



**Independent Review**

**West of England Combined Authority**

**February 2023**

**SOLACE**



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## **A. The West of England Combined Authority**

The West of England Combined Authority is a combined authority within the West of England area, consisting of the local unitary authorities (LAs) of Bristol, South Gloucestershire, and Bath and North East Somerset. The body has its headquarters in Bristol and is led by the Mayor of the West of England.

Devolution of certain powers to the West of England was announced by the Government in the 2016 budget. The proposal could bring nearly £1 billion of investment to the region over thirty years.

The original proposal was to cover the same area as the County of Avon which came into formal existence on 1 April 1974 and was abolished in 1996. However, in June 2016, North Somerset council rejected the Combined Authority proposal. Bristol, Bath, North East Somerset and South Gloucestershire councils agreed to proceed without North Somerset

The devolution deal, via the West of England Combined Authority Order 2017, came into force on 9 February 2017. The first public meeting of the West of England Combined Authority took place on 1 March 2017 with an interim chair, followed by the first Mayoral election in May 2017. The region covered by the combined authority had a population estimated at 950,000 in 2020. The authority also works closely with North Somerset Council; the joint area had a population in 2020 of 1,165,600.

The authority's functions, as specified by the West of England Combined Authority Order, mostly cover planning, skills and local transport. In April 2017 the authority published a constitution which includes terms of reference for the body and its committees.

The Mayor and The West of England Combined Authority are also responsible for a consolidated, devolved local transport budget, with a multi-year settlement. The authority promotes the West of England Joint Local Transport Plan, which includes the MetroBus network and the MetroWest rail project.

The devolution deal brought £900 million of investment funding to the region. Due to the work of The West of England Combined Authority, over £1.15 billion in new funding has been secured for the West of England region since then.

## **B. Background to this SOLACE review**



In May 2022, Grant Thornton (GT), the Combined Authority's (CA) external auditors initiated a Value for Money (VfM) Governance review and in November 2022 their report was published.

Grant Thornton issued three legally-binding "statutory recommendations", two "key recommendations" and four "implementation recommendations".

Issuing statutory recommendations is a serious step for external auditors to take which attracted the attention of officials at the Department for Levelling Up Homes and Communities (DLUHC) who took a keen interest in the improvement journey of the West of England Combined Authority

Mayor Norris wrote to the Secretary of State (DLUHC) on the 9<sup>th</sup> December 2022 accepting the findings of the GT VfM Governance review as agreed at the West of England Combined Authority Committee. As part of the West of England Combined Authority improvement journey, Mayor Norris committed to asking his officers to commission an independent peer review of the West of England Combined Authority approach. The terms of reference for the review are wide ranging and were agreed by all members of the West of England Combined Authority and can be found as Appendix 3 of this report.

It was proposed that the independent review would take place in two phases. This report comprises the 'Discovery Phase', as the West of England Combined Authority requested a swift initial report to be presented to its The West of England Combined Authority Committee meeting on the 17<sup>th</sup> March 2023. The discovery phase would potentially point to further recommendations of work to be considered by the West of England Combined Authority for a 'phase two': Independent, in-depth developmental support. Recommendations made in this report need to be considered, sequenced effectively and developed as part of the phase 2 work.

Fieldwork for the review involved 40 separate conversations with The West of England Combined Authority and LA staff, political leaders, businesses, strategic partners and stakeholders. There was also a comprehensive document review and online viewing of The West of England Combined Authority Committee and Audit and Scrutiny meetings. Nothing in this report is attributable, but there are quotes in italics from respondents which help illustrate points being made in the report.

## **Review Findings**

### **C. Purpose of The West of England Combined Authority**

The West of England Combined Authority was established in 2017 with the officer structure that supported the LEP, some 40 staff. The staff compliment is set to grow from 235 full time equivalent in 2022/23 to 320 full time equivalent this year. The West of England Combined Authority core specific grant funding has increased by 256%.



In 2016/2017 the Leaders of the four potential constituent LAs (including North Somerset) were involved in the architecture of the devolution deal. North Somerset decided not to be part of the new West of England Combined Authority arrangements. This review did not look deeply into the rationale for the original creation of the West of England Combined Authority and the LA understanding of the original purpose of the West of England Combined Authority.

The perception gathered during this review was that the original West of England Combined Authority was intended to secure funds for the region and then projects to be delivered by the Local Authority, essentially using the West of England Combined Authority as an 'intermediate body' to secure central government funding. The fact that most current decisions require unanimity of the Local Authorities suggests that the LAs intended from the outset to retain decision making powers. This review found no evidence to suggest that this was the intended purpose of the West of England Combined Authority at that time, however, it was raised too often in interviews not to highlight here. *'There were differences of understanding of the purpose of the CA right from the outset.'*

What is clear is that there has been no significant conversation since 2017 as to the core philosophical purpose of the West of England Combined Authority. Interviewees felt that 'common purpose' had not been explored and that roles and responsibilities and 'powers' are not understood. This has resulted in confusion between strategic governance and day to day transactional activity and as a result, fundamental behaviours have been broken and all have a voice in every domain.

The West of England Combined Authority is currently unable to fully amplify its great regional achievements and those of its partners due to local arguments taking national attention above successful initiatives. A Combined Authority should act as a partnership and this approach is not apparent in areas of The West of England Combined Authority business now.

Together, there is a need to revisit and explore the form, function and purpose of the West of England Combined Authority. Some believe that the Elected Mayor of the West of England Combined Authority should be a Chairman, others that he should use his West of England Combined Authority 'powers'. In fact, both these scenarios are true and there should be a considered place for both in a Combined Authority.

The logical next step from exploring the purpose of the West of England Combined Authority is to then determine together how the West of England Combined Authority should operate;

- As two teams? The West of England Combined Authority core management and three LAs?
- OR One team?
- AND/OR expand to include other Local Authorities (in the first instance North Somerset)



Most interviewees felt that this conversation must happen as soon as possible. Without it, the constitution cannot be rewritten, nor can the West of England Combined Authority restructure its management team to realise and effectively deliver on the agreed common purpose.

Despite many of the high-profile disagreements, the West of England Combined Authority has been engaged in some outstanding activity since it was established in 2017. Selected achievements of the last twelve months need to be commended and recognised here.

#### **D. Selected achievements of the West of England Combined Authority in the last twelve months**

- Securing £910m additional funding for the region
- Supporting 13,000 residents with training and careers support
- Supporting 1,373 businesses through the Growth Hub.
- Securing £540m through the City Region Sustainable Transport
- Receiving £95m from Homes England for the Bristol Temple Quarter Regeneration Programme, which will deliver some 2,400 new homes alongside a significant upgrade to Bristol Temple Meads Station.
- Unlocking the next tranche of the Investment Fund, £150m for the 5-year period to 2026.
- Combined Committee unanimous investment decisions in respect of The North Fringe, Quantum Technology and Hydrogen Sustainable Transport in driving forward matters of regional, local and national importance.

