

West of England Combined Authority Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Monday, 11 March 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 Mark Bradshaw, Bristol City Council
Cllr Katy Grant, Bristol City Council

Cllr Jonathan Hucker, Bristol City Council
Cllr Hal MacFie, Bath and North East Somerset
Council
Cllr Brenda Massey, Bristol City Council
Cllr Ben Randles, South Gloucestershire Council

Metro Mayor – Dan Norris (for agenda Item 4)

Officers In Attendance:

Richard Ennis, Interim Acting Chief Executive
Daniel Dickinson, Interim Monitoring Officer
Rachel Musson, Strategic Director of Resources
Roger Hoare, Director of Environment
Jess Lee, Director of Policy & Strategy
Stephen Bashford, Strategic Director of Economy
and Skills
Phil Wright, BSIP Programme Manger
Bob Scowen, Consultant
Nicola Phillips, Transport Operations Team
Manager
Marcia Daniels, Corporate Communications
Manager
Jill Bennett, Democratic Services and Scrutiny
Manager
Suzanne Ogborne, Democratic Services Officer

Apologies:

Cllr David Addison, South Gloucestershire
Council

Cllr Tim Kent, Bristol City Council

Minutes

1	Evacuation Procedure The evacuation procedure was noted.
2	Declarations of Interest under the Localism Act 2011 The Chair, Cllr Ed Plowden, declared that he was employed by Sustrans as the Director of the National Cycle Network.
3	Apologies for absence Apologies were received from Cllr Tim Kent, Bristol City Council and Cllr David Addison, South Gloucestershire Council
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 about his thoughts on the recent Best Value Notice which

had been issued to the Mayoral Combined Authority (MCA) by Government. Metro Mayor Dan Norris stated that it related to issues that were 'live' when he came into post and noted other Combined Authority regions had equal challenges to consider. He explained that it was a positive opportunity to re-set and to revisit the relationships between the Combined Authority Mayoralty and the Unitary Authorities but this would have to be reciprocated particularly with upcoming political changes in Bristol. He further questioned the timing of the notice being issued during a general election year.

2. In response to a question about the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) and Demand Responsive Transport, the Metro Mayor Dan Norris said that he felt that officers were making some decisions without strong enough political leadership. In relation to WESTlink, he said where this service worked well was for smaller journeys to link up with the existing transport systems. However, it was not always working in the way that was expected and commented that this was an experiment and would be continually evolving. He would like to re-visit this in six months and for politicians to have more input.

3. In relation to BSIP and the UA's request for consultation on key proposals within the programme, Members asked why the Mayor had not allowed this to be discussed at the meeting of the Planning & Housing and Transport Board at its 19 February 2024 meeting, despite a specific request from Cllr Sarah Warren. Metro Mayor Dan Norris said that Cllr Sarah Warren's approach made it difficult to have a discussion as it usually became a disagreement about facts. He explained that BSIP had to be seen in a much wider context as it is complicated. Alongside this there is a need to talk about the Transport Levy. It is the responsibility of the Councils to provide subsidised buses where there is a social need and where there was no commercially run services. He commented that 18 months ago the Unitary Authorities decided to freeze the Levy and in that time we have seen bus inflation which inevitably meant that there would be bus cuts. Mayor Dan Norris expressed his concern with how Bath and North East Somerset Council had used the subsidised money that it had received for subsidised services in the area in a way that he was not happy with; extending the subsidy to run over an election period, knowing that these services would be cut immediately afterwards. He further stated that he would welcome discussions with Councillors from the Unitary Authorities, but he wished for this to be done in a non-party-political point scoring way and noted that there was a need for further discussion in that respect.

4. In relation to the Paulton Bus Bid, B&NES Members said that the first they knew about this was when it was announced in the press and asked whether the Mayor had intentionally withheld this information from them and their officers. They also felt that there was a mismatch between urban and rural areas as only non-bus organisations can apply for funding locally and urban areas do not have parish/town councils. The Metro Mayor Dan Norris said that WESTlocal was not a new concept and that all Combined Authority Members and relevant parish councillors had been invited to consider solutions for their area. He urged Councillors to raise concerns with him at the appropriate time as he was not necessarily aware of what Officers were doing, so that any issues could be altered and adjusted. It was an opportunity for areas to formulate bespoke ideas as one solution does not fit every community.

