

WECA Call-in 3 May 2022

Joint Committee Governance Review

I am going to deal with

1. Background
2. Reasons for the call in
3. What the decision fails to address

## 1 Background

There have been difficulties in reaching decisions between the Unitary Authority Leaders and the Metro Mayor.

This problem exists within WECA itself, where decisions are taken by the WECA committee but also within the Joint Committee which includes North Somerset and relates to funds devolved to the Local Enterprise partnership, funding from 2012 City Deal, a number of one off funded projects and much more and decisions relating to the Joint Transport Plan and Joint Spatial strategy

There has been a long history of co-working which established a process of officers and leaders working up proposals and detailed papers which were agreed in detail before a final paper was presented for endorsement at the Committee/Joint Committee.

This process no longer works, so the Unitary Authority Leaders commissioned a report from their monitoring Officers to review governance. The meeting to consider this was scheduled as a special meeting for 31<sup>st</sup> March, but this was cancelled at relatively short notice and rescheduled to be convened after the WECA meeting.

The Joint Committee meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> April agreed to move forward with the report with a new constitution being presented to the next Joint Committee meeting at the end of June.

The WECA Mayor asked for the chair of WECA Scrutiny and Audit to be involved in the process.

Members who are not on audit committee should be aware that the WECA External auditors are currently investigating the frictions that exist in decision making as part of their audit and are aiming to report in June.

## 2. Reasons for call in

Most specifically this report was not capable of being scrutinised before the decision was taken. This was for the simple reason that the agenda for the Joint Committee was published 4 days after the agenda for scrutiny, and no one had informed the scrutiny committee that it was on the agenda. As a result, no one was invited to speak to scrutiny about the proposals.

The WECA Chief Executive (who also holds the role of LEP Chief Executive) presented a set of new recommendations shortly before the start of the Joint Committee meeting. These could not be scrutinised as we were unaware of them, and impossible to follow watching online.

Secondly, the chairs of the 2 committees have no authority to contribute an opinion, other than through the call-in process.

In addition, relevant information was not made available with the public papers. Most particularly there was no reference to the Ministerial letter of 31<sup>st</sup> March regarding the integration of the LEP into the combined authority and no reference was made to the need to resolve decision making and constitutional issues relating to the non-co-terminous boundary between WECA and the LEP.

The decision to proceed failed to address the biggest governance issue of all. If the constituent members continue to fail to work together in a constructive and collaborative way, the new constitution will also fail.

The proposal gave no indication of the potential cost of splitting out the Joint Committee meeting separately from the Committee

The Chief Executive made a statement that the proposal would put at risk £600m of funding

### 3 Issues that need addressing

I believe the Joint Committee needs to urgently consider the following items

1. A detailed report outlining the actions needed and the timeline to achieve the quickest possible integration of the LEP
2. To provide a timeline for responding to the issues raised and the tabling of the revised constitution and standing orders
3. A report of the potential revenue costs of the proposal to split out the meetings and an indication of how this would be funded
4. To receive a detailed report from the Chief Executive explaining the threat to £600m of funding
5. And to receive a response from the unitary authorities advising how that threat can be avoided
6. The proposals depend on the detail of the constitution and standing orders. These need to be drafted and subject to scrutiny before going to joint Committee. What is the timescale for this process?
7. A detailed explanation of how these proposals interact with the levelling up White Paper and the Ministers' letter of 31<sup>st</sup> March.
8. A constitution and standing orders cannot force joint working where one or more of the parties does not want it. It is imperative that the funding body -WECA -and the recipient UAs establish a reliable and workable joint working process. All parties need to agree a basis for decision making that leaves the accountable body responsibilities clear, without putting funding in jeopardy, but which does not prevent the constituent UAs from determining spending on projects within their boundaries.

Putting a lot of work into drafting a constitution without resolving this is futile. Each member of the Joint Committee needs to agree to co-operative working

9. It is not for callers-in or scrutiny to determine the exact dates, but we urge WECA and the UAs to agree a timeline and provide this information by 31<sup>st</sup> May to enable scrutiny to review in June, before approval so that earliest possible integration of the LEP is possible.