#### **Recommendation: Purpose of The West of England Combined Authority**

- The West of England Combined Authority to engage in a facilitated structured conversation to revisit and clarify its core purpose taking on views from strategic partners, business and other regional bodies. This may result in some proposed changes to the constitution.

#### **E. Strategic approach to the region**

There is broad agreement across the partners that the West of England Combined Authority can add significant value in facing outwards towards London, nationally and internationally. Currently, there is not an up to date, clear shared West of England Combined Authority narrative about the West of England or its economy, which everybody can get behind. There is little understanding how the West of England Combined Authority, the Western Gateway, or indeed emerging devolution in the South West will operate together for the benefit of the wider region. Non-participation from the West of England Combined Authority in any of these spaces will fuel a divide. Collaboration will be



required to avoid a contested space. There is a need for the West of England Combined Authority to *'raise its eyes to a higher level.'*

Senior politicians should again consider expanding with the addition in the first instance of North Somerset. North Somerset is involved in the LEP arrangements with the other three LAs in the West of England Combined Authority. The West of England LEP footprint is unusual as it covers more LAs (4) than does the West of England Combined Authority (3). There are also relationships to Wiltshire and Swindon in terms of health footprints.

It is highly likely that devolved powers to regions will only continue to be promoted by government and The West of England Combined Authority needs to anticipate this and seek a 'critical mass' of membership to increase its economic voice if the region is to benefit.

Economic strategic planning can operate at different spatial levels. At macro level as described above, regional, West of England Combined Authority level, Local Authority level and at ward/community level. Within each level, roles and responsibilities can be attributed and any blurred edges can be clarified and discussed.

It is unfortunate that the process for the West of England Combined Authority Spatial Development Strategy (SDS) has fallen away. Each LA is now working on its own spatial plan and not wanting to derail the progress that they have all made, consideration of a restart to the SDS process would be hugely beneficial for the region.

A strategic analysis and mapping of growth nodes and corridors, strategic housing sites, assets such as the Airport and the Port of Bristol, universities, cultural/heritage assets, travel to work patterns, employment sites, education and medical hubs are crucial to plan at a West of England Combined Authority level.

There needs to be consideration of innovation hubs, incubator sites and startup opportunities. Economic sector analysis of green technologies, digital technology, aeronautics, defence and cyber are needed. Determine the current USP for the West of England in terms of economic sectors and what and where will be the emerging economic sectors in twenty years.

A Regional Strategic Economic Strategy should be built around the analysis and the economic sectors. This sector development would be enabled with transport hubs and corridors and also housing and the development of relevant skills.

When dealing with any strategic issue, the West of England Combined Authority must enable linkage, display knowledge and awareness, be sympathetic, promote connection and show empathy with its residents and communities. It must provide clear, unambiguous, civic leadership. The West of England Combined Authority must also be able to amicably agree to disagree in making decisions in the best interest of residents. That is effective democracy.



Co-production of such a strategy would help clarify purpose, promote ownership of the agenda and give a compelling narrative to inward investors both nationally and internationally. All subsequent work of the West of England Combined Authority would have a reference point and would link to the Regional Strategic Economic Plan and its objectives.

This strategy, with a multi-year time horizon (beyond electoral cycles) would be the cornerstone of intent. It would then be helpful to map funding to the strategy with a Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP). Performance can be measured against an implementation plan, which could evaluate the economic and social impact in the region.

### **Recommendations: Strategic approach to the region**

- The West of England Combined Authority to co-produce a Regional Strategic Economic Strategy which is accessible and provides a common narrative for all regional stakeholders to be able to promote the economic vision of the region to external audiences.
- To explore whether the process of developing a Spatial Development Strategy could be revisited, taking into account the progress each LA has made with its own plan.
- To consider expanding the membership of the West of England Combined Authority

## **F. The West of England Combined Authority as a management organisation**

It is recognised that the growth of the West of England Combined Authority over the years as an organisation was not planned as strategically as the West of England Combined Authority itself would have initially envisaged. Teams of staff have been recruited rapidly on a fixed term basis to deliver projects when the funding had been drawn down.

As a result, it is acknowledged that there has been no significant organisational development plan to develop a target operating model for the West of England Combined Authority or to establish expectations of core behaviours of staff about dealing with partners and with the constituent LAs. The West of England Combined Authority is now developing a 'step change' development programme to address this issue which is a positive step. This programme must be shared with the LAs and must involve the LAs in some elements of the programme where appropriate (some elements will obviously be internal to the West of England Combined Authority staff).

In the last twelve months, the West of England Combined Authority senior management team has had many interim senior officers, and this has made it difficult for the LAs to make meaningful relationships and build trust. This is not a reflection on the calibre of the interim staff, but a fact of continuity. The West of England Combined Authority management structure does require a review as there is not enough capacity under the Director posts to reflect the changing needs of the organisation. There are opportunities for co-location with partners and linkages with the Universities who are willing to provide expertise and resource. Proposals for restructure of the West of England





management team have been brought to the West of England Combined Authority Committee, but this has yet to be accepted due to differences of opinion on the way forward.

For example, it will be important for all members of the West of England Combined Authority to devise some working 'Principles'. These could include:

- We will co-produce policy and practice and co-commission feasibility studies
- We will build trust through our behaviours.
- We will be open minded about a reset in relationships and processes.
- We will always recognise the 'big picture'.
- We will listen to understand not to defend. Etc etc

Due to the rapid growth and the changing function of the West of England Combined Authority into a delivery organisation, the 'corporate core' or 'enabling' functions of HR, IT, legal, procurement, finance, democratic services, comms, risk management were described as not being fit for purpose, however, steps are now being taken to address this, given the growth in the organisation's budget.

It has been recognised that the West of England Combined Authority centrally has not been proactive enough, in many instances, in its dealings with the LAs. On occasion, reports have been issued late for the LAs to consider and sometimes these have been at a final drafting stage with little time to provide input. However, there are occasions where the West of England Combined Authority has had significant engagement and co-production with the LAs on policy and projects, but sometimes this has not been accepted or recognised by the Local Authorities. The lack of joint understanding of 'what the West of England Combined Authority is' has led to this unsustainable situation.

It was reported that suspicion and mistrust became the starting point in senior liaison between the West of England Combined Authority core team and the LAs. In some areas of the West of England Combined Authority, confidence had reduced, resulting in less engagement with the LAs. Many staff had stopped taking responsibility and ownership which had led at times to late and poor reports. However, at times, good proactive engagement with the LAs at lower levels had not been recognised by the Local Authorities. This situation is changing.

LA officers at Director level and below now describe good working relationships between themselves and the West of England Combined Authority core team. They state that this has improved markedly over the past twelve months. There is more collaboration and joint working, particularly on infrastructure and skills projects. There are occasions where LA staff receive reports which are different to what had been agreed, as the reports sometimes are amended during the West of England Combined Authority internal processes. Examples of good proactive working between the West of England Combined Authority core team and the LAs are:



- Bristol and the West of England Combined Authority are currently discussing the potential of a joint approach for their programme management of significant projects.
- In the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement programme there has been consideration of which organisation (the West of England Combined Authority core team or the LA teams) is best placed to deliver projects. In one example, The West of England Combined Authority is delivering the M32 and Park and Ride schemes and South Gloucestershire is delivering local schemes.
- The West of England Combined Authority and North Somerset have recently launched an enhanced partnership to improve bus services across the region.

Internally, the West of England Combined Authority staff mention that the West of England Combined Authority feels like a positive place, collegiate and collaborative at a staff level and that they work well together. The West of England Combined Authority runs the secretariat for the M10 group of Mayoral Combined Authorities, and many The West of England Combined Authority staff are held in high regard.

The current Chief Executive of the West of England Combined Authority started extended leave due to illness on the 25<sup>th</sup> November 2022. The West of England Combined Authority constitution was amended by an extraordinary West of England Combined Authority Committee meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2022 to appoint the Acting Chief Executive (essentially whoever is the current director of finance at the time). An interim acting Chief Executive was therefore confirmed at that extraordinary meeting and the arrangement took effect immediately.

The new interim Chief Executive is *'starting to develop sensible levels of Governance and trust.'* This approach was also recognised by those present during the adjournment of the recent budget meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> January, where he developed an agreed budget amendment with the Chief Executives and Leaders of the LAs.

The new Interim Acting Chief Executive was mentioned as having made a difference to the working environment, both internally and externally. The West of England Combined Authority Leadership Team agendas have been rescheduled to discuss strategy, operations and organisational development. Statutory Officer meetings now take place regularly. He has increased the number of internal audit days for the West of England Combined Authority from 100 to 300 per year. He has started the recruitment processes for permanent senior staff; the Director of Infrastructure (almost completed), the Chief Financial S73 Officer, the Monitoring Officer. All LA chief executives or their representatives have been invited to be part of the appointment processes.

The interim acting Chief Executive intends to focus on relationships and working together. *'The whole is so much more significant than its parts'*. Economy and business, mapping sector development and using an effective business board will also be a priority. Along with delivering the infrastructure projects and focusing on Environment 2030.



A West of England Combined Authority internal Governance Board has been established to review the internal processes, which can appear confusing for West of England Combine Authority staff. These processes have not really caught up with the growth of the organisation. Core functions also need to develop.

The intent is to develop the West of England Combined Authority Leadership that moves from operational to strategic and from transactional to policy. *'The new interim Acting Chief Executive is trying to create trusted spaces for discussion of strategy, governance and for effective execution of plans.'*

The West of England Combined Authority has already reached out to the Western Gateway organisation to explore joint opportunities and is intent on working in a regional geography.

### **Recommendations: The West of England Combined Authority as a management organisation**

- Roll out the 'Step Change' programme with external support and facilitation. Establish working behaviours and principles for West of England Combined Authority.
- Strengthen the function of the 'corporate core' to be fit for the new West of England Combined Authority delivery function.
- Continue to build on enhanced relationships with the LAs based on agreed principles.
- Complete a management restructure to fill interim posts permanently in consultation with the LAs.

### **G. LEP/Business and Partners**

The business community has an independent voice and is entitled to give its view on the way that the region operates. It should have confidence, its views and its influence for the region are highly valued.

The landscape around the involvement of Business and the role of a LEP/Business Board needs to be clarified as soon as possible. The LEP covers four Local Authorities, those of the West of England Combined Authority and North Somerset. If a Business Board is established to advise the West of England Combined Authority, the solution must encompass the four LAs and possibly a wider geographical grouping. The Board must fit into the points of decision making and policy formation for the West of England Combined Authority. Clear Terms of Reference need to be developed to reflect how the Board will fit into this process. It is felt that Business and University expertise is underused at present to help inform, challenge, and support the West of England Combined Authority and the regional economic ambition.

The business community and significant partners have felt upset and *'aghast'* with the public disagreements in the West of England Combined Authority which have dominated headlines. They



feel that this must be resolved if the region is to be taken seriously by inward investors and Government.

The Cultural Compact was given as a good example of where the West of England Combined Authority and its partners work well together. Co-production, collaboration, fostering innovation and exceptional output. Partners wonder why this approach cannot be taken, even in highly contested spaces such as the West of England Combined Authority transport?

The West of England Combined Authority *must focus on convening and permitting the region to think together*. The need for a co-designed Regional Strategic Economic Plan for the region (as indicated in section E above) is highlighted as a priority for Business and partners. Producing the Local Industrial Strategy for the West of England Combined Authority some three years ago was cited as a positive process; however, it now requires updating to include green technologies, digital and other emerging sectors. It is felt that the regional spatial land use exercise is currently missing and that the Joint Strategic Transport Plan must reflect the Strategic Economic Strategy for the region. Business and partners urgently require a collective regional economic narrative.

#### **Recommendation: LEP/Business and Partners**

- With regard to the government LEP integration process, use independent facilitation to work with the business and partner community to redefine the role and terms of reference of a Business Board to advise, support and challenge the West of England Combined Authority. Ensure that the Board fits into policy/decision at an early stage in the West of England Combined Authority processes. Consider the collaboration of other regional bodies such as the Western Gateway, Universities and other Local Authorities in this work.

#### **H. West of England Combined Authority Operating Principles**

Some colleagues suggested that documents, a strategic review, refreshed strategies or new constitutional arrangements could be seen as the solution and the more difficult conversation about principles and behaviours had been avoided.

Working relationships underpin any document, strategy, or any new constitutional arrangements. The focus on agreed principles and behaviours is therefore critical to the success of all the other recommendations. If these principles are adhered to, the benefit of the other recommendations will be amplified. If the operating principles are not agreed, action for other recommendations may not be sustainable.

In addition to the West of England Combined Authority central team developing internal (and some outward facing) principles as part of their organisational behaviours, it would be beneficial for the



wider West of England Combined Authority to consider developing 'operating principles'. These could be, for example:

- Agreed timetable for agendas and reports between the West of England Combined Authority and the LAs including a co-production process.
- Enhanced communication between the West of England Combined Authority and the LAs with regular informal meeting schedules (see Meetings J. below) between senior politicians and senior officers (less transactional, more strategic)
- Comprehensive, six month forward plan.
- Mutual respect, understanding and tolerance of individual agendas.
- Open minded in approach etc etc

### **Recommendation: West of England Combined Authority Operating Principles**

- As part of the work in redefining the core purpose of the West of England Combined Authority, with independent support, develop fundamental West of England Combined Authority operating principles.

### **I. West of England Combined Authority Operating Processes**

*'History compounds tension and trust.' 'Process management had broken down; meaningful progress is quite difficult without it.'*

Once the operating principles have been determined and agreed a set of operating processes should then be developed. Examining the best practice in other Combined Authorities, the following processes are suggested as a starting point for discussion and adoption by the West of England Combined Authority at the earliest opportunity.

The Local Authority senior politicians and chief officers generally do not currently feel able to take part fully in Combined Authority business. *'At times it is like we are being done to.'* It is clear from observing meetings that senior leaders do not have full ownership of many agenda items. *'some of the reports only reflect the view of the West of England Combined Authority core'*. There can be a feeling of *'them and us.'* Similarly, the West of England Combined Authority Mayor can become frustrated with speed of progress. These are collective issues and mature responsibility works both ways.

*'The West of England Combined Authority should be about shared regional objectives and there is a willingness on the LAs part to resolve this and demonstrate progress and to work with the Interim Chief Executive.'*

## **J. Meetings**

As an integral part of the way forward the following meetings are recommended to enable the West of England Combined Authority to function in a more effective manner. This list is based on good practice in other Combined Authority areas.

1. The West of England Combined Authority Mayor and the Leaders of the three LAs must meet informally together including resolving strategic issues prior to full Committee. Agreed Terms of Reference (ToR) to be developed.
2. The West of England Combined Authority Mayor, Leaders and Chief Executives (CXs) of the LAs should meet regularly with an agreed ToR. Senior Officers from the LAs and The West of England Combined Authority to join as and when necessary.
3. The CX of the West of England Combined Authority and the CXs of the LAs meeting ('the engine room') should be the main area where strategic intent is converted to practical delivery.

The meetings below the West of England Combined Authority Board require review in the light of a Regional Strategic Economic Plan, their purpose and function along with new ToRs. Lead Cabinet members in the LAs do not meet frequently enough in these committees to be able to offer constructive support to the regional agendas. There is no Climate and Environment committee. All the boards are chaired by the West of England Combined Authority Mayor.

4. If the Transport, Planning and Housing, and Skills Committees are to meet more regularly, it might be a consideration for the West of England Combined Authority Mayor to chair the Transport Committee and allow two LA Leaders to chair the remaining committees of housing and planning, and skills. Again, this would promote ownership and involvement of the LAs at a very senior level.

### **Recommendations: Meetings**

- With independent support, establish a set of meetings as above with the purpose of enhancing ownership and collaboration of the agenda and The West of England Combined Authority itself. Develop clear ToRs for these meetings and move in a phased way with a defined timetable and training programme to full implementation.

## **K. Portfolios**



The West of England Combined Authority would benefit greatly in terms of rebuilding trust and relationships if each Leader was ascribed a portfolio in conversation with the West of England Combined Authority Mayor. This would promote ownership of the agenda and involve the Leaders more fully in The West of England Combined Authority business.

Roles, responsibilities and accountabilities would have to be crystal clear, but with enhanced trust these 'boundaries' could become porous and more cross cutting.

Examples of portfolios could be Environment, Regional Strategic Economic Strategy, Skills, Culture, Equalities, Strategic Finance. At this stage, Housing and Transport would be the West of England Combined Authority Mayoral lead, with a collective responsibility, but with respectful regard to each other's local and regional Executive Functions and powers.

The meetings and portfolio responsibilities set out above will require increased time commitment, probably the equivalent of two days per week on West of England Combined Authority business for senior LA Leaders and an added commitment for the West of England Combined Authority Mayor. The West of England Combined Authority business should be seen as part of the day job and not a bolt on activity. If necessary, capacity would need to be built up in each organisation to facilitate this approach, as in most mature Combined Authorities.

The workplan for all the meetings above would reflect the Strategic Regional Economic Plan which would be co- produced with the Business community and Partners. All work must link to the strategic objectives set out in this plan, which would focus the agenda.

### **Recommendation: Portfolios**

- Consider assigning Leader portfolios to help with the work of the West of England Combined Authority as above. Consider assigning Chief Executive portfolios to support the Leaders with their work and co-design a working protocol for operation of the portfolios.

### **L. Project Evaluation Process**

Most decision making must be framed in a transparent process. This is not to say that current West of England Combined Authority decisions on projects are not taken in this way, but that perception exists and it will be important to revisit and clarify the project evaluation process. When the process is clear to all, it can have the effect of '*draining the sense of emotion out of the decision.*' This is particularly important if a significant resource is to be allocated to a particular LA. Processes and protocols can guide decision making, however, it is acknowledged that there should always be room for the 'outlier' decisions which have broad political support, which may not fit exactly with a process. That is democracy.



Under the constitution, currently each project is evaluated under the same framework, despite its scale and scope. The evaluation and move to a decision can take nine months, which has been described as too lengthy and complicated. LA staff should be involved on the evaluation team. Any evaluation should enable prioritisation of the schemes in line with the objectives in the Regional Strategic Economic Plan.

Each political leader must have the ability to explain the impact on the economy or community of every decision for the region, even if the investment is not in their area. A strategic plan will help construct the subsequent narrative which should underpin every collective decision.

The process should be based on defined criteria and evaluation should involve representatives from the LAs. Criteria should include:

- Linkage/fit with the West of England Combined Authority Regional Strategic Economic Plan.
- cost benefit analysis,
- value for money,
- impact on GVA,
- benefit cost ratio,
- added social value etc.
- impact on residents

The criteria should be open and transparent, upfront in any bidding or allocation process and must be respected and owned by all members of the West of England Combined Authority .

### **Recommendation: Project Evaluation Process**

- Revisit the process for Project Evaluation with regard to models which have been adopted in other Combined Authorities.

### **M. Constitution**

It is widely accepted that the West of England Combined Authority constitution needs to be updated. It is difficult to see how this can be done meaningfully unless the purpose and function and future intent of the West of England Combined Authority is resolved. Otherwise, any update will be a piecemeal exercise and only deal with individual concerns. Some examples highlighted during this review were:

- The ability of the West of England Combined Authority Mayor to raise a precept.
- Potential unrealistic low delegations to certain West of England Combined Authority officers regarding largescale infrastructure projects which can result in delay.



- Clarify the statutory status of the Transport Board
- The West of England Combined Authority Mayor has no vote on his own budget.
- Decisions at the West of England Combined Authority board need to be unanimous.
- The City of Bristol has double the population of other LAs, but only one vote on the West of England Combined Authority Committee.

There is no doubt that the constitution requires review. Each of these issues could be addressed in isolation. However, it would only be a fully effective exercise if further issues were highlighted after more work had been explored, completed and trust had developed further. The process of review requires a fully inclusive process and should not solely be undertaken by the West of England Combined Authority Monitoring Officer.

### **Recommendations: Constitution**

- Identify the issues with the constitution which would help the West of England Combined Authority to work in a more effective and agile way. Have regard to constitutions in other Combined Authority areas. This process would have regard to activity in other recommendations listed above and would need to be sequenced as such.
- Hence, review the constitution making representations to Government on proposed changes, if necessary.

### **N. Wider Structures including the West of England Joint Committee**

The region has complicated boundaries and partnerships, reaching much further than the defined West of England Combined Authority areas. This must be taken into consideration when defining a Regional Strategic Economic Plan.

The place of the Joint Committee does require a fundamental evaluation alongside a review of the West of England Combined Authority structural processes. Grant Thornton (VfM November 2022) commented on the Joint Committee as being strengthened, possibly due to a relationship deficit with the West of England Combined Authority and that GT would be monitoring this development further.

Legacy funding does flow through this Joint Committee and whilst understanding that there currently remains a need for this committee, it does make sense to think longer term as there is duplication of time and process. The role of North Somerset in this review must be accommodated.

Whilst recognising that the context is completely different, In Greater Manchester, the old AGMA (Association of Greater Manchester Authorities) organisation and the new GMCA (Greater Manchester Combined Authority) had to sit side by side with consecutive meetings during a transition process. In that situation, the AGMA meeting took place at the rise of the GMCA meeting.

### **Recommendation: Wider Structures including the West of England Joint Committee**

- As trust begins to become stronger, it will become necessary to align the West of England Combined Authority and the Joint Committee into the same business meeting - or agree another mechanism or framework for decision-making involving North Somerset. This will serve as an indicator as to the maturity of The West of England Combined Authority. North Somerset needs to be included in this regional solution.

### **O. Progress on the West of England Combined Authority action plan in response to the GT recommendations**

The Grant Thornton report was published in November 2022. The senior management team of the West of England Combined Authority had a draft of the report several months prior to this, as would be normal practice. This would be to enable a fact check exercise to be undertaken and to present further information and data to the auditor if requested. This did create frustration for the West of England Combined Authority Audit Committee.

The West of England Combined Authority Audit Committee considered the Grant Thornton VfM Governance report at its meeting on the 17<sup>th</sup> November 2022. At the same meeting, the committee also considered a report and an action plan set out by the West of England Combined Authority management.

In the action plan, the West of England Combined Authority management had commented on progress made on the recommendations set out in the Grant Thornton report. The Audit committee was not satisfied with the action plan and requested more detail to be considered at a further meeting at the earliest opportunity.

Later that day, the West of England Combined Authority Committee meeting also determined that the action plan was not detailed enough and itself asked for a further detailed iteration to be presented at the earliest opportunity. At the West of England Combined Authority meeting of the 9<sup>th</sup> December the committee did not agree the action plan but sought views of the Audit and Select committee in respect of the emerging action plan, with the intention of it being brought back to the March 2023 West of England Combined Authority Committee meeting for consideration and approval. The action plan is Appendix 2.

### **The Action Plan (9<sup>th</sup> Dec 2022)**

It is only a short time between the 9<sup>th</sup> December 2022 and February 2023, however, much of the context and issues in the GT report had been known for some time by the West of England

Combined Authority (management) and, indirectly, the constituent Local Authorities. Many of the end dates in the plan for actions are March 2023, some have longer time horizons.

The fifth column of the action plan (Appendix2) is headed 'Action'. The four bullet points of The West of England Combined Authority action in response to the GT Statutory Recommendation 1 (SR1) in the action plan are:

- *Leaders will continue to regularly meet with the Combined Authority Mayor as required to both address any concerns early and to identify opportunities.*
- *A programme of activities to agree regional priorities will take place in 2023. This will involve free and frank discussion regarding the allocation of existing resources in the context of new and emerging challenges, such as inflationary pressures, to primarily focus on the delivery of projects. A Regional Priorities workshop which leaders have all agreed to attend is scheduled for January.*
- *Board members will be involved at an earlier stage in setting a strategic regional direction*
- *Consideration of appropriate attendees (wider than Mayors, Leaders and CEOs) to attend the regional prioritisation workshop will be made (including regional finance officers (S.151) officers, Directors for Infrastructure, and independent voice(s)), to ensure the workshops results in meaningful outcomes.*

Apart from a confidential mediation exercise involving the four main civic political Leaders and separately, the Chief Executives (including North Somerset), it is difficult to evidence sufficient impact on the other action points for SR1. Perhaps that is not surprising as the Combined Authority Chief Executive had been on leave due to illness from the 25<sup>th</sup> November 2022 and the Interim Acting Combined Authority Chief Executive took up post formally following a special The West of England Combined Authority Committee meeting of the 12<sup>th</sup> December 2022.

One to one meetings have taken place between political Leaders and the Mayor and also the West of England Combined Authority Chief Executive (CX) has met the Local Authority Chief Executives on a one to one and collective basis, but this has had little impact to date.

For example, the West of England Combined Authority meeting of 27<sup>th</sup> January 2023 to formally consider the Mayor's budget, resulted in a lengthy adjournment as the Mayor's budget was not accepted by the Leaders of the Local Authorities during the meeting. Mediation outside of the room was required during the adjournment where a compromise was reached and an amendment to the budget was then tabled. Only at that point was the Mayor's budget agreed. This was not a satisfactory way to conduct the West of England Combined Authority business in public.

There is no agreed programme of activities to consider regional priorities (second 'action' bullet). A one hour meeting was held on the 20<sup>th</sup> February 2023, which is not enough to scope out a political



framework to allow officers to then develop the principles of any political steer. Other 'relevant officers' as mentioned in the action plan were not involved in this meeting.

The four bullet points of action in response to the GT Statutory Recommendation 2 (SR2) in the action plan are:

- *Senior Officers will meet collectively and individually with their counterparts as policies and projects progress, from conception to delivery and evaluation.*
- *The Combined Authority will ensure that Cabinet Members from the Unitary Authorities can request briefings with senior CA officers as required. Any existing regular meetings will continue in line with agreed arrangements.*
- *Officer delivery boards have been established and meet monthly to review progress on agreed projects and to provide challenge and support to ensure more timely delivery on all projects where relevant. These boards will continue and will report directly to regular joint CEO meetings. This process will be reviewed to further strengthen the board if necessary.*

A delivery board has been established and does meet regularly. There is evidence to suggest that this board is having an impact in monitoring the progress of project implementation. Apart from the delivery board, based on conversations with interviewees, it is too early to say whether the other action points for SR2 are having an impact.

The two bullet points of action in response to the GT Statutory Recommendation 3 (SR3) in the action plan are:

- *The protocol will be shared with UA Leaders, Chairs of Audit and Scrutiny for comment before being adopted and published.*
- *The protocol will be published on the Combined Authority's website and shared with Combined Authority officers.*

These bullet points have been actioned.

It is hoped that recommendations in this review will help to accelerate progress in this Action Plan.

The West of England Combined Authority will consider a further update to the action plan at its meeting on the 17<sup>th</sup> March 2023 which does describe further progress on the above points.

### **Recommendations: Progress on the West of England Combined Authority action plan in response to the GT recommendations**

- With independent support, the West of England Combined Authority should rework the action plan to include recommendations in this review and of any other external feedback, for example, any potential monitoring report from External Auditors Grant Thornton.



- Progress on the action plan should be subject to external independent review every three months (quarter) and also reported to Audit and Scrutiny Boards and through to the West of England Combined Authority Board for consideration.

## **I. Conclusion**

During this review there was a willingness to improve relationships in the West of England Combined Authority and to progress the way in which the West of England Combined Authority operates and functions. The review found that members of the West of England Combined Authority were open to challenge and support. Also, there was a huge commitment and pride in the region from the West of England Combined Authority, LAs, the business community and strategic partners. It would help if external facilitation was in place to add capacity, guide and support the West of England Combined Authority on this journey.

There have been great successes in the West of England which have at times been overshadowed by public disagreement. There is so much potential still to be realised for the West of England and with the willingness and resolve of everybody to act on areas of improvement, The West of England Combined Authority will be able to deliver more for its communities.

