

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At an inquorate meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held in the Authority Chamber - No.1 Mann Island, Liverpool, L3 1BP on Wednesday, 6th November, 2019 the following Members were

Councillor Bill Woolfall	Labour	Halton BC
Councillor Louise Whitley	Labour	Halton BC
Councillor Edna Finneran	Labour	Knowsley MBC
Councillor John Morgan	Labour	Knowsley MBC
Councillor Sam Gorst	Labour	Liverpool CC
Councillor Tom Crone	Green	Liverpool CC
Councillor Christine Howard	Labour	Sefton MBC
Councillor Sam Marshall	Labour	Sefton MBC
Councillor Paula Murphy	Labour	Sefton MBC
Councillor Helen Cameron	Labour	Wirral MBC
Councillor Dr John Pugh	Liberal Democrats	LCR Opposition Group

In light of the meeting being inquorate, the Chair, Councillor Tom Crone on behalf of the Committee requested that: -

- 1) a report be produced to consider ways and measures that can be taken to improve the inquorate meetings of the LCR Overview and Scrutiny Committee; and
- 2) a briefing paper be produced looking at best practice among the other Combined Authorities across the country relating to quorum practices and ways to improve inquorate meetings.

20. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Andy Bowden, Adrian Jones, Tricia O'Brien, Jean Stapleton, Kevan Wainwright, and Sir Ron Watson CBE.

21. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

22. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 4TH SEPTEMBER 2019

The inquorate meeting noted the minutes of the previous inquorate meeting of the LCR Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 4th September 2019 as a correct record.

23. METRO MAYOR S ROTHERAM'S UPDATE

The Metro Mayor, Steve Rotheram provided an update relating to his recent activities and he highlighted the following: -

LCR Overview and Scrutiny Committee inquorate meetings

The quoracy of the meeting affects the final accounts of the Combined Authority, through the “qualified” account due to inquorate meetings in the final review it raises questions relating to the Governance arrangements.

Merseyrail Dispute

Led discussions with both parties to resolve the 3 year dispute, which has now been agreed in principle which will be put to members. This then guarantees a guard/second safety-critical person on every train.

Convention of the North

Attended the convention of the North in Rotheram, Yorkshire with the Metro Mayor of Greater Manchester in September 2019 and he made representation to Government for 5 priorities: -

- Action to resolve the Northern Rail debacle;
- Providing a London style subsidy for buses;
- Action on clean air;
- More Support for rough sleepers; and
- Devolution for more powers for skills and training.

Also met with the Prime Minister and re-iterated the priorities. As a result a Northern Manifesto has been produced, which is cross party and will be published soon.

Smart Ticketing

New era for smart ticketing and smart travel across the City Region with the Metro Card which will replace the Walrus. First step to deliver a more simplified transport system. Daily bus fares will be capped across the City Region.

Social Innovation Fund

Created a new £5m social innovation fund, to support social trading organisations to multiply and grow businesses across the region to drive new innovation and support the thriving third sector across the city region to grow from strength to strength.

Local Industrial Strategy (LIS)

Developed further the LIS and hosting a number of consultation events with the Chamber of Commerce, Trade Unions, Social Economy, Third Sector and continued engagement until submission to Government in 2020.

Northern Rail

Grant Chapps “Northern Rail can’t continue the way it is”. It is travel chaos at stations relating to late trains, cancelled trains or short platforms etc. Met with Secretary of State emphasised the concerns and discussed removing the franchise and ownership for an “operator of last resort”. Also met with Northern who have promised further improvements, but hoping that an “operator of last resort” is brought in for Northern.

Housing First Update

Piloting Housing First approach with Government pilot funding, making good strides. Welcomed a number of first users into their own homes with their own furniture and wanted to thank the Housing First Team and Kate Farrell.

Active Travel

600km cycle and walking network spanning the length and breadth of the city region. Result in more people 'ditching' the cars and providing a genuine and more environmentally friendly mode of transport. Recent appointment of Simon O'Brien as a keen cyclist supporting Active Travel.

Housing Strategy

Friday 1st November 2019 approved the new Housing Strategy, calling on Government to provide £200m for brown site remediation, to be cleared and commercially developed with the potential for 42,000 homes to be built across the city region.

Councillor Sam Marshall enquired about the "operator of last resort" and if it was similar to what happened on the East Coast Line.

Metro Mayor S Rotheram commented that it was similar to the East Coast Mainline, which went back into public ownership and turned over a profit. He spoke about the opportunity in the city region and the detailed negotiations with DfT relating to guaranteed services to support the climate emergency and alternative travel.

Councillor John Pugh commented about the issues Northern Rail face relating to delays, infrastructure and rolling stock and if the "operator of last resort" would face similar challenges and enquired about the investment programme.

Metro Mayor S Rotheram commented that there have been no investment from Government and Network Rail have failed on a number of projects in comparison to the projects on Merseyrail which has been delivered on time and within budget. People need the guarantee of the services which is not being given by Northern Rail.

Councillor Sam Gorst enquired about the potential 42,000 new homes and whether it would be social housing or private luxury homes.

Metro Mayor S Rotheram commented that it would be up to each Local Authority to decide how to invest. The Combined Authority can only get the pots of money for the Local Authority's to bid into. He stated that it should be social housing and for housing to be affordable for the public.

Councillor Edna Finneran enquired about homelessness and people sleeping on the streets and what was being done as a Combined Authority and as Local Authorities.

Metro Mayor S Rotheram spoke about "hidden homelessness" and "rough sleepers" that needed to be tackled through the building of more houses and homes across the city region. He referred to the brownfield sites that had been left derelict across the region, which could be used to build houses and create homes for these people. He also spoke about the Housing First project and its progress.

Councillor Sam Marshall welcomed the "brownfield project" initiatives and enquired about the derelict sites that were "housing market renewal initiatives" that were already prepared for renewal and if it would be included in the project.

Metro Mayor S Rotheram confirmed that the “housing market renewal initiative” sites were included in the “brownfield project”. He spoke about enabling Local Councils to build council houses again and being able to pull the initiatives together.

Councillor Tom Crone also welcomed the “brownfield project” and enquired if the Metro Mayor would confirm that houses would not be built on greenfield sites or green areas. He also commented about the “active travel” project and welcomed the 600km improvements to cycling lanes and walking paths across the region, but wanted to know if more than £4.8m would be committed to the project from the Transforming Cities Fund as it would not be enough to complete the 600km improvements.

Metro Mayor S Rotheram spoke about the “active travel” project and access to more money would not make a difference given the Government cycle for spending which was between 2-4 years. The allocated money will be spent on time to prepare the work and the cycling and walking network for the infrastructure plans ahead. He commented about the current method of creating the cycling lanes and the work required to ensure it is done properly and not just painted lanes, but segregated cycling lanes and walking paths. The Metro Mayor, S Rotheram also spoke about the Brownfield First project and informed the Committee that the Combined Authority is not a planning authority, but in a general course of direction could persuade partners to do something about the greenfield sites.

Councillor Sam Gorst enquired about disabled parking at train stations and accessible train stations.

Metro Mayor S Rotheram commented that there were many train stations across the region with an aging infrastructure, but there were plans to do more and to improve accessibility as it was currently 62%, but will be working hard to get it up to 100%. £15m of funding has been committed to rebuild and refurbish stations.

The inquorate Committee noted the Metro Mayors’ update and thanked him for his attendance.

Councillor Paula Murphy left the meeting at 10.53am.

24. LIVERPOOL CITY REGION HOUSING STATEMENT UPDATE

The inquorate Committee considered a report from the Head of Government Relations, John McGee providing an update relating to the Draft City Region Housing Statement and Delivery Plan 2019-24.

