

**COMMENTS FROM COUNCILLOR STEPHEN CLARKE,
CHAIR OF WEST OF ENGLAND COMBINED AUTHORITY OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

**COMMENTS TO BE SUBMITTED TO:
JOINT MEETING OF WEST OF ENGLAND COMBINED AUTHORITY COMMITTEE
AND WEST OF ENGLAND JOINT COMMITTEE – 31 JANUARY 2020**

Arising from our meeting held on 29 January 2020, I wish to raise the following matters on behalf of the Combined Authority's Overview & Scrutiny Committee:

1. Climate emergency planning update (agenda item 15)

Overall, we are very disappointed with the report and have great difficulty in accepting the adequacy of the report as a progress update. Our concerns are summarised below.

Immediacy of action:

The key point about the Climate Emergency is that it is an *emergency*; an emergency is defined as a serious/unexpected and often dangerous situation requiring immediate action. In our view, the action taken to date, as set out in the report, does not indicate that the authority is taking forward action on the Climate Emergency with the required pace and urgency.

Climate Emergency action plan:

We note from the report that the "next steps" include the development, in liaison with the West of England unitary authorities, of a Climate Emergency action plan. It was suggested at the meeting that this would be available in the Spring. We would like a clear date to be set by which the action plan will be available to scrutinise.

Governance:

The report recommends that a requirement be added to the terms of reference of all the authority's governance boards to consider the impact of all decisions and advice on the climate emergency. Whilst we understand that the rationale behind this proposal is to embed tackling the climate emergency into the authority's governance, **we recommend in the strongest possible terms that a new Climate Emergency Board is established** to drive forward the regional response, and to ensure that effective actions / priorities are taken forward as quickly as possible. Our view is that the Cabinet lead portfolio member in each of the authorities should comprise this Board, and that the Board should also maintain strong links with the climate emergency action being taken in each authority. Scrutiny of course has an important role in monitoring progress and holding the authority to account but is not empowered to take the decisions required moving forwards to ensure that the essential urgent action is being maintained and that the appropriate level of resource is allocated.

We additionally recommend that WECA should take on an additional employee to concentrate/ focus / champion / co-ordinate activity as Bristol City Council have done.

Resource priorities:

We believe that the £250k currently allocated to support regional climate emergency action is inadequate and should be increased. We are aware that the authority's £350m investment programme was set before the authority declared a climate emergency in July 2019. Nevertheless, we feel it is essential to maintain an ongoing challenge to ensure that investment priorities are re-assessed in light of the Climate Emergency declaration. For example, investment in strategic park and ride sites should be brought forward at the earliest opportunity. We believe that WECA should revisit the prioritisation of the major schemes list that was decided before the declaration of the Climate Emergency and re-assess them in the light of the emergency.

We invite Mayor Tim Bowles to attend one of our meetings and discuss this issue as soon as possible.

2. Consultation with ward councillors and residents

In connection with the Joint Committee report on the LEP One Front Door funding programme, we noted strong concerns from north Bristol scrutiny councillors that appropriate consultation had not taken place with local residents or councillors on the proposed segregated bi-directional cycle path from Crow Lane roundabout to the Charlton Road junction included as part of the A4018 corridor improvements. Whilst we are aware this is a Bristol scheme, we nevertheless feel that the Combined Authority must build appropriate checks and balances into their processes to ensure that all proposals brought through for WECA funding have been the subject of all appropriate consultation.

3. Status of the Joint Spatial Plan

We note that the Joint Spatial Plan is paused given that two authorities have withdrawn from the process. We request please that scrutiny is kept fully informed about the next steps for regional strategic planning.

4. Investment Fund gateway review

We noted from the budget update that the first 5 year Investment Fund gateway review/evaluation is starting. We feel that in overall terms, the authority is strongly placed in terms of meeting the review's requirements.

Cllr. Stephen Clarke
Chair, West of England Combined Authority Overview & Scrutiny Committee