## **Appendix 1. Full list of recommendations**

### **C. Recommendation: Purpose of The West of England Combined Authority**

The West of England Combined Authority to engage in a facilitated structured conversation to revisit and clarify its core purpose taking on views from strategic partners, business and other regional bodies.

This may result in some proposed changes to the constitution.

### **E. Recommendations: Strategic approach to the region**

The West of England Combined Authority to co-produce a Regional Strategic Economic Strategy which is accessible and provides a common narrative for all regional stakeholders to be able to promote the economic vision of the region to external audiences.



To explore whether the process of developing a Spatial Development Strategy could be revisited.

To consider expanding the membership of The West of England Combined Authority

**F. Recommendations: The West of England Combined Authority as a management organisation**

Roll out the 'Step Change' programme with external support and facilitation. Establish working behaviours and principles for The West of England Combined Authority.

Strengthen the function of the 'corporate core' to be fit for the new West of England Combined Authority delivery function.

Continue to build on enhanced relationships with the LAs based on agreed principles.

Complete a management restructure to fill interim posts permanently in consultation with the LAs.

**G. Recommendation: LEP/Business and Partners**

Use independent facilitation to work with the business and partner community to redefine the role and Terms of Reference of a Business Board to advise, support and challenge The West of England Combined Authority. Ensure that the Board fits into policy/decision at an early stage in The West of England Combined Authority processes. Consider the collaboration of other regional bodies such as Western gateway, Universities and other Local Authorities in this work.

**H. Recommendation: The West of England Combined Authority Operating Principles**

As part of the work in redefining the core purpose of the West of England Combined Authority , with independent support, develop fundamental the West of England Combined Authority operating principles.

**J. Recommendations: Meetings**

With independent support, establish a set of meetings as above with the purpose of enhancing ownership and collaboration of the agenda and the West of England Combined Authority itself. Develop clear ToRs for these meetings and move in a phased way with a defined timetable and training programme to full implementation.

**K. Recommendation: Portfolios**



Consider assigning Leader portfolios to help with the work of The West of England Combined Authority as above. Consider assigning Chief Executive portfolios to support the Leaders with their work and co-design a working protocol for operation of the portfolios.

**L. Recommendation: Project Evaluation Process**

Revisit the process for Project Evaluation with regard to models adopted in other Combined Authorities.

**M. Recommendation: Constitution**

Identify the issues with the constitution which would help The West of England Combined Authority to work in a more effective and agile way. Have regard to constitutions in other Combined Authority areas. This process would have regard to activity in other recommendations listed above and would need to be sequenced as such.

Hence, review the constitution making representations to government on proposed changes, if necessary.

**N. Recommendation: Wider Structures including the West of England Joint Committee**

As trust begins to become stronger, it will become necessary to align the West of England Combined Authority and the Joint Committee into the same business meeting. This will serve as an indicator as to the maturity of the West of England Combined Authority.

**O. Recommendation: Progress on the West of England Combined Authority action plan in response to the GT recommendations**

With independent support, the West of England Combined Authority should rework the action plan to include recommendations in this review and of any other external feedback, for example, any potential monitoring report from External Auditors Grant Thornton.

Progress on the action plan should be subject to external independent review every four months and reported to Audit and Scrutiny Boards and through to the West of England Combined Authority Board for consideration.

## Appendix 2 The West of England Combined Authority action plan of 9<sup>th</sup> December 2022 in response to the Grant Thornton VfM Report

| Recommendation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Accepted | Issues to be addressed                                                                                                                                                            | Response                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Action                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Measure of outcomes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Timescale               |
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| SR1 <i>The Mayor and members of the Combined Authority represented by the Council Leaders, must commit to improving their working relationship and demonstrate that significant progress has been made within a reasonable timeframe to be determined by the Mayor and Combined Authority. This should include a role for independent mediation and the constructive</i> | Yes      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Culture &amp; behaviour</li> <li>• Mediation &amp; Relationships</li> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Internal Decision making</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We recognise there have been strained relationships. Work is ongoing to promote greater understanding among West of England partners.</li> <li>• This is part of a longer-term ongoing conversation which will require engagement at all levels between the Combined Authority and Unitary Authorities</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leaders will continue to regularly meet with the Combined Authority Mayor as required to both address any concerns early and to identify opportunities.</li> <li>• A programme of activities to agree regional priorities will take place in 2023. This will involve free and frank discussion regarding the allocation of existing resources in the context of new and emerging challenges, such as inflationary pressures, to primarily focus on the delivery of projects. A Regional Priorities workshop which leaders have all agreed to attend is scheduled for January.</li> <li>• Board members will be involved at an earlier</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement a programme of activities to discuss regional priorities with leaders, senior officers and board members</li> <li>• Regional priorities paper to be considered by Combined Authority Committee in March 2023.</li> <li>• Timely Committee meetings to be held</li> <li>• To allow for maximum participation leaders &amp; senior leaders will be given advance notice of meetings.</li> <li>• Agendas and Papers will be issued in good time in advance of meetings taking place.</li> </ul> | March 2023, and Ongoing |



| Recommendation                                                                                                                                                                  | Accepted | Issues to be addressed                                                                                                                                                           | Response                                                                                                                                                                                           | Action                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Measure of outcomes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Timescale              |
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| <i>consideration of advice arising from this process (SR1)</i>                                                                                                                  |          |                                                                                                                                                                                  | and LEP as we develop, improve and embed new working practices to adapt and reflect changing circumstances.                                                                                        | <p>stage in setting a strategic regional direction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consideration of appropriate attendees (wider than Mayors, Leaders and CEOs) to attend the regional prioritisation workshop will be made (including regional finance officers (S.151) officers, Directors for Infrastructure, and independent voice(s)), to ensure the workshops results in meaningful outcomes</li> </ul> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                        |
| <i>SR2 - A formal protocol should be agreed between member organisations within the Combined Authority to commit to consultation on key proposals, that they should define,</i> | Yes      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working practices</li> <li>• Culture &amp; solution development</li> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Internal decision making</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Senior officers in the Combined Authority and Unitary Authorities play a key role in finding solutions to contentious problems all year round.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Senior Officers will meet collectively and individually with their counterparts as policies and projects progress, from conception to delivery and evaluation.</li> <li>• The Combined Authority will ensure that Cabinet Members from the Unitary Authorities can request briefings with senior CA</li> </ul>                                                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement a programme of activities to discuss regional priorities with leaders, senior officers and board members</li> <li>• Regional priorities paper to be considered by Combined Authority Committee in March 2023.</li> <li>• Timely Committee meetings to be held</li> <li>• To allow for maximum participation Mayors, Leaders &amp;</li> </ul> | March 2023 and ongoing |