Councillor Edna Finneran enquired about the building of affordable homes and what was meant by affordable and the older population living in 3/4 bedroom homes and would want to scale down but not prepared to move into flats, as they would prefer bungalows, but availability is an issue.

John McGee referred the Committee to the vision and foreword in the Draft City Region Housing Statement and Delivery plan which provided an explanation about “affordability” and working with the housing market to deliver on the ambitions including bungalows, to free up the 3/4 bedroom homes. He also explained that the Combined Authority was working with the Local Authority’s to provide good quality,

manageable and well built homes for the regions residents as part of the housing planning process for the next 10-15 years.

Councillor Dr John Pugh enquired about the landlord licensing schemes in the City Region and its success and whether “rogue landlords” were re-thinking how they would treat tenants. He also asked about homeless people and whether there was any data relating to the % of people who were homeless who suffered with addictions and mental health issues.

John McGee informed the Committee that there was no quality of data around homelessness and those who suffered with addictions and had mental health issues, which was quite poor as it was quite difficult to acquire that kind of detailed data. He spoke about the landlord licensing schemes and reported that it was working well, but it was time limited and within a limited geography within the region, but ongoing discussions were taking place with Local Authorities to extend the scheme.

Councillor Christine Howard spoke about Local Authorities having the powers and means to build housing on brownfield sites and enquired about the £200m previously identified for de-contamination and whether it would also be used for building houses. She also asked about the further devolution powers and whether it can be guaranteed that the £200m identified for decontaminating Brownfield sites would be given to Local Authorities, rather than private development companies.

John McGee said that it would depend on what happened at the General Elections, but he was of the view that those devolved powers would not be given. He also stated that Homes England’s funding process focused on infrastructure and decontamination and not building houses as there was very little money. However, discussions were underway to deliver on a pipeline of schemes and activities and bring together funding.

Councillor Sam Marshall commented that the report was good and the information relating to the social landlords, the local authorities, the private landlords and housing partners was a credit to the work being done. She enquired about the length of time it has taken to be saying the same things since 2012 relating to accessible homes for all and shouldn’t the council provisions be prioritised relating to the funding for more council houses to be built.

John McGee commented that he understood the frustrations, but the decision to build more council houses was a political decision and it was about delivering the 42,000 new homes and improving the life chances of the regions citizens.

Councillor Tom Crone enquired about the integration of the housing policy with transport and whether provisions for private car ownership and encouraging residents to live without a car and rely more on public transport was being considered. He also asked about whether it was possible for the Combined Authority to put together packages of projects to harness more energy company funding.

John McGee commented that work was underway to bring together the Transport Plan, the Housing Statement and the Spatial Development Strategy and to set design standards for the future meeting the green economy. He also spoke about the Combined Authority already looking at the energy packages to secure funding from external sources.

The inquorate Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted: -

- a) the report;
- b) the vision set out in the City Region Housing Statement; and
- c) the proposed approach to the Delivery Plan 2019-24.

25. LIVERPOOL CITY REGION HOUSING FIRST SERVICE UPDATE

The inquorate Committee considered a report from the Head of Government Relations, John McGee providing an update relating to the Housing First service within the Liverpool City Region and he highlighted the following: -

- The project has taken a long time to prepare and to collate the strategy, but it is beginning to deliver and work well;
- 15 people have been employed as key workers of the housing first service, providing a wrap around service;
- There have been 94 referrals over 2 months so it is full as it is only a pilot;
- 13 people have been housed and 48 people are actively considering whether they want to use the scheme or not;
- 11-15 people are currently waiting on the right home;
- Working relationships with key partners in the City Region is going well including key people in the Local Authority housing teams, the NHS, the Criminal Justice system and other third sector organisations;
- Looking to set up a local Social Lettings Agency to help expand the service to more users;
- Looking at Strategic Housing allocations with the Local Authorities to ensure the property pool is working well across the Housing First service; and
- It is a 3- year programme so thinking about the sustainability and future funding.

