

LCR OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At an inquorate meeting of the LCR Overview and Scrutiny Committee held in the Authority Chamber - No.1 Mann Island, Liverpool, L3 1BP on Thursday, 19th January, 2023 the following Members were

Present:

Councillor Pat Moloney
Vice-Chair of the Committee
(in the Chair)

Councillor John Abbott, Halton Borough Council
Councillor Robert Austin, Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor David Burgess-Joyce, Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Eddie Dourley, Halton Borough Council
Councillor Edna Finneran, Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Christine Howard, Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Trisha Long, St Helens Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Tricia O'Brien, Liverpool City Council
Councillor Angela Teeling, Halton Borough Council
Councillor Carran Waterfield, Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council

29 INQUORATE MEETING

The Chairperson, Councillor P Moloney, advised Members that the meeting of the Committee was inquorate and he was supportive of continuing with the meeting as an informal discussion.

Members expressed their frustration with the quorum threshold and ongoing attendance issues relating to this Committee and sought clarity on whether there was the mechanism for hybrid meetings to take place or substitute nominations.

Louise Outram, Interim Monitoring Officer, informed the Committee that the legislation didn't allow for hybrid Committee meetings to be held and Central Government continued to be lobbied in respect of the quoracy threshold for Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee's.

30 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Steve Radford, George Davies, Sam Gorst, Julie McManus, Brenda O'Brien, Brian Spencer, Kai Taylor and Mancyia Uddin.

31 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

32 TO CONSIDER THE MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS HELD ON 7 SEPTEMBER AND 1 DECEMBER 2022

The inquorate meeting noted the minutes of the previous meetings of the LCR Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 7 September 2022 and 1 December 2022.

33 COMBINED AUTHORITY BUDGET 2023/24

The Committee considered the report of the Portfolio Holder for Policy, Reform and Resources and the Executive Director of Corporate Services, which provided the Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an opportunity to consider and make recommendations on the 2023/24 budget for the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority prior to its approval at the meeting of the Combined Authority on 20 January 2023.

The Metro Mayor, Steve Rotherham, introduced the proposed 2023/24 Combined Authority Budget and advised the Committee that this budget reflected the prevailing economic challenges, notably the high levels of inflation which were having a significant impact on the transport industry.

The Metro Mayor advised Members that the proposal was to again freeze the Mayoral Precept at the same level as when it was first introduced, which for most households was between £12 and £14 per year. It was also reported that proposed increases to the Transport Levy, paid by each of the constituent authorities, would be capped at 2.95%.

The Metro Mayor also summarised how the budget proposals would support the following:

- investment in a London style integrated transport system;
- continue to maintain the two Mersey Tunnels;
- provide £50m investment in new cycling and walking infrastructure, including links between Runcorn Station Quarter and Daresbury Science Park;
- construction to start on a new Mersey Ferry with Cammell Laird;
- opening of another new station at Headbolt Lane in Kirkby in the Spring, with work continuing on a new Liverpool Baltic Station; and the development of schemes for Carr Mill in St Helens and Woodchurch on the Wirral;
- significant improvement of facilities at Lea Green in St Helens and eight further stations would become fully accessible when new lift installations;
- £60m Brownfield Land Fund investment to develop derelict land for affordable homes that will also boost council tax returns and Council finances;
- over £50m investment in Adult Education across the City Region, including £8m for skills Bootcamps to target areas of skills shortage;
- release of £25m to support the Liverpool City Region Freeport Programme and unlock significant investment across the City Region, but in particular at the Freeport Sites in Widnes, Newton-le-Willows and Wirral Waters; and
- matching Liverpool City Councils £2m investment to bring Eurovision to the City Centre.

The Metro Mayor concluded his statement and invited John Fogarty, Executive Director of Corporate Resources to make his budget statement.

John Fogarty advised the Committee that the economic conditions, in particular inflation rates in the Transport and Bus sector, had made this a challenging budget setting process. However, the proposed budget would still allow the Combined Authority to continue investing across the City Region.

The Chair, Councillor Maloney invited questions/comments from the Committee.

- Welcomed the comprehensive report and recognised the unprecedented budget challenges which the Combined Authority faced, whilst also continuing to commit to developments across the City Region. However, assurance was sought on how the budget provided best value for residents.

The Metro Mayor advised the Committee, that Central Government had deemed the LCR Combined Authority as one of the best run in the country. He emphasised the importance of demonstrating to Central Government, that the LCR Combined Authority was best placed to invest every pound received from them, into the City Region.

John Fogarty informed the Committee that the Combined Authority was developing a Commercialisation Strategy with the aim of securing a greater return from the private sector. The Strategy would also include modernising the operation of some services.

- Highlighted that for Wirral residents who had to use the Mersey Tunnels, it appeared that they were paying an additional tax to use them. Furthermore, had consideration been given to ceasing support for some of the big-ticket cultural investments.

The Metro Mayor recognised the views of those who were frustrated with having to pay Tunnel Tolls and advised that efforts remained to keep the levels as realistically affordable as possible. He advised that a reduction in Tunnel Tolls could be obtained for City Region residents, if they used a Fast Tag. With regards to funding for culture, the Metro Mayor advised that as a multiplier, cultural events brought far greater investment into the City Region. The challenge was to encourage tourists to expand their visits and go to attractions across the City Region.

- Expressed frustration at the insufficient number of homes available to rent for those who couldn't afford to buy a house.
- Recognising the increase in construction costs, clarity was sought on whether there were sufficient protections with the budget to withstand this impact.

The Metro Mayor advised the Committee that projects would need to remain affordable and it maybe that if costs were to escalate, the scale of a project may need to be reviewed.

- Clarity was sought on whether there would be any other budgetary pressures as a consequence of freezing the precept.

The Metro Mayor explained that at some point before the next Mayoral Election, consideration would need to be given on whether the precept would be raised to support changes to the transport system.

- Reference was made to details in the report which explained that public transport patronage levels were still recovering from the pandemic and noted that this may have budgetary implications. Clarity was sought on how the budget would be impacted if patronage rates did not increase as anticipated.

John Fogarty, Executive Director of Corporate Services advised the Committee that the Merseyrail network was recovering well, in comparison to the national picture. However, patronage across the bus network had not returned to pre-covid levels. Members were informed that the bus network provided a great social value to the City Region and also supported the zero carbon ambitions. There were a number of short term financial mitigations available and discussions were ongoing with Central Government.

- Assurance was sought on how future changes in the rate of inflation may impact the LCR Combined Authority budget.

The Committee was advised that the LCR Combined Authority used the RBR forecast and had taken a prudent view on inflation, along with other factors such as pay awards and the Supported Bus Network. The budget had financial contingencies and Officers were confident that anticipated price increases could be accommodated within the proposed budget.

The Chair thanked the Metro Mayor and Officers for their presentation and contributions.

The inquorate meeting RESOLVED - That:

- (i) the contents of the report be noted; and
- (ii) the budget proposals for 2023/24 be commended to the LCR Combined Authority and the comments raised by the Committee be considered by the LCR Combined Authority as part of the formal approval of the Budget for 2023/24.

34 CORPORATE PLAN 2021-24; QUARTER 2 (JULY TO SEPTEMBER) 2022-23 PERFORMANCE UPDATE

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a report which provided an overview of the performance of Quarter 2 (July to September 2022) performance against the LCR Combined Authority Corporate Plan.

The report also included the following elements:

- performance against the 5 Corporate Plan Priorities and Developing our Organisation for Quarter 2; and
- report performance against the Corporate Performance Measures for Quarter 2.

The Committee welcomed the clear and concise presentation of the performance information and in doing so raised the following questions and comments:

- Requested that further information be presented to a future meeting, on how the Combined Authority was supporting homelessness and housing across the City Region.
- Referred to the Cleaner priority and noted the omission of work with schools, colleges and further education establishments in respect of Net Zero. Recognising the importance of Net Zero, it was noted that engagement with schools and colleges would make a significant difference in helping to achieve the Net Zero ambitions and requested that this activity be reflected within the monitoring of the Cleaner priority.

The Committee was advised that the education element for the Cleaner priority would be reviewed further.

The inquorate meeting RESOLVED that:

- (i) The report be noted;
- (ii) A report explaining the LCR Combined Authority's work in respect of homelessness and housing strategy be presented to a future meeting of this Committee; and

- (iii) The Cleaner priority be reviewed to incorporate an education element.

35 FAIR EMPLOYMENT CHARTER: IMPLEMENTATION AND NEXT STEPS

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director: Policy, Strategy and Government Relations and the Portfolio Holders for Education, Skills, Equality and Diversity and Policy, Reform and Resources which provided an update on the implementation of the Fair Employment Charter.

Members were advised that to date 59 employers had achieved the aspiring level of the Charter. To support the application process, significant progress had also been achieved in the development of an online process, web pages and promotional materials for the Charter. In terms of next steps, the final stages for developing and testing the accredited level would soon be open for applications.

Members welcomed the introduction of the Fair Employment Charter and raised the following questions and comments:

- Clarity was sought on how Trade Unions were informed about which organisations had achieved accreditation to the Charter.

Members were informed that the NorthWest TUC and representatives from other Trade Unions had been involved in the development of the Charter and also sat on the Assessment Panel when considering accreditation. This allowed the Trade Unions to bring their knowledge of a workplace and ensure that the organisation could meet the requirements of the Charter.

- It was noted that only 12 businesses had been contacted across Halton and confirmation was sought on how Chambers of Commerce were involved in the Charter.

Members were advised that Chambers of Commerce had been involved in the development of the Charter, as part of the Reference Panel. The Chambers had been able to use some of their contacts, however, it was recognised that there was more work was required and the opportunity to engage further with Chambers would be welcomed. It was also reported that discussions were taking place with all Local Authority Employment and Skills officers to understand how engagement plans could be best developed to suit the needs of each Local Authority.

- Whilst the Fair Employment Charter would bring benefits to organisations based in the City Region, clarity was sought on whether the Charter could be applied to those organisations outside of the City Region.

It was reported that the applications from organisation's outside of the City Region would be welcome and work was currently ongoing with neighbouring areas who already had a Charter in place to explore mutual support. However, the City Region

The inquorate meeting RESOLVED that:

- (i) The update provided on the development and implement of the Fair Employment Charter be noted; and
- (ii) Regular updates on the implementation of the Fair Employment Charter be provide to future meetings of the Committee.

36 APPOINTMENT TO THE AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

As the meeting was inquorate and required a decision, this report was deferred to the next meeting of the LCR Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The meeting closed at 3.55 pm

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Chairperson of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee