

West Yorkshire Combined Authority
40-50 Wellington Street
Leeds
LS1 2DE

31 March 2021

Dear Will,

I write in response to your letter dated 23 March 2021, in which you made suggestions regarding regional scrutiny arrangements and mayoral accountability. I would like to thank you and your colleagues for the proposals you set out and the careful consideration given. The partnership working between the Combined Authority and the local authorities of West Yorkshire is extremely important and I hope that it will be further strengthened over the coming months.

As I'm sure you are aware, since the West Yorkshire leaders agreed the devolution deal with government last March the Combined Authority has been considering and implementing a wide programme of changes in readiness for the Mayor's arrival in May. Increased member engagement and enhanced scrutiny arrangements have been a major consideration. As such, I have provided an update on this work where relevant, and responded to the points you raised in your letter below.

Scrutiny

Throughout the last year there has been agreement across West Yorkshire that regional scrutiny arrangements required enhancement. As part of this work, the Combined Authority's Overview and Scrutiny Committee held a range of working groups to discuss, review and make recommendations for change. Cllr Harrand, who you will be aware is the Chair of this committee, also contacted local authority scrutiny chairs to provide information on the working groups and to offer them an opportunity to comment on this work.

This resulted in the Combined Authority meeting in March agreeing that the Combined Authority will increase the number of overview and scrutiny committees to three, covering the themes of: corporate scrutiny; economy scrutiny; and transport scrutiny. It is intended that the Mayor will be invited to at least two meetings of each committee per year.

In addition the Combined Authority's Overview and Scrutiny Committee have recommended that:

- all scrutiny chairs in West Yorkshire meet at least twice a year to discuss common issues, share work programmes and identify areas of common scrutiny.
- the committee improve their direct engagement with local councillors and the public.

In relation to the use of a substitute's panels, substitute arrangements are under review, but it should be noted that the Combined Authority's overview and scrutiny arrangements have a different statutory basis from those of local authorities and therefore it is not always possible to directly replicate models.

In addition, throughout recent years myself and senior officers from the Combined Authority have, whenever invited, attended local authority scrutiny committees to answer questions regarding work of the Combined Authority. We are very happy to do this, and I agree that it would be useful to continue this into the future arrangements. We can also ask chairs of scrutiny if they would wish to make this more regular.

Mayoral Engagement

We are currently preparing engagement proposals for the Mayor, which will be discussed and agreed with them upon their arrival. The points you have raised regarding the Mayor partaking in a public question time and attending full council meetings in each local authority area are entirely reasonable, and are being developed as part of these proposals.

Visibility of decisions

I would like to assure you that the Combined Authority values transparency of decision making. Subject to the usual provisions relating to exempt and confidential information, meetings of the Combined Authority and its committees (including of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee) are in public, and reports and minutes published. Meetings are web-cast, notice of Key Decisions to be taken are also published, as are records of officer decisions.

We also provide regular email bulletins to all constituent council members on the latest work or decisions of the Combined Authority and Local Enterprise Partnership. However, we recognise there is more to do to increase visibility and engagement, in partnership with the local authorities and will be looking at this over the coming months.

In addition, we have worked closely with Constituent Councils to develop a protocol relating to the concurrent functions which the Mayor and Combined Authority will exercise in conjunction with local authorities. This protocol is currently being considered by each local authority prior to being considered at the Combined Authority meeting in April.

I hope that this outline is helpful and I would be pleased to discuss with you any of the points raised in more detail if useