

**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 – 19 JUNE 2020**

Having considered the papers for the 19th June meeting, I wish to raise the following matters on behalf of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

1. Climate emergency planning update (agenda item 22)

Back in January, we expressed our disappointment about the lack of pace and urgency in taking forward the regional climate emergency work. The Climate Emergency was declared in July last year, but we are told the Action Plan is now delayed until October. It was due now.

We do, however, acknowledge and accept that aspects of the plan will need to be reviewed in light of Covid-19 and that recovery planning and climate emergency planning must be linked.

We also feel though that our previous comments have been ignored – in January, we recommended in the strongest possible terms that a new Climate Emergency Board should be established to drive forward the regional response and to ensure that effective actions / priorities are taken forward as quickly as possible. This evidently is not being pursued.

We also raised the issue that the £250k allocated to support regional climate emergency action was inadequate and should be increased and that WECA should take on an additional employee to concentrate/ focus / champion / co-ordinate activity. Again, nothing has happened.

We remain very concerned about the lack of urgency in driving forward an effective regional response and again invite Mayor Tim Bowles to attend one of our meetings to discuss this issue as soon as possible.

2. Update to the Constitution (agenda item 12) and effectiveness of scrutiny

We note that under the Combined Authority governance model, the number of formal decision-taking committee meetings is being reduced to 4 per year.

We feel it is essential that the role of scrutiny is enhanced moving forwards to help ensure transparency and public accountability around the Combined Authority's decision taking. To that end, we intend at our next informal meeting to discuss proposals to strengthen the role of scrutiny, particularly in relation to our current sub-groups which mirror the WECA Boards (Transport; Planning and Housing; Business; Skills).

We would like the committee to consider strengthening the role of scrutiny, including reviewing the accessibility of regional meetings, like the Regional Transport Board, so that all or part of these meetings are held in public.

3. Quality assurance of reports, with specific reference to agenda item 19 – Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan

We wish to raise concerns about the quality assurance of some reports brought for your consideration under the WECA logo.

We received a statement from Cllr Gollop, which is also before you today, that raises particular issues about proposals being brought forward as part of the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan. It is very clear to us that some of the proposals have not been the subject of any consultation with either local councillors or residents. Cllr Massey has also submitted a statement to this meeting on the issue of the lack of involvement with ward councillors regarding the cycling/walking proposals.

We acknowledge that this is a case where the local authority has evidently not adequately fulfilled its responsibility to consult effectively – nevertheless the report is presented under the WECA logo, which carries a reputational risk in that it appears that WECA is not interested in the views of local residents when it is in fact the underlying Council that has not fulfilled its responsibilities.

We urge you to work with the unitary authorities and learn lessons from this in terms of the quality assurance of future reports.

With specific regard to the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan, we strongly urge that you ensure that as individual schemes are brought forward, full local consultation takes place in each and every case with local residents and councillors.

4. Regional Economic Recovery Taskforce (as referenced at agenda item 11)

We welcomed the update on the Taskforce – in order to assist our scrutiny role and keep us informed, we ask that the minutes of Taskforce meetings are shared with us.

On the wider issue of the role of the Taskforce, we urge the WECA Mayor and the political leaders of all the West of England authorities to work together and collaborate on the regional recovery to deliver the outcomes our residents and businesses need.

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