

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At an inquorate meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held Remotely on Wednesday, 10th March, 2021 the following Members were

Councillor Louise Whitley	Labour	Halton BC
Councillor Bill Woolfall	Labour	Halton BC
Councillor Edna Finneran	Labour	Knowsley MBC
Councillor John Morgan	Labour	Knowsley MBC
Councillor Tom Crone (Chair)	Green	Liverpool CC
Councillor Tricia O'Brien	Labour	Liverpool CC
Councillor Christine Howard	Labour	Sefton MBC
Councillor Dr John Pugh	Liberal Democrat	Sefton MBC
Councillor Carran Waterfield	Labour	Sefton MBC
Councillor Michelle Sweeney	Labour	St Helens MBC
Councillor Adrian Jones	Labour	Wirral BC
Councillor Jean Stapleton	Labour	Wirral BC
Councillor Helen Cameron	Conservative	Wirral BC

### 34. INQUORATE MEETING

The Chair advised that the meeting was inquorate and as such any decisions or recommendations made by the group would be on an advisory basis only.

### 35. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors A Corkhill, L Dowd, A Jones, Sir R Watson, K Wainwright and J Wiseman.

### 36. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENT

The Committee extended their best wishes to Councillor Corkhill who was recovering from surgery and would not be present for this meeting. It was noted that there had been a change in membership of the Committee and the Chair welcomed Councillor Sarah Doyle who would be replacing Councillor Joanna Anderson.

### 37. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest submitted for this meeting.

### 38. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 14 JANUARY 2021

The minutes of the last meeting held on the 14 January 2021 were agreed as an accurate record with an amendment to note Councillor Waterfield's attendance.

### 39. METRO MAYOR S ROTHERAM'S UPDATE

Metro Mayor, Steve Rotheram provided the Committee with an update on his activities since the last meeting with a focus on pandemic recovery.

The Committee heard that this week marked the return to school for children in the city region as part of the first stage of the Government's plans to unlock the country after the recent lockdown. The impact of the pandemic on education was highlighted and it was acknowledged that there was a nervousness around infection rates rising once schools reopened. The Metro Mayor suggested that Government needed to be held accountable to ensure 'no child was left behind' as a result of lost learning during the pandemic. The decision to cancel exams was noted as having the potential to adversely affect those from disadvantaged backgrounds in a similar way to the previous year's algorithm.

It was reported that infection rates in the city region were at the lowest they had been since the start of the year and the pressure on the NHS had reduced as a result as well as a reduction in deaths. Long-term Covid had led to an extension in patients stays in hospital and this had the potential to pose capacity issues. The Metro Mayor emphasised the need to adhere to the guidance so that in the future restrictions could be eased and the benefits of vaccine deployment could be felt.

The Committee were advised that the Metro Mayor had recently addressed 200 cross sector businesses at an online event to discuss Covid recovery and the LCR recovery Fund. The criticality of delivering the strongest and fairest recovery that was possible was reaffirmed and the Metro Mayor stated that the city region's Economic Recovery Plan would help to achieve this goal.

Concerning Transport, the Metro Mayor advised that the new station in Kirkby was progressing and that the LCR Combined Authority had recently announced a funding package for the project. Plans included proposals for 300 park and ride spaces and a bus interchange with step free access.

It was reported that since the last meeting the LCR Combined Authority had launched its Fair Employment Charter with around 300 employers from across the city region involved in its development. The importance of ensuring the availability of good jobs for the city region's people was highlighted.

The Committee were advised that the digital programme was working towards connecting the six local authority areas and the LCR Combined Authority had launched a joint venture to deliver ultra-fast connectivity across the city region. The project was expected to provide £105m of initial return to the local economy with an aspiration that over the projects lifetime that figure could significantly increase.

The Metro Mayor noted that this was the last Overview and Scrutiny Committee of the municipal year and as such thanked the Chair and the Members for their hard work over the past 12 months, and he stressed the importance of effective scrutiny as part of the decision making process. The Metro Mayor and the Chair of the Committee thanked the officers in attendance for their contribution over the last year as well as Democratic Services for the support they had provided to members during this difficult time.

Councillor Pugh raised concerns over home-schooling and the effect this could have on children without access to the requisite resources, highlighting a pre-existing inequality in the education of children from different socio-economic backgrounds. The Metro Mayor agreed that access to resources like connectivity were vital during this time and this needed to be addressed nationally by DfE to ensure that the curriculum was suited to the needs of the community. It was noted that education did not fall under the remit of the LCR Combined Authority but that a strategic overview

of education was being undertaken by Sir Paul Grant. Councillor O'Brien agreed that connectivity was key to education and suggested that programmes for children from more deprived areas could be reinstated.

Councillor Pugh also enquired about the current consultation on the changes to the Southport – Piccadilly line which disadvantaged residents in Southport. The Metro Mayor agreed that connectivity was fundamental in improving air quality and stopping people from moving out of the city region.

The Committee discussed the Fair Employment Charter and a recent announcement by Jaguar Land Rover to increase their workforce. The Metro-Mayor stressed that it was essential to the future economic prospects of the city region to concentrate on the 'jobs of the future' with a focus on new technologies and digital.

Councillor Sweeney suggested that ensuring children from deprived areas had opportunities to succeed outside of standard education was essential, highlighting extra-curricular activities and groups as key to socialisation. The Metro Mayor agreed that socialisation was important and that had been highlighted by the pandemic and Build Back Better which sought to create a more fair and socially just society, through changing the approach to policy making as depicted by the Households into Work project.

With regards to accessibility on the network, Councillor O'Brien urged the Metro Mayor to continue the LCR Combined Authority's work to ensure that all stations across the city region had disability access. The Metro Mayor agreed that accessibility was important and noted that currently the network was around 60% compliant. It was hoped that funding could be secured from Government to continue adding lifts and ramps to stations though it was noted that some of the Victorian stations would be more challenging to convert.

The Chair noted his disappointment that there had not been an update on the Climate Change agenda and asked for reassurance that recovery from Covid would be green, low carbon and environmentally friendly. The Metro Mayor highlighted the city region's net zero carbon plan and projects like Glass Futures and Hydrogen Bus as demonstrating the LCR Combined Authority's commitment to tackling climate change. The city region's ambition for tidal energy was also highlighted alongside a housing pilot to improve insulation in poorer areas. The Metro Mayor assured the Committee that in all the LCR Combined Authority's plans there was always a consideration of the environment and the LCR Combined Authority's investment in community environmental projects to help educate children on how to minimise the impact of future generations was the first in the nation.

#### **40. RACE EQUALITY DECLARATION OF INTENT**

Lorna Rogers, Head of Mayoral Programme Delivery, presented the Committee with the proposed Race Equality Declaration of Intent which sought support. It was requested that the Members play a role in monitoring the future performance against targets by acting as champions for the race equality programme.

The Committee received a presentation on the programme of work to date in addressing the realities of racial injustice and inequalities in the city region. It was explained that Black and Asian communities had been disproportionately affected by Covid-19.

The LCR Combined Authority had agreed to build an evidence base and case for change to improve the opportunities for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people in the city region and it was noted that Build Back Better needed to deliver on outcomes for all residents and businesses. The presentation focused on the LCR Combined Authority as an employer (that needed to be representative of the communities in the city region), commissioner (improving accessibility and take-up of programmes being funded by the LCR Combined Authority) and as a facilitator (amplifying the voice of Black Asian and Minority Ethnic residents and working with partner organisations that prioritise race equality).

It was reported that the Declaration of Intent was a key document for the city region and as such progress needed to be monitored in a transparent way using tangible targets over a five-year timeline.

The Committee heard that the life chances of a black person in the Liverpool city region needed to be addressed, for example black graduates were paid less than other groups and were three times less likely to be employed compared to other ethnicities. Furthermore, it was explained that black residents were twice as likely not to be homeowners and three times more likely to be stopped and searched by the Police with a higher rate and risk of death from Covid19 and the lowest life satisfaction score in the UK. It was explained that this evidence demonstrated the compound impact of discrimination and the systemic nature of the problem.

In summation, Lorna Rogers explained that there was a real opportunity for the LCR Combined Authority to make an impactful change that would benefit everyone in the city region as well as businesses through closing the employment gap that could add £300mil to the economy per annum.

Members showed their appreciation for the report and confirmed their willingness to act as champions for race equality within the city region.

Councillor Howard queried what consultation had been undertaken with Black Asian and Minority Ethnic employees and residents in the city region in particular with the targets set out in the report, noting the significance of engaging with the community throughout the process to ensure the focus was right. Lorna Rogers agreed that engagement was key and explained that the vision was for communities to co-design the solutions. There had been engagement with community groups and young people were involved in gathering evidence on lived experience alongside business support and employee feedback.

The Chair advised that as the meeting was not quorate, the recommendations to the LCR Combined Authority would be advisory.

#### **41. ADULT EDUCATION BUDGET PROGRAMME UPDATE**

Alison Gallagher, Lead Officer – Adult Education Budget provided the Committee with a presentation on the Adult Education Budget (AEB) with a focus on the previous year's delivery and plans for 2021-22.

The Committee were given an overview of the previous year, noting that the embedding of AEB had been supported by Legal, Audit and Procurement in the establishment of a payment system.

Alison Gallagher outlined the range of learning aims funded by the LCR Combined Authority and noted that a new digital entitlement had been introduced for 2021-22.

With regards to funding for the academic year 2019-20, the Committee were advised that reconciliation figures had not been applied to grant funded organisations due to the costs associated with delivery, adapting to new delivery methods including additional sanitisation costs resulting from the pandemic. Procured providers had been paid in a more flexible way during the pandemic to enable cash flow support. Unspent and unearned funds are currently being repaid by providers to the LCR Combined Authority.

It was explained that 36,800 learners had been supported and a breakdown of gender, disability and race was provided to portray the diverse range of learners involved. Preparation for Work, and Health and Social Care were the most popular courses in 2019/20. The Members were advised that Level 2 retraining and reskilling was being fully funded to support learners and providers in delivering contracts during the pandemic. A digital grant to AEB providers had also been made available to support learners in getting the right equipment.

New Learning aims have been developed in conjunction with colleges and local employers. Providers had been successful in adapting delivery to an online platform and were delivering a mixture of blended and online courses during lockdown. It was explained that planning for 2021-22 was underway and a funding offer of £53million had been confirmed from the Department for Education for devolved AEB.

The LCR Combined Authority would continue to plan for the coming year noting that a procurement exercise would be launched later in 2021 for the academic year 2022-23 and beyond.

Councillor Pugh queried the different varieties of training being provided highlighting digital training as key to the city region's digital ambitions. The extent to which the skills gap was being plugged was questioned and it was requested that in future reports an analysis of the type of training being provided and how it related to the LCR Combined Authority objectives be included. Alison Gallagher explained that an analysis of achievement rates had been affected by the pandemic and that digital bootcamps were being organised.

## **42. MERSEY TIDAL PROJECT UPDATE**

Martin Land, Project Director – Tidal, provided the Committee with an update on the Mersey Tidal project with a focus on the project's strategic context and the next steps.

The presentation highlighted that there was generation capacity needed and that solar, offshore and wind provided under 10% of national capacity. The Tidal project was estimated to provide 30% of electricity in the city region and would be locally significant. Issues with solar and wind power were identified and it was explained that tidal would be a more reliable and available resource as it utilised the difference in the height of the tide twice a day and could be predicted with accuracy up to 18 years in advance. It was explained that the Mersey had the largest tidal range at 8.4metres height difference between high and low tide with a spring tide every 2 weeks.

The Committee were advised that it would take a further 5 years to develop the plans and it was hoped that the plant could be operational by 2030 and would provide an asset that could exist for the next 100 years. An Outline Business Case was expected to be submitted in the Autumn of 2021 when the project would move into Phase 4.

Considering the strategic context of the project, it was noted that the project aligned with the city regions net zero carbon targets. A review of 1600 square kilometres of the area had been undertaken with MEAS (Merseyside Environmental Advisory Services) and Sefton Council to better understand the immediate environment. Working in collaboration had helped the LCR Combined Authority to act as a more intelligent client when considering the views of consultants.

Stakeholder consultation was also underway to get an understanding of the trends over the next 100 years and what the effect on the environment would be if the LCR Combined Authority did nothing. A study into the tidal range resource in the UK had been undertaken to provide further detail on the sandbanks in the Mersey.

With regards to project costs, a breakdown of the scope of the project and a development budget were being formed and once the detailed programme began a cost estimate would be built. It was estimated that the budget would be completed by March 2022 and an investment decision would be proposed in mid-2025 with the next phase estimated at c£70million. Government funding would support the project alongside the electricity market system and private capital which was highly available for environmental projects.

A further update in August would provide information on the structure of the project and a discussion on if it should be publicly led.

The Committee were advised that the next step was to clarify government support for tidal through its national planning statements due for revision in September. A consenting strategy would be drafted as part of the Outline Business Case alongside energy modelling, calculating costs and looking at funding mechanisms for the project.

The Committee discussed similar schemes in the UK including those in Morecombe Bay, Fleetwood and Colwyn Bay.

Councillor Cameron queried whether there were any active studies from MEAS or Sefton Council on geomorphology and how the environment had been impacted by dredging. It was explained that detailed studies had not yet taken place and officers had been collecting the existent background data for consideration. It was reported that discussions had taken place with the National Oceanographic Centre regarding dredging and officers were looking to secure more data on this.

Councillor Pugh admired the ambition of the project and questioned what a 'bad response' from Government would look like, using the tidal project in Swansea as an example. Martin Land explained that initial discussions with Government were encouraging in terms of the need for a renewable and reliable system. It was acknowledged that the reliability of tidal was viewed positively and aligned with Government's net zero pledge. Due to the large cost of the project it was emphasised that the regulatory asset model was critical.

With regards to employment and procurement, Councillor Howard raised whether apprenticeships would form part of the training and sustainable employment that could be brought to the city region as part of the project. It was advised that around 5000 construction jobs would be created over 5 years and work was being done to understand that job profile. A breakdown of the skills needed for the 40 different roles was being crafted using existing offshore jobs to identify any similarities.

The Chair noted his support of renewable projects and the ambition to generate clean energy but raised concerns over the risk and long-term expense of the project. With this in mind, it was queried whether officers were aware of developments in the energy market that could make other sources like wind more viable. Secondly the Chair queried how the LCR Combined Authority would decide if the ecological costs were too high and if the impact on local biodiversity was too severe. Martin Land explained that supply and demand and consumption of energy were balanced with regards to energy storage. It was reported that the LCR Combined Authority was involved with the energy systems catapult on their national model which identified the value of tidal as a complimentary energy supplier. The seasonality of energy demand was also being considered and the impact this would have on energy storage. With regards to economics, it was explained that as the technology developed costs would vary and Officers were cognisant of this.

Concerning the environment, Martin Land explained that the LCR Combined Authority were aware of the studies and the justifications that would be needed to achieve consent. Whether a barrage or a lagoon scheme were utilised would also feature into considerations with a focus on what was best for the environment. Engagement would be key in understanding the concerns of residents and consultation would use evidence when presenting the project. It was acknowledged that the project would have an impact on the salt marches, and this would be factored in.

**43. ANY OTHER BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIRPERSON DEEMS TO BE OF AN URGENT NATURE**

No items of urgent business were received for this meeting, so the Chair closed the meeting, thanking members of the Committee for their attendance and participation over the last municipal year.

Minutes 34 to 43 received as a correct record on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of July 2021.

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Chairperson of the Overview and Scrutiny Meeting

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