He said that Paulton had put in a bid, along with other areas, and that if Members think that there are other places that could have been included in that route, to contact him. He said that it would be important to keep this under review.

5. The Mayor was asked, how did he think that issues that we have with WESTLink can be resolved. The Metro Mayor Dan Norris said that more political input and consideration of

	<p>the needs of the people represented would be helpful. He acknowledged that the scheme was not flexible enough to meet the challenges. However, he considered that this is an experiment and this mean that there is an opportunity to shape it in the way that we want.</p> <p>The Chair thanked the Mayor for attending the meeting.</p>
5	<p>Minutes Subject to the inclusion of the following, the minutes of the 8 September 2023 were agreed: “Cllr Kent was also present to speak to his statement but was advised that this was not allowed under public forum. He was, however, invited to speak to it at agenda item 11.”</p> <p>The minutes of 22 January 2024 were agreed.</p>
6	<p>Items from the Public (Questions, Statements and Petitions) The Chair noted that 6 questions had been submitted by members of the public. Written responses had been provided and were available on the Authority’s website.</p> <p>The Chair noted that 3 statements had been received as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. David Redgewell 2. Cllr Sarah Warren 3. Emilia Melville <p>The following attended the meeting to present their statements:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. David Redgewell 2. Cllr Sarah Warren
7	<p>Chair’s Announcements The Chair commented that at an informal meeting, Scrutiny had discussed the following:</p> <p>a) how carbon literacy and accounting can be embedded into the MCA’s decision-making process and included in the body of Committee reports, and how it will be considered globally across the Authority</p> <p>b) a RAG rating against 18 principles for good MCA scrutiny according to the protocols. 18 Scrutiny Protocols had been introduced by the Department for Levelling Up and Communities (DLUHC) in December 2023 and as part of this arrangements were being made for a new Task and Finish Group looking at the Constitution. This is now all the more important due to the Government’s Best Value letter. Arrangements were being made for the Mayoral Combined Authority’s Audit and Overview & Scrutiny members to have access to information via a sharepoint site</p> <p>c) Delivery assurance programme – we are beginning to see some outputs from this, and welcome joint training across all involved in delivery. Awaiting the results of this and an internal audit had been commissioned.</p> <p>He also commented that both he and Alison Streatfeild-James had attended one each of the Combined Authority’s advisory boards as observers. He asked fellow Members to let him know if they would like to attend future advisory board meetings.</p> <p>The Chair highlighted that some Members had raised concerns with him about the accuracy of the Mayor’s statement at the previous O&S committee meeting that he had not been aware of requests to discuss the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) at the Transport and Housing Advisory Board and had suggested this required further discussion at a scrutiny</p>

	<p>meeting. He commented that he had made it clear that if anyone wants to pursue these concerns that he thinks it is a Code of Conduct issue.</p>
<p>8</p>	<p>Citizens' Panel The Chair invited the Corporate Communications Manager, the Transport Operations Team Manager and a representative from TPX Impact to give a presentation to the Committee.</p> <p>As background to this, bus services had seen high inflation, rising driver wages and maintenance costs which had meant increasingly tough choices on which bus services could be financially supported. To help make these choices and get the views of residents, the Metro Mayor had asked for a Citizens' Panel to be formed to consider the question 'How do we decide which bus services to fund?'. The Citizens' Panel had met and considered this in a general sense and were not to consider or make recommendations about any existing or future individual bus services.</p> <p>12,000 invitations were sent and the team received 309 responses – the team said that they would normally expect 2% but this was a slightly higher response. This required quite a commitment by participants.</p> <p>Officers and TPX Impact were now working on a final criteria and notes document to share with the Combined Authority. Work was already underway to develop a way to apply these priorities to future allocations of funding for bus services. The Transport Operations team will be turning these outcomes into a transparent formula that the Metro Mayor would propose to use for future decisions on funding buses. Outcomes from the Citizens' Panel would be published online by 30 April and speaker videos (where permission was given) would be available to view by 31 March. The Chair commented that the committee would be most interested to hear the outcomes of the Panel's considerations when these are available.</p> <p>Summary of comments from Members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The make-up of the Panel was discussed and B&NES members highlighted that panel members had not been recruited from Radstock and Midsomer Norton which were rural areas and so may not have been fully represented. Officers said that the Panel reflected the population of the Combined Authority region • Officers would in future have a 'reserve' list for panel members in the event that a participant could not make the meetings for any reason • The team were confident that they could take on board the Priorities identified by the Panel and blend these with existing priorities. • Members commented that this allowed for much lived experience and knowledge, informing interesting priorities. • Interestingly, there was overlap with existing priorities and these were as expected apart from one or two • One of the top priorities was at least one service per rural area. It was acknowledged that given the intense pressure on budgets, the reality was that the budget probably would not stretch this far. However the team could look at one bus to cover a rural area and transfer passengers into other services. This is where WESTLink steps in. • The committee were keen that WESTLink was part of the service. <p>Resolved: That the report be noted</p>
<p>9</p>	<p>Bus Service Improvement Plan Officer decisions February 2024 The Chair invited the BSIP Programme Manager and the Interim Head of Integrated Transport to give a presentation to the Committee. The Chair said that he was interested to</p>

know what the outcomes of the Committee decisions were going to be as we moved towards June Committee and the BSIP re-set.

As background, West of England BSIP had been shared with Joint Committee in October 2021 ahead of submission to the Department for Transport (DfT). In April 2022 we received confirmation of the bid success and in July 2022 Committee approved the acceptance of the bid and gave delegations to Mayoral Combined Authority (MCA) Directors of Infrastructure & Resources and NSC Director of Infrastructure. In Autumn/Winter 2022/3 the governance process was established to ensure clarity of decision making and consultation. The BSIP programme is from 2022-2025.

Officers explained that in accordance with this, the Director Decision Notices (signed by the 3 Directors with delegations) are put into the public domain once approved and shared with BSIP Programme Board ahead of formal approval. Once the DDN is approved, detailed delivery commences. The monthly BSIP Programme Board gives a platform for input from the Unitary Authorities as well as internal stakeholders. The team have also held workshops with the UAs to help to shape it.

In relation to upcoming DDNs, these include: Regional Transport Brand – the roll out of *WEST* branding on bus stop flags and timetables across the CA/NSC area, websites and buses, this had been consulted several times with UA/LTA officers as well as through the Enhanced Partnership process; and the Fares Package 3 – the final round of fares packages to support publicly funded bus services in the region and encourage patronage growth. These DDNs have been advertised, but require further work before completion. They have been consulted on with all UAs.

In terms of next steps, there is a request by DfT to do a refresh of the policy document that BSIP is based on. This provides an opportunity to revisit this and to make it into a policy document. The BSIP programme is now in full scale delivery, however it does have to go through the Enhanced Partnership process in early May for submission on 12 June 2024.

Summary of comments from Members:

- Members requested that in order to scrutinise the programme, they would like to receive monthly information on BSIP. The team confirmed that they would share the programme report which would show, for instance, WESTlink patronage levels.
- Officers confirmed that what they would be submitting in June would not be a radical departure from the existing programme. Passenger information, the core bus network and where they are promoting services, will be adjusted but not fundamentally changed.
- Officers explained that community transport was supported by Levy funding and that the WESTlocal bid is an initiative that was signed off by DfT and has strict rules. BSIP money cannot be used to fund community transport. It is quite challenging for local communities to create something which is quite complex. The Combined Authority's role is to try and step in to facilitate something which was locally driven.
- In relation to Real time information (RTI) it was acknowledged that this is at the heart of customer confidence, otherwise they lose faith in the process and use other modes of transport available to them. There needs to be a consistency between the digital screens at bus stops and operator apps. More people are getting their journey information via apps.
- Officers confirmed that addressing the lack of shelters, digital screens and timetables and