Councillor Edna Finneran enquired about the Property Pool and how confusing it could be for local people looking for housing regarding the “banding” in areas of the City as the criteria and process varies across the region and it should be one process.

John McGee commented that the Combined Authority were looking at the issues and trying to co-ordinate the approach with the Local Authorities regarding the process and a more consistent approach.

Councillor Sam Marshall enquired about the actual data being captured for the pilot together with costs of provisions and modelling against what it could be etc.

John McGee informed the Committee that data was being captured, monitored and being evaluated and further details could be shared with the Committee if required.

Councillor Sam Gorst spoke about the General Elections and whether or not the Property Pool could be brought in-house so that Local Authorities could manage the Property Pool and not the Registered Social Landlords.

John McGee commented that it could be looked at through the devolution relating to housing.

Councillor Tom Crone enquired the development of the business plan with £7m over 3 years and if there were any estimations of savings over the future years e.g. using the Finland model.

John McGee informed the Committee that it has been looked at and large sums of savings were identified for the future.

The inquorate Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the contents of the progress of the Housing First service within the Liverpool City Region.

26. APPRENTICESHIPS

The inquorate Committee considered a report from the Policy Lead, Employment and Skills, Rob Tabb providing an update on the implementation of the actions agreed following the Scrutiny Review in 2016/17 and he highlighted the following:

- Apprenticeships are important to the City Region as it contributes both economically and socially;
- It has an economic impact and is good for businesses and is seen as a tool for social mobility to develop skills and to progress in work;
- This Committee conducted a review in 2016/17 and submitted recommendations which were accepted by the Combined Authority;
- The timing of the review took place just before major funding and operational reforms were implemented in April 2017;
- As a result of the reforms the City Region was dis-proportionately negatively affected by the implementation of the reforms similar to that of Sheffield, West Midlands and Tees Valley;
- The Apprenticeship Levy is about large employers who pay a particular levy and agree how it is spent;
- The numbers of 16-18 years old who started apprenticeships are maintained and the proportion has increased recently together with Level 4 plus apprenticeships;
- There have been restrictions and reductions in funding for small businesses with less than 130 staff who don't pay into the apprenticeship levy, but there are facilities available for those who have spare apprenticeship levy to transfer funding to other organisations to fund over 100 apprenticeships;
- Disproportionate affected in some sectors, but the requirement to spend 20% time with off the job training and it has been recently enforced, but has impacted social care e.g. domiciliary care;
- Some actions have been put in place through the programmes in place –
 - An application Apprenticeship Portal;
 - The Combined Authority agreed in October 2019 to fund £4m of SIF funding for the Skills and Employers brokerage service;
 - Invested in development of new standards for Maritime qualifications; and
 - Embedded the creation of apprenticeships in social value.

- It is a live conversation with the Government Officials, Metro Mayor and Portfolio Lead raising issues and concerns for the apprenticeships.

Councillor Edna Finneran spoke about recently visiting a college in Knowsley and then visiting an engineering company and finding out that the company did not use the college as the qualifications to be an engineer did not match the qualifications on offer at the college as it was out of date so no apprentices would be hired.

Rob Tabb commented that additional funding has been made available to colleges and universities other providers to have up to date training and equipment.

Councillor Sam Marshall welcomed the report and the actions being delivered and noted the 50% reduction, but was pleased with the mitigation being put in place by the Combined Authority and the discussions taking place with the Metro Mayor and Government officials.

The inquorate Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted: -

- a) the update on the actions recommended by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in March 2017; and
- b) the broader update on apprenticeships and the work underway by the Combined Authority.

27. NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Liverpool City Region Overview and Scrutiny Committee be held on 15th January 2020.

The Chair on behalf of the Committee noted that it was Charles Yankiah's last meeting as he was due to leave the Combined Authority. The Chair thanked Charles for his support and work on the Committee and wished him the best for the future.

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Chairperson of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

(The meeting closed at 11.45 am)