for wider involvement of local Councillors.

Our work

Member observed West Yorkshire Combined Authority Scrutiny Committee - 4 January 2018

Member met with Cllr Keith Wakefield, Kate Thompson, Caroline Allen, Fiona Limb, 29 January 2018 to discuss CityConnect decision making

Evidence Session - 5 February 2018 - Evidence from:

- » **Ms Liz Hunter, Interim Director, Policy and Strategy, West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA)**
- » **Councillor Tim Swift, Leader of Calderdale Council**
- » **Councillor Barry Collins, Deputy Leader of Calderdale Council**
- » **Councillor Dan Sutherland, Cabinet Member, Calderdale Council**
- » **Councillor Dot Foster, Calderdale Councillor who sits on the WYCA Overview and Scrutiny Committee**
- » **Robin Tuddenham, Chief Executive**
- » **Mark Thompson, Director, Regeneration and Strategy**
- » **Nigel Broadbent, Head of Finance**
- » **Steven Lee, Assistant Director, Strategic Infrastructure**
- » **Mary Farrar, Corporate lead, transformation**
- » **Heidi Wilson, Strategic Housing Delivery Manager**
- » **Fiona Thurlbeck, Service Lead, Business and Skills**

Written evidence also provided by Councillor James Baker (WYCA Scrutiny Committee) and Councillor Peter Caffrey (WYCA Transport Committee)

For further information about this report please email us at scrutiny@calderdale.gov.uk or visit www.calderdale.gov.uk