	<p>the overall re-branding are part of the Capital programme under CRSTS.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ It was highlighted that as the travel to work area is extensive across the West of England (WoE) it is important to look at the wider geographic picture. Officers confirmed that they also work with colleagues in Somerset, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire and attend their meetings to ensure that they work together in a co-ordinated way. ▪ In relation to RTI there are a multitude of different steps in producing data, officers said that in the short term they have worked with First to put more staff behind the scenes. In the longer term there is a project which would pull together all the different transport apps into one and the hope is that this will be part of the solution. ▪ Officers were asked if the BSIP refresh would be a CA committee decision - officers said that this had to be submitted by 12 June 2024 which is before the June committee. However, they reassured members that they would work through the Enhanced Partnership process and with relevant UA officers.
10	<p>Review of Items for West of England Combined Authority Committee - 15 March 2024 COMBINED AUTHORITY BUDGET FORECAST</p> <p>Members were asked to note the revenue and capital forecast as set out in the report for the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority for the financial year 2023/24 based on data from the period April 2023 to January 2024 for both the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority and Mayoral budgets. Rachel Musson, Strategic Director of Resources, said that the drive should be to get ahead to deliver on time and on budget.</p> <p>In relation to the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), Members were disappointed to see that the deadline for new arrangements had not yet been met. Richard Ennis, Interim Acting Chief Executive, said that this was the position reached for this coming financial year until we agree how we are going to work the Business Board across the region. It is likely that Government will hold the money as we have not been able to reach a position with North Somerset. Both he and Mike Bell of NSC have written to the Secretary of State.</p> <p>Resolved: That the report be noted.</p> <p>EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS - STRATEGIC WORKING APPROACH AND FUNDING REQUEST</p> <p>The following was noted from discussions: Members welcomed the proposed multi-year investment in a new Employment and Skills Fund. They suggest that Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) needs to be a key focus as well as developing the skills of people who may want to be self-employed, both of which can help to tackle deprivation.</p> <p>Members asked for a simple dashboard to enable them to monitor how each of the programmes are progressing.</p> <p>Resolved: That the report be noted.</p> <p>TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME</p> <p>Members suggested that The Best Value Notice received from Government on Tuesday, 5 March 2024 was the key current issue for the Mayoral Combined Authority (MCA) and this was welcomed by both the Audit and Scrutiny Committees.</p>

It was noted that the Scrutiny Committee and the Audit Committee had previously commented that they had seen good progress on the Transformation Programme where it is in the gift of officers to make progress, but had seen little progress on the two statutory recommendations raised by the auditors in November 2022: for the Mayors and Council leaders to improve their working relationships via independent mediation; and for a formal protocol to be agreed to commit to consultation on key proposals, which should be defined at an earlier stage.

Members strongly recommended that everyone carefully considered their responses to the outcomes of the November 2022 Grant Thornton Value for Money Governance Review, the February 2023 SOLACE Independent Review and what was said in the Best Value Notice. It was felt that each of the parties must accept the need for a re-set of working relationships, for a reform of the Constitution and for the need to take a collective approach to this.

It was suggested that all parties make use of the support, facilitation and mediation offered; currently this seems to be limited to a one-hour meeting, but there is no doubt that the process will take considerably longer.

Consideration should be given to the involvement of Scrutiny and Audit in the process and how they can be productively involved in the set up and operation of the Independent Panel.

To consider how the proposed Scrutiny Task and Finish group on the Constitution might be set up and contribute to the process of revising the Constitution. Members requested that the current Interim Monitoring Officer, Dan Dickinson, continued his good work on the Constitution until he leaves the Authority in July 2024.

It was suggested that the CA should use learning from Cambridgeshire & Peterborough.

That consideration is given to reforming the role, purpose and operation of the Advisory Boards as a key forum for improving collaboration.

Securing the attendance of all committee members, including the Mayor, at preparatory meetings in the run up to each committee. Members looked forward to playing their role in this process, including the proposed SOLACE one-year on review. It was noted that a company had been commissioned to carry this out.

It was noted that the Employment & Appointments Committee are considering the recruitment of a permanent CEO and Monitoring Officer.

Overall Scrutiny should be looking much more at on-going performance including monitoring KPIs to keep an eye on the progress for every programme, particularly where the CA is a commissioning authority.

Resolved:
That the report be noted.

CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN (CESAP) 2023

The following was noted from discussions: Members noted the wide-ranging programme to deliver the Climate Emergency Strategy and strongly agreed with the need to develop a carbon accounting/measurement process as soon as possible to assist with the goal of achieving Net Zero by 2030. This should apply not only to the Combined Authority's operations but for all proposed projects that it commissions or delivers directly.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

INVESTMENT FUND PROGRAMME

The following was noted from discussions: Members noted the Delivery Assurance processes being put in place and how difficult it would be to demonstrate the impact of this, as projects will continue to slip and budgets put under pressure even if the process is highly successful. The Committee welcomed the proposed Internal Audit of this process and would encourage a capacity building approach to be taken alongside an inspectorial one

Resolved:

That the report be noted.