

**West of England Combined Authority
WECA Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

Monday, 20 September 2021, 10.00 am
Council Chamber, Bath Guildhall

Present:

Cllr Winston Duguid, Bath and North East Somerset (Chair)
Cllr Hal MacFie, Bath and North East Somerset Council
Cllr Ed Plowden, Bristol City Council
Cllr Steve Pearce, Bristol City Council

Cllr Andrew Varney, Bristol City Council
Cllr James Arrowsmith, South Gloucestershire Council
Cllr John Ashe, South Gloucestershire Council
Cllr Paul Hughes, South Gloucestershire Council (as substitute for Cllr Brian Allinson)

From North Somerset Council:

Cllr Mike Bird
Cllr Huw James

Also in attendance:

Metro Mayor Dan Norris

Officers In Attendance:

Patricia Greer, Chief Executive
Ian Hird, Scrutiny Manager

Tim Milgate, Democratic Services Officer
Helen Iles, Senior Policy Manager

Apologies:

Cllr Brian Allinson, South Gloucestershire Council (Cllr Paul Hughes attended as substitute)
Cllr Geoff Gollop, Bristol City Council
Cllr Brenda Massey, Bristol City Council
Cllr Peter Crew, North Somerset Council

Minutes

1	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS</p> <p>The Chair welcomed everybody to this extraordinary meeting of the West of England Combined Authority Overview & Scrutiny Committee. The Metro Mayor Dan Norris was also in attendance.</p> <p>Apologies for absence were noted and substitute members were welcomed.</p>
2	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</p> <p>There were no declarations of interest.</p>
3	<p>ITEMS FROM THE PUBLIC (QUESTIONS; STATEMENTS; PETITIONS)</p> <p>One public statement had been received from Mr David Redgewell on the subject of climate emergency. The statement had been circulated in advance and was noted. The member of public was not present at the meeting.</p>

PRINCIPLES FOR A REFRESHED CLIMATE EMERGENCY AMBITION AND GREEN RECOVERY FUND PLANS

It was noted that an Extraordinary joint meeting of the West of England Combined Authority Committee and West of England Joint Committee would be held on 21 September 2021. The committees would be considering reports setting out principles for a refreshed climate emergency ambition and plans for a Green Recovery Fund. The agenda and reports for this meeting had been circulated to the WECA Overview & Scrutiny Committee so that Members of that Committee could be briefed on, and invited to comment on these reports. These comments would then be considered by the West of England Combined Authority Committee and West of England Joint Committee as part of its decision-making process.

Metro Mayor Dan Norris addressed the meeting on the main points of the report and to receive questions. He stated that it was important that the Metro Mayor was held to account by the WECA Overview & Scrutiny Committee. He felt that the public was ahead of the politicians in terms of facing the climate emergency and it was now time for action. Locally a target of net zero carbon had been set by 2030, which was ambitious as the national target was net zero by 2050. He was confident however that technology would be key to the way forward.

The following points were raised:

- It was noted that late amendments moved at the joint meeting of the West of England Combined Authority Committee and West of England Joint Committee did not give adequate chance for the Overview & Scrutiny Committee to scrutinise;
- The Metro Mayor was asked whether he would speak to the new Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Michael Gove, as soon as practicable. The Metro Mayor confirmed he would and recognised the challenge set by house building targets;
- The Metro Mayor was challenged on rural bus services and whether funding could be redeployed for this area. Dan Norris stated that he recognised the funding crises in bus travel since the start of the pandemic with passenger numbers only 63% of pre-pandemic levels. The previous rules around operators giving notice of service changes etc had not been applied during the pandemic. Regular meetings were being held with service providers. The bus network was run on a commercial basis except where the authority could support services with the limited funding available to do so. The Metro Mayor stated he would consider all options on public transport in the region, including enhanced partnerships and bus franchising but that he needed to be sure resourcing was available; due to the resourcing position, an enhanced partnership was the realistic way forward at this point rather than franchising.
- The Mayor felt that the proposed appointment of a Director for the Environment would benefit the whole region;
- Retrofitting existing homes would be one solution to working towards net zero.

The Metro Mayor Dan Norris left the meeting at this point. The Committee continued to discuss the report on the Principles for a Refreshed Climate Emergency Ambition and Green Recovery Fund Plans. The following points were raised:

- It was felt that although the paper set out the longer term actions and developing action plan, the emergency required immediate action;
- It was asked whether there was any headroom available for increasing the green recovery fund's £20m. The Chief Executive confirmed that the £20m was being allocated from the Investment Fund. It was questioned whether any pension fund money could be invested into infrastructure improvements;
- The Climate Board would be responsible for setting actions and tracking the progress of the action plan and targets. It was asked whether it would be more appropriate for an independent body to monitor progress each year;
- The Chief Executive stated that the Government was looking at ways in which to invest in infrastructure in areas of the country with fewer people rather than as previously in cities and more heavily populated urban regions. The plan was for many different partners as possible (UAs, business, etc) to be around the table monitoring the strategy as possible which would be evidence/data driven;
- Patricia Greer confirmed that the Spatial Development Strategy was being worked upon and would take around 2 years to completion. This work could be used to inform other strategies such as the Joint Local Transport Plan;
- It was acknowledged that the region's businesses had a big role to play in reaching net zero carbon by 2030 through investing in high skilled employment;
- The Committee stated that they welcomed the setting up of the new Climate Board and a new senior member of staff to drive the work. Scrutiny members asked whether they could have observer status on the Authority's Board meetings. An update on this last point would be brought to a future meeting. The Overview & Scrutiny Committee would receive regular updates on progress;
- A question was raised as to whether local planning authorities could adopt higher standards on house building than was required;

Agreed: That the comments raised on the principles for a refreshed climate emergency ambition and plans for a Green Recovery Fund report be collated, summarised and submitted to the 21 September extraordinary meeting of the West of England Combined Authority Committee and West of England Joint Committee (see appendix 1).

Appendix 1

COMMENTS FROM WEST OF ENGLAND COMBINED AUTHORITY OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

COMMENTS SUBMITTED TO: EXTRAORDINARY JOINT MEETING OF WEST OF ENGLAND COMBINED AUTHORITY COMMITTEE AND WEST OF ENGLAND JOINT COMMITTEE – 21 SEPTEMBER 2021

Following our meeting held on 20 September, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee wishes to present the following comments:

a. Metro Mayor's attendance at Scrutiny

We welcomed Metro Mayor Dan Norris' attendance at our meeting and had a useful discussion. We look forward to future positive and ongoing engagement with the Metro Mayor.

b. Principles for a refreshed climate emergency ambition (item 8)

We thank Helen Iles, Senior Policy Manager for her presentation of this report.

We note and welcome the fact that tackling the climate emergency is a key priority for the Metro Mayor and we strongly support the revised principles as set out in the report. As discussed with the Metro Mayor, we also recognise the public appetite for fast, urgent action.

We support the proposal to create an interim Environment Director to drive forward the refreshed ambition with a view to recruiting to this post on a permanent basis in the medium term.

The report seeks to establish a Climate Board for the region - we welcome the broad representation proposed in terms of the membership of this Board and the collaborative partnership approach that will be taken. We also wish to strongly request please that a scrutiny member is given observer status on this Board, in line with the arrangements being made for scrutiny member observers to attend the other Combined Authority Boards.

We particularly welcome the clarity of the target that in order to meet our 2030 net zero carbon ambitions, we will need to cut 464kt of CO₂ each year (10% of today's total) - this sets the huge scale of the challenge ahead and demonstrates the region's ambition. It will be essential to continue collaborative work with the unitary authorities to establish clear, measurable targets within the Climate and Biodiversity strategy/action plan, which are agreed by all authorities and with robust progress checks and reporting in place; there must be clear lines of accountability for the delivery of each action.

Noting that the new Climate and Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan will be delivered in Spring 2022, we request please that a progress update is specifically brought to Scrutiny in January 2022 to allow us an opportunity to comment and input to this critically important plan. We are particularly keen to see momentum build through urgently identifying and delivering tangible 'quick wins' in parallel with the development of the new strategy and action plan.

c. Green Recovery Fund (item 9)

We broadly welcome and support this report and the recommendation to earmark (from the existing Combined Authority Investment Fund) headroom of £20m for a Green Recovery Fund. We see this amount as a start and any avenues of increasing the amount through match funding or otherwise should be explored. We would like to be kept fully informed as the detailed plans for the drawdown of this fund to support specific actions are developed. We are concerned that the appraisal methods used to guide investment decisions should be fit for purpose, and would welcome an independent expert viability assessment.

Councillor Winston Duguid

Chair-designate

On behalf of the West of England Combined Authority Overview & Scrutiny Committee.