| Recommendation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Accepted | Issues to be addressed | Response                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Action                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Measure of outcomes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Timescale |
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| <p><i>at an earlier stage. Combined Authority members should engage effectively in this process, to help mitigate points of contention before they are published and debated in public. This should include a commitment to deliver proposals on a reasonable timetable</i></p> |          |                        | <p>We value this important work, and we will ensure this is standard practice as a move forward.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We recognise that constructive relationships are as important as processes.</li> <li>• All West of England partners will commit to meaningful consultation when developing solutions and proposals to help leaders to mitigate points of contention where</li> </ul> | <p>officers as required. Any existing regular meetings will continue in line with agreed arrangements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An officer delivery board has been established and meets twice a month to review progress on agreed projects and to provide challenge and support to ensure more timely delivery on all projects where relevant. These boards will continue and will report directly to regular joint CEO meetings. This process will be reviewed to further strengthen the board if necessary.</li> <li>• To help support driving delivery of key projects, proposals will include a commitment to deliver on a reasonable timetable (agreed by the Committee), which will be included in relevant papers going forward.</li> </ul> | <p>Senior Officers will be given advance notice of all meetings.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agendas and Papers will be issued in good time in advance of all meetings taking place (public and private) to enable proper consideration and informed debate to take place in the meeting. )</li> <li>• Papers detailing proposals will contain agreed timetables for delivery.</li> <li>• A forward plan of decision making for public meetings will be maintained and published.</li> </ul> |           |

| Recommendation | Accepted | Issues to be addressed | Response                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Action | Measure of outcomes | Timescale |
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|                |          |                        | <p>possible ahead of Combined Authority Committee meetings.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Further work to find solutions to operational matters will continue with a view to embedding new working practices which will be developed with all partners.</li> <li>• Meaningful engagement with Combined Authority Scrutiny and Audit Committees will continue ahead of CA</li> </ul> |        |                     |           |

| Recommendation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Accepted | Issues to be addressed                                                                                                        | Response                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Action                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Measure of outcomes                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Timescale    |
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|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |          |                                                                                                                               | committee meetings to ensure constructive feedback on key proposals.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |              |
| SR3 - <i>In future, in all circumstances, including where there is a potential conflict of interest affecting individual statutory officers adequate steps must be taken to ensure the statutory duties of these officers is effectively discharged.</i> | YES      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>VfM</li> <li>Communication</li> <li>Transparency</li> <li>Working practices</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A protocol has been prepared and shared earlier this year with the Auditor and Chair of Audit, which has been designed to manage the rare cases of conflict of interest by statutory officers.</li> <li>This is designed to reflect the unusual circumstances that in a small authority there may not</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The protocol will be shared with UA Leaders, Chairs of Audit and Scrutiny for comment before being adopted and published.</li> <li>The protocol will be published on the Combined Authority's website and shared with Combined Authority officers.</li> <li>The Combined Authority Monitoring Officer will brief senior officers regarding the implications of the protocol.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In the unlikely situation that a similar circumstance arises, the Mayor and Unitary Authority Leaders will be briefed by the Chief Executive on a confidential basis.</li> </ul> | January 2023 |

| Recommendation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Accepted | Issues to be addressed                                                                              | Response                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Action                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Measure of outcomes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Timescale                                               |
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|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |          |                                                                                                     | always be another employee able to discharge the role of deputy                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                         |
| <p>KR1 - <i>The future management structure of the Combined Authority should be reviewed in order to ensure it is fit for purpose in the context of new funding awards and strategic priorities and this must include appropriate consultation and agreement by the CA Committee.</i></p> | YES      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leadership</li> <li>Organisation</li> <li>Culture</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognising that several senior leadership posts are currently vacant and interims are in post, there is an opportunity to develop a new Senior Leadership Structure of the Combined Authority which will be developed in 2023.</li> <li>This structure will reflect the changing</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A new Senior Leadership Structure of the Combined Authority will be developed in 2023.</li> <li>The Combined Authority will use expert support to determine necessary skills and appropriate structures are in place so as to recruit suitably skilled permanent staff at pace.</li> <li>It will be agreed in line with the Constitution by the West of England Combined Authority Committee</li> <li>Process regarding Senior Officer appointments to be guided by external expert support</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A new senior leadership structure will be developed by Combined Authority Officers in consultation with expert support (a third party)</li> <li>A new senior leadership structure will be implemented by October 2023 following engagement and consultation with the Constituent member organisations.</li> <li>All Senior Officer roles will have permanent appointments as soon as practicable.</li> </ul> | New senior structure to be implemented by October 2023. |

| Recommendation                                                                                                                                   | Accepted | Issues to be addressed                                                                                             | Response                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Action                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Measure of outcomes                                  | Timescale                                               |
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|                                                                                                                                                  |          |                                                                                                                    | <p>funding landscape which has emerged in recent years and will meet the requirements of our strategic priorities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We recognise the need for senior leadership stability and will aim to complete this process by Autumn 2023.</li> </ul> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                      |                                                         |
| <p>KR2 - <i>The Constitution of the Combined Authority should be revised to define the conditions under which it is acceptable for other</i></p> | Yes      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Working practices</li> <li>Internal decision making</li> <li>VfM</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Constitution of the Combined Authority will be revised to define the conditions under which it is acceptable</li> </ul>                                                                                                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The West of England CA Monitoring Officer will provide wording for the constitution at the next suitable meeting of the Combined Authority Committee (no later than March) in consultation with the Monitoring</li> </ul> | <p>Constitution updated to reflect new protocol.</p> | <p>March 2023 or as soon as is practically possible</p> |

| Recommendation                                                                                                                                                        | Accepted | Issues to be addressed                                                                                                                                                    | Response                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Action                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Measure of outcomes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Timescale  |
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| <i>officers and members to seek independent legal advice, without reference to the Monitoring Officer and/or Head of Legal Services.</i>                              |          |                                                                                                                                                                           | for other officers and members to seek independent legal advice, without reference to the Monitoring Officer and/or Head of Legal Services.                                                                                                | <p>Officers of the Unitary Authorities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Such a change would require unanimous support of the Mayor and Leaders at a West of England Combined Authority Committee meeting.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |            |
| IR1 <i>That consideration of relationships with the Chief Executive Group should be incorporated into any relationship development and mediation work undertaken.</i> | Yes      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Culture &amp; behaviour</li> <li>Mediation &amp; Relationships</li> <li>Communication</li> <li>Internal Decision making</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work is underway to establish longer term working practices among all senior officers which embed a culture of mutual understanding and constructive working.</li> <li>We recognise that</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Senior Officers will continue to meet collectively and on a 1:1 basis going forward.</li> <li>All Senior officers will work collaboratively and engage in meaningful consultation when developing solutions and proposals to help leaders to mitigate points of contention where possible ahead of Combined Authority Committee meetings.</li> <li>Where possible, matters of contention will be</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Senior Officers and CEOs will continue to meet regularly at a regional level.</li> <li>Areas of contention will be shared with partners in good time to enable solutions to be developed where possible.</li> <li>Agendas and Papers will be issued in good time in advance of meetings taking place.</li> </ul> | March 2023 |

