

Minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held remotely on Tuesday, 16 February 2021

Commenced 4.00 pm
Concluded 5.00 pm

Present – Councillors

LABOUR	CONSERVATIVE	LIBERAL DEMOCRAT AND INDEPENDENT GROUP
Azam D Green Kamran Hussain Watson Tait	Pollard Bibby Riaz	Reid

Observers: Councillor Hinchcliffe, Councillor Ross-Shaw, Councillor Dodds, Councillor Love, Councillor Johnson, Councillor Winnard, Nicola Hoggart, non-voting co-opted member of Regeneration and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Azam in the Chair

9. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

In the interests of transparency, the following members all disclosed their service on the West Yorkshire Combined Authority:-

- Councillor Dodds
- Councillor Watson
- Councillor Riaz
- Councillor Winnard

ACTION: City Solicitor

10. MINUTES

Resolved –

That the minutes of the meeting held on 7 January 2021 be signed as a correct record.

ACTION: City Solicitor

11. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

No requests were made to remove the restriction on a report or background paper.

12. REFERRALS TO THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

No referrals were made to the Committee.

13. WEST YORKSHIRE DEVOLUTION

At the commencement of the meeting, the Chair welcomed all those members of the Regeneration & Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee who were in attendance as observers.

The Strategic Director Place submitted a report (**Document “Y”**) which updated members on devolution in West Yorkshire and the attendant benefits for Bradford and the wider region. It also outlined the progress being made by Bradford Council and the West Yorkshire Combined Authority in taking forward main work streams and governance in preparation for the new Mayoral Combined Authority for West Yorkshire.

The Strategic Director, introduced the report and explained that the devolution order had been made by Government on 29 January 2021. He stated that there were significant benefits to devolution, including increased funding and influence. He took members through the new powers that would result from devolution and highlighted the particular benefits to Bradford. These would include funding to develop a masterplan for a new city centre railway station and support for an Enact early hub. Members were advised that significant progress had already been made on the new railway station and that the West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) was holding a series of workshops in respect of devolution issues.

The Managing Director of WYCA joined the meeting and explained in detail the elements of the devolution order, explaining that, while some elements had immediate effect, others would come into force with the election of a Mayor in May 2021.

The Chair queried the governance arrangements that would be in place to ensure fairness and accountability. He was advised that there would be comprehensive scrutiny of all functions to ensure that the original objectives of devolution held true and that each of the five Local Authorities within West Yorkshire would continue to be represented. Arrangements were already in place to ensure that

objectives were shared.

A member welcomed the report, stressing that one of the reasons devolution was so important was the benefit to everyone living within West Yorkshire as a result of economic and transport improvements. He complemented the team in achieving progress to date but highlighted that plans and policies must be explained clearly to ensure that the new body was both relevant and accessible.

Another member queried the challenges the Council would face in implementing change and was advised that they included preparing to be a mayoral combined authority and ensuring that all opportunities were maximised. Practical issues to address included the challenges of climate change and the immediate issues of COVID-19.

The Managing Director of WYCA concurred with that view, stressing that WYCA had an economic recovery plan in place to facilitate recovery post pandemic.

He also stressed that consultation was ongoing in respect of connectivity across the District, particularly with regard to improving bus use.

The Chair then asked how priorities had changed as a result of the pandemic and was informed that the pandemic had been enormously disruptive to the priorities which had previously been established and that it would have significant ongoing consequences, particularly for industry and education.

Another member queried the timescale for the brownfield housing fund and was advised that projects must be identified by June 2021 and in construction or delivered by 2024/25. The member commented that it would be good to know where the fund was proposed to be utilised.

Members asked what lessons had been learned from areas which had already gone through devolution and were advised that two particular themes had stood out:-

- The relationship between the mayor and council leaders must be a real partnership to achieve best results
- The new organisation must be well prepared before the mayor was elected to make the transfer of responsibilities as seamless as possible. An emphasis on decision making, governance and scrutiny was also vital.

Members were also advised that the role of the Police and Crime Commissioner would transfer on 10 May 2021, following the elections, but that in the event of elections not being able to go ahead as planned, the current Commissioner would remain in place until elections did happen.

The Chair of the Regeneration and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee was in attendance and concurred with colleagues' views that devolution was very welcome. He also asked how local neighbourhoods would be supported and was informed that relationships would be developed in partnership with Local Authorities in order to resolve local issues and build safer and stronger neighbourhoods.

The Leader of Council was also in attendance and stressed that devolution would

be a crucial advantage for economic recovery. She looked forward to WYCA and local authorities being part of the same family and to ensuring inclusivity and fair access across West Yorkshire.

The Chair concluded the discussion by thanking all those involved in making devolution possible so far and stressing that the opportunities it provided must be grasped with both hands.

Resolved –

That officers from the West Yorkshire Combined Authority and Bradford Council be thanked for their efforts and that the Committee looks forward to receiving future updates.

Action: Strategic Director, Place.

Chair

Note: These minutes are subject to approval as a correct record at the next meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

THESE MINUTES HAVE BEEN PRODUCED, WHEREVER POSSIBLE, ON RECYCLED PAPER