

**West of England Combined Authority
West of England Combined Authority Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

Monday, 22 January 2024, 1pm
70 Redcliff Street, Bristol, BS1 6AL

Present:

Cllr Ed Plowden, Bristol City Council
Cllr Alison Streatfeild-James, Bath and North
East Somerset Council
Cllr David Addison, South Gloucestershire
Council
Cllr Mark Bradshaw, Bristol City Council
Cllr Katy Grant, Bristol City Council

Cllr Tim Kent, Bristol City Council
Cllr Hal MacFie, Bath and North East Somerset
Council
Cllr Brenda Massey, Bristol City Council
Cllr Ben Randles, South Gloucestershire Council
Cllr Geoff Gollop, Bristol City Council (Substitute
for Cllr Jonathan Hucker)

Observer: Cllr Mike Bird, North Somerset
Council

The Metro Mayor was in attendance for item 4

Officers In Attendance:

Richard Ennis, Interim Chief Executive
Daniel Dickinson, Interim Monitoring Officer
Rachel Musson, Strategic Director of Resources
Malcolm Parsons, Head of Capital Delivery
Phil Wright, Public Transport Programme
Manager
Jess Lee, Director of Policy & Strategy
Jill Bennett, Democratic Services and Scrutiny
Manager
Suzanne Ogborne, Democratic Services Officer
(Virtual)

Apologies:

Cllr Jonathan Hucker, Bristol City Council

Minutes

1	Evacuation Procedure The evacuation procedure was noted
2	Apologies for absence Apologies were received from Cllr Jonathan Hucker, Bristol City Council and it was noted that Cllr Geoff Gollop was deputising for him.
3	Declarations of Interest under the Localism Act 2011 The Chair, Cllr Ed Plowden, declared that he was employed by Sustrans as their Director of the National Cycle Network.
4	Questions to the Metro Mayor The Chair welcomed the Mayor to the meeting for a Question and Answer session. In response to questions asked by the Committee, the Mayor responded as follows: 1. The Mayor was asked why the Advisory Boards – the Planning & Housing and Transport Board and the Business & Skills Board - are not used to greater effect and

why certain matters that UA Members and officers wanted to discuss were vetoed by the Mayor?

Metro Mayor Dan Norris said that he was quite happy about the established ways of working and he is always available to anyone who wants to talk to him. He commented that he thought that the Advisory Boards were important as they allowed dialogue with Members and officers in the UAs. He said that he relied on the UA councillors and others to inform him of local matters and this is incredibly important. He said that he was not aware of vetoing anything in terms of items coming forward to inform the agendas for these meetings and he is open to ideas and dialogue. He would like the meetings to be focussed so that they enabled meaningful discussions that are important to the public.

2. In relation to the Temple Quarter Joint Delivery Plans, the Metro Mayor was asked if he could clarify when carbon accounting will become a centre piece for all activities across the region. He was also asked how do we know if double carbon accounting will be avoided and what format that will take and how it will balance against the pressure of financial budgeting?

Metro Mayor Dan Norris said we have a Climate Emergency with targets set for 2030 and we need to ensure that we meet the targets. He highlighted that Temple Quarter was a big project and a great opportunity. He said he was confident that we can do all those things with double accounting to measure progress or otherwise. There will continue to be many discussions with all stakeholders and the need for all the people in the region to get involved.

He said that given that we have all these extra responsibilities in respect of the Climate Emergency that this would require time and effort. We now need to match that with the resources, in particular human resources. We need to use the resources wisely and as well as we can. If we do not, we will not be given more funds.

Richard Ennis, Interim Acting Chief Executive commented that the Combined Authority (CA) had set up an Environment Directorate to consider the Climate Emergency which is headed up by Roger Hoare. There will be training carried out around carbon accounting for CA staff. He mentioned that Bristol Temple Quarter is the joint second largest regeneration project in the country and we have to get the balance right working with both the private and public sectors.

3. In connection with the £106m Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) and the loss of a substantial number of bus routes in the region, the Metro Mayor was asked how he felt that Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) was working.

Metro Mayor Dan Norris, said that the region was successful in getting the £106m BSIP funding however the money had not come unconditionally. Government had stipulated strict criteria for the use of the money and this tied our hands about some of the options for using this. Many buses and bus route have been lost and the truth is that despite the huge amount of money we have been given, we still have greater demand than we have money. There are many communities that are left isolated, for instance where residents cannot get to the local shops, to the GP practice for medical appointments and some cannot get to work.

The Mayor commented that the big challenge had been the huge pressures that the UAs are facing with reduced budgets and the resulting cuts in expenditure that they are having to make. This resulted in less money being available from the Unitary Authorities to subsidise the bus services through the Bus Levy. As a result their contributions to the Levy were frozen. That coincided with a huge increase in inflation being felt by the bus industry.

The Metro Mayor said that he wanted to ask all the Councils to contribute more to the Levy

	<p>pot to reflect the need and highlighted that this is happening in other parts of the country. However, he acknowledged that the region is in the difficult position in that it does not have precepting powers, which means that we cannot raise Council tax to pay for the bus subsidies. There is also a national shortage of bus drivers.</p> <p>In relation to On-demand responsive services, the Mayor did not feel that it was working particularly well and he felt that it had potential but that potential had not yet been fulfilled. There were challenges with a shortage of buses and bus drivers for DRT. The rules are quite strict including that we cannot compete with commercial services.</p> <p>The scheme is constantly being reviewed and on-demand services are working differently in different parts of the area. The team need to work out a way that we can make sure that we can get the demand services to operate for example to and from hospitals and train stations. At Bristol Parkway there is no way to pick up an on-demand service there.</p> <p>4. The Chair commented that when DRT was introduced it was about integrated transport and DRT was not seen as a replacement to normal bus services. The Metro Mayor said that DRT was for short distances and to get to the main route. He felt that the zones were too big and that we need to look at this again.</p> <p>5. The Metro Mayor was asked for assurance that a meaningful Forward Plan is prepared and updated regularly so that the Overview & Scrutiny function can be carried out in a meaningful way. The Metro Mayor gave an undertaking to re-double efforts to try and get this in place.</p> <p>6. Members commented that it was good to see financial information on WESTLink and that they would also like to see the figures in relation to the zones.</p> <p>7. The B&NES Member asked for a meeting for one of his residents with the Mayor to discuss the re-routing of the number 522 bus. The Mayor said that his officers would arrange this.</p> <p>8. In response to comments made by members of Bristol Old People’s Forum and the Ashton Vale Suffragettes, the Mayor said that he would arrange for a meeting for them to meet with himself and Doug Claringbold from FirstBus to discuss the Ashton Vale bus service situation.</p> <p>The Chair thanked the Mayor for attending the meeting.</p>
5	<p>Minutes</p> <p>Having not reached an agreement on amendments submitted by Councillor Kent and the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny, the minutes of the 8 September 2023 were deferred.</p> <p>The minutes of 2 October 2023 were agreed.</p>
6	<p>Chair's Announcements</p> <p>The Chair made the following announcements:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That Overview & Scrutiny members would continue the custom and practice of observing the Planning & Housing and Transport Advisory Board and the Business & Skills Advisory Board. 2. In connection with the above, he would like Overview & Scrutiny members to confirm to him by email whether they would like to observe next month’s Advisory Boards. The Planning & Housing and Transport Board will be held on 19 February 2024 at 1pm and Business & Skills on 22 February 2024 at 1pm. Both meetings are held virtually on

	<p>Zoom.</p> <p>3. Audit and Scrutiny committee members had attended a training session with Ed Hammond from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS). It was suggested that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A further informal meeting be organised, this had had now been confirmed as 9 February 2024 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is room for improvement and a need for continual self-reflection. • There is a need to be clear about the distinction between Audit (compliance, risk and control) and Overview and Scrutiny and this could be achieved with some amendments to the current Constitution. • In relation to the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), it would be important that the Combined Authority’s Constitution is clear and specific about its new role in relation to this. • A new protocol had been issued by the Department for Levelling up (DLUHC) – this needs to be used as a guide and there was some more work to be done around this <p>The Chair was pleased to see that there is a budget proposal for an extra Combined Authority Democratic Services Officer to help with this work.</p>
7	<p>Items from the Public (Questions, Statements and Petitions)</p> <p>The Chair noted that 8 questions had been submitted by members of the public. Written responses had been provided and are available on the Authority’s website.</p> <p>The Chair noted that 4 statements had been received as follows:</p> <p>1 David Redgewell 2 Ian Quaife 3 Rosa Kell 4 Ian Beckey and Brendon Taylor</p> <p>The following attended the meeting to present their statements - David Redgewell and Bernice McKendrick on behalf of Ian Quaife.</p> <p>The Chair thanked those in attendance for their questions and statements. He commented that whilst Overview and Scrutiny did not have any power or remit with regards to the topics discussed, the members of the public may wish to submit their comments, statements and questions to the Combined Authority Committee, who are the decision-making body.</p>
8	<p>Bus Service Improvement Plan Task and Finish Group</p> <p>The Chair introduced the item and explained that the report attached (version 2) to the agenda papers was prepared following meetings of the Task & Finish Group between October and December 2023. He thanked officers for all their hard work. He commented that the UAs also need to consider how their portfolio holders are kept involved. He highlighted that there was concern in particular with regards to the Birthday buses, noting that there was an assertion that the uplift in numbers is attributed to the Birthday Buses scheme. In addition, he raised some concerns that residents in the top 10% of the socio-economic group were most engaged with the scheme. He further mentioned that WESTLink should be kept abreast of the boundaries in North Somerset.</p>

Summary of comments from Members:

The Chair and Officers were thanked for drafting the report. It was felt that it had been an open, frank and honest process. It was clear that there are challenges within the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) in relation to delivery. Also, serious concerns over Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) and its effectiveness.

It was noted that Audit Committee was looking at aspects of this from a governance and decision point of view. It was acknowledged that a lot of the issues overlapped.

In relation to the Ashton Vale residents' comments earlier in the meeting, it was felt that we do need to recognise the costs to our constituent authorities of social isolation caused by transport issues and that joined up thinking needs to be considered.

In relation to the wider issues around BSIP, it is important to consider whether we have identified the measures by which we all judge success. The criteria should be set at the outset and this is important in view of the fact that we are innovating and doing things differently. This should be applied to BSIP and any other new funding we may achieve.

Members were keen for further performance data in relation to DRT, for example: the number of passengers on each ride, the numbers of unmet demand, rides not completed and how much time the buses are driving around empty.

There was an 'ask' that directly affected ward members are informed as to what decisions are being made and when. Richard Ennis, Interim Acting Chief Executive explained that the Authority had an Infrastructure Director who meets his counterparts in UAs and that they work together, and papers are taken through that group on a regular basis. The Planning & Housing and Transport Board also had an opportunity to consider any issues.

It was concluded by the Chair, that this had been an incredibly useful exercise. He suggested that for the future the Task & Finish timetable allows for officers contributions to reports before they go public and that we ensure that the next steps are followed up.

9

Comments from the Informal Meeting held on 15 January 2024 & Review of Items to be considered by the West of England Combined Authority Committee and Joint Committee on 26 January 2024

BRISTOL TEMPLE QUARTER REGENERATION PROGRAMME

The report sought approval to participate in the Joint Delivery Vehicle (JDV) being created to drive forward the comprehensive regeneration of the Bristol Temple Quarter (BTQ) regeneration area. The Interim Acting Chief Executive explained that this is a 20 year programme which includes 10,000 homes and the wider St Philips Marsh area and also Flood zone works and is of major significance.

The following was noted from discussions:

- The need for affordable housing for the people living in the area and those in the lowest paid jobs. Consideration should be given to how the accountability flows, how viability is being assessed and whether we are going to be bound by these rules and not tilted away from affordability. We need assurance that we have got it right and it will deliver what is needed for those who need accommodation most.
- The Interim Chief Executive explained that there are a number of different bodies

involved including the four partners, the Combined Authority, Homes England, Bristol City Council (largest) and Network Rail. Homes England's Chief Executive sits on the Board and there is £94m grant funding from them. Discussions around affordability are a big issue and also we need a scheme that works for the public sector and the private sector as well. We are working with Homes England to look at schemes like 'rent to buy' where a person buys a percentage of their house. Richard also mentioned that a Joint Delivery Team is being set up and February/March will see the procurement of a developer for the scheme.

- The Chair highlighted that there is some exposure to risk and that Overview & Scrutiny would see regular reports.
- Members felt that the handling of public engagement is going to be vital as the project progresses with members and community groups so that they are able to be heard.
- A comment was made regarding the Exempt papers to accompany the report and it was agreed that a discussion was needed to establish a principle going forward for members to have confidential access to these background papers.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

MAYORAL AND COMBINED AUTHORITY BUDGET 2024/5 AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

The Chair explained that Overview and Scrutiny Members had an informal meeting on 15 January 2024 to look in detail at the Budget. Members felt that overall the paperwork was much more streamlined and had been reduced in volume. The key issues Members focussed on were staffing issues and buses. Members expressed concern about the Transport Levy; as the financial gap becomes larger, the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) funding would also come to an end. It was considered that the region was heading towards a very difficult financial position in relation to this. For the next year there would be a balanced budget but as we moved forward there are going to be really difficult decisions to be made.

The following was noted from discussions:

- There was support for there not being a 10% reduction in staffing as per the previous year.
- In relation to the Treasury management report, given that we are actively investing in measures to reduce carbon, this needed to be built into treasury management. Members welcomed the carbon counting as part of this.
- It was noted that Avon Pension Fund is making strong efforts to move towards investment in low carbon schemes.
- Consideration should be given to how any extra funding from the UAs for the Transport Levy would be spent to best effect. The Head of Capital Delivery explained that transport officers at the CA would work with their counterparts in the UAs to work through the best way to use this additional budget on additional bus services.
- It was noted that in relation to BSIP funding, the region had negotiated an extension of a year to 2025 and we were told that we could extend the use of that money into supported services which was not originally allowed. However the terms excluded any fares promotion, it was about keeping bus services commercially viable.
- Members were pleased to see that there is some optimism in relation to the bus market recovering.
- In relation to the increased cost for staff at the Combined Authority, the Committee

was convinced the size of the CA and number of staff was warranted. This would provide a better corporate centre. Officers commented that the report to committee now includes detail of which roles are project funded and which are not, see Appendix 4.

Resolved:
That the report be noted.

TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME

The Chair commented on Page 125 of the report that there was an interim Value for Money (VfM) report from Grant Thornton and noted that his expectation was that Scrutiny should have been aware of this. The Strategic Director of Resources commented that this was part of the annual report to Committee and that Grant Thornton would report to the next Audit Committee.

The Director of Policy & Strategy explained that the Authority would be using the Regional Strategy through which to assess the Investment Strategy and prioritisation. Once this is in place there will be a process of engagement with regional partners on the strategy which would happen in February/March with the aim to get a strategy in place to bring to Committee in June 2024. It was noted that there was a new recommendation 1 in the Budget report to consider role and purpose by Autumn.

The Chair mentioned the Combined Authority's Constitution and its role and purpose. He commented that he would like to see more willingness of all parties to co-operate with sorting out day to day aspects of the Constitution. The Interim Director of Law & Governance stated that there would be a Task & Finish Group to consider the Constitution.

The Chair thanked officers for their work.

Resolved:
That the report be noted

TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

To provide an update to the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority Committee on key transport schemes and to secure approval from Committee on critical decisions and associated funding (where applicable) within the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority Transport Infrastructure programme.

The following was noted from discussions:

- In relation to ZEBRA 2, the electric vehicle bidding scheme, it was noted that this would only going ahead with First. In the preparations for Zebra 3 would there be an opportunity to expand that to work with other bus operators so that they could buy into electric buses - which could benefit smaller operators. The Head of Capital Delivery commented that there would be no reason why other operators could not be involved in future bids. It was explained that the bid was split into two elements, fleet and depots across First areas. He noted that the Authority would be left with some more Bristol centric depots and it was explained that the fleet would be used across the region.
- In relation to Electric Vehicle charging, it was felt that it should be easy and convenient for members of the public to use EV charging points. It was noted that we are trying to

	<p>influence the market and not be driven by it.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In relation to the BSIP delegations, the Committee requested sight of the dates that the decisions were made. <i>These will be circulated following the meeting</i> • The committee were pleased to see a range of transport innovations around rail which they considered to be somewhat overlooked. However, there was little evidence with regards to improving accessibility at existing railway stations. The Head of Capital delivery said that there was a paragraph in the report that recognised accessibility was not good. His team were looking specifically at railway stations in Lawrence Hill, Parson Street and Avonmouth. • Complex technical work would need to be carried out in the long term and concern was expressed whether the Combined Authority had the right expertise internally to deliver these. • It was noted that the Department for Transport were going to start funding electrification again. It would be important to re-ignite the Government's interest in the region. • The Chair questioned if the Regional transport model proposed would be brought in-house. The Head of Capital delivery commented that it would be led by the Combined Authority with the UAs and be a joint effort across the region. <p>Resolved: That the report be noted.</p>
10	<p>Agenda setting for the Informal meeting to be held on 9 February 2024 The Chair commented that there would be an informal meeting of Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 9 February 2023. The proposed agenda would include carbon budgeting and a discussion on the next steps following the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) training. He also mentioned that consideration would be given to establishing a Task & Finish group to focus on Governance and the Constitution. The Committee would look at other Task & Finish group topics with specialist leads.</p>
	<p>Date of next meeting: Monday, 11 March 2024</p>

Meeting ended at 1.05pm