| Recommendation                                                                     | Accepted | Issues to be addressed                                                                                                      | Response                                                                                                                                                                  | Action                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Measure of outcomes                                                                                                                                                   | Timescale  |
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|                                                                                    |          |                                                                                                                             | <p>constructive relationships are as important as processes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff survey results to be reported back to committee.</li> </ul> | <p>flagged with all senior officers in good time to allow for solutions to be developed ahead of Combined Authority meetings.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All Senior Leaders will commit to promote a culture of respect and understanding at all times.</li> <li>Where relationships require support, Senior Leaders will seek mediation at an early stage to ensure good working practice continue and solutions can be developed.</li> <li>A forward plan of decisions and activities to help with planning / resourcing / engagement for CEOs meeting will be developed.</li> </ul> |                                                                                                                                                                       |            |
| IR2 <i>That the constitution be reviewed, as previously considered by Combined</i> | Yes      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Constitution</li> <li>Working practices</li> <li>Internal decision making</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Constitution will be revised to include the new Monitoring</li> </ul>                                                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Constitution will be revised to include the new Monitoring Officer protocol.</li> <li>Regional MOs to meet regularly to discuss any</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Constitution will be revised to include the new Monitoring Officer protocol and wider issues identified in IR2.</li> </ul> | March 2023 |



| Recommendation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Accepted | Issues to be addressed | Response                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Action                                                          | Measure of outcomes | Timescale |
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| <p><i>Authority Members. This should incorporate the new Monitoring Officer protocol but also focuses on the specific ambiguities raised in the recent legal advice including the definition of statutory roles, delegated powers, managing conflicts of interest, decisions on all senior staffing matters including restructure and severance. The results should be reported to committee and used alongside the points we have raise basis for revision. There may be value in reviewing other</i></p> |          |                        | <p>Officer protocol</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MO will discuss this and any further changes to the document in consultation with the Unitary Authority MOs, which would require unanimous support of the Mayor and Leaders at a West of England Combined Authority Committee meeting.</li> </ul> | <p>matters regarding the constitution that need addressing.</p> |                     |           |

| Recommendation                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Accepted | Issues to be addressed                                                                       | Response                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Action                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Measure of outcomes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Timescale                           |
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| <i>Combined Authority constitutions to optimise the opportunity to improve the document in these areas.</i>                                                                                                         |          |                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                     |
| <i>IR3 That the performance reviews of the senior officers be formally recorded, including reasonable steps taken to manage issues and provide access to resources to enable skills development as appropriate.</i> | Yes      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performance</li> <li>• Working practices</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The annual performance reviews of all senior officers will be formally recorded, including reasonable steps to manage issue and provide access to support and resources to enable skills to develop as appropriate.</li> <li>• Reviewing GT 'Auditing Culture' Report:</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internal actions put in place to ensure Performance reviews are formally recorded.</li> <li>• Consideration of the GT Auditing Culture report made by the Head of HR in consultation with UA HR leads (and others as relevant), and recommendations for improvement made for consideration by the constituent member CEO group</li> <li>• Process agreed by March 2023 for the recording and sharing of key organisation performance indicators and</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performance reviews to be formally recorded. Head of HR to provide confirmation process has been implemented by January. Process for managing senior management performance shared with UA partners.</li> <li>• Positive staff survey results and feedback at all levels of the organisation. Results shared with CA lead members and CEOs on a regular basis.</li> </ul> | January and March 2023 respectively |

| Recommendation                           | Accepted | Issues to be addressed                                       | Response                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Action                                                                                           | Measure of outcomes                                                                                                       | Timescale |
|------------------------------------------|----------|--------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
|                                          |          |                                                              | <p><a href="#">Auditing Culture</a> and to consider how best practice can be implemented in the Combined Authority.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organisational Performance Reports to be developed and shared with all CA partners, which would include staff survey results, turnover, KPIs.</li> <li>Process for managing senior officer performance to be shared with UA partners.</li> </ul> | information with member organisations relating to organisational culture and health              |                                                                                                                           |           |
| IR4 – <i>That the Monitoring Officer</i> | Yes      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leadership</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Monitoring</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monitoring Officer to be confirmed at Director</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monitoring Officer role retains its current seniority at Director level</li> </ul> | Ongoing   |

| Recommendation                                                                                                                                                                          | Accepted | Issues to be addressed                                                                        | Response                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Action                                                                                                                         | Measure of outcomes                                                                                             | Timescale |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <i>role retains its current seniority at Director level in any future restructure or that sufficient safeguards are implemented to protect the authority and influence of the role.</i> |          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organisation structure</li> <li>• Culture</li> </ul> | Officer will remain as a Director role in any future senior leadership structure which will be considered by the Combined Authority Committee. Any change would require a vote of the West of England Combined Authority Committee. | Level in any future leadership structure. Any change would require a vote of the West of England Combined Authority Committee. | in any future restructure. Any change would require a vote of the West of England Combined Authority Committee. |           |

## **Appendix 3**

### **TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR INDEPENDENT PEER CHALLENGE REVIEW**

The review will include consideration of:

- The extent to which there is a consistent view of the role and purpose of the West of England Combined Authority
- how the CA and its constituent members can improve their ability to set a clear and agreed ambition for the region and their partnership.
- the working relationships and supporting architecture required to enable effective collaboration both between politicians and between chief officers across the CA and its constituent member organisations.
- the role of statutory officers in circumstances when a potential conflict is identified.
- In the light of the above, whether there is sufficient appropriate leadership and capacity to be able to deliver the ambition, objectives and statutory responsibilities of the West of England Combined Authority

The report produced as part of this review will include consideration as to whether the existing action plan resulting from the recent value for money audit report requires any amendment. The action plan sets out the intention to report on progress swiftly including with reports back to the Combined Authority Committee initially at the March meeting to ensure agreement ahead of pushing on with delivery. The fortnightly meeting of CEOs will receive updates on the work as it progresses.

In order to answer these questions, the following areas will be considered:

- the operation, culture and structure of the Combined Authority, and of the constituent Unitary Authorities insofar as it relates to regional partnership working;
- the effectiveness of arrangements in place to support the required collaboration between political and organisational leadership of the Combined Authority and constituent members;
- the capacity and/or capability to provide the Combined Authority with clear and effective strategic direction;
- adequacy and use of resources and the impact of governance on the Combined Authority's ability to deliver best value;



- the appropriateness of the Governance arrangements of the Combined Authority to enable delivery, including the constitution and the schemes of delegation;
- the culture of openness, transparency and trust within and between the officers and members of the Combined Authority Committee and Unitary Councils;
- openness to robust, constructive, high support challenge;
- the effectiveness of working relationships and engagement with partners, including North Somerset.

This work will provide conclusions on the action needed to improve the ability of the CA and its constituent authorities to:

- effectively develop and agree overarching strategies and associated delivery plans for the region
- establish clarity of purpose for what the Combined Authority is there to do and that constituent authorities will agree to provide the landscape, operational freedoms and support the Combined Authority in seeking to achieve
- put the right arrangements in place to enable positive collaboration between the Combined Authority organisation and constituent authorities
- support Combined Authority committee members to provide clear and effective leadership and direction for the benefit of the region
- improve the capability of the Combined Authority to be an effective organisation, working as part of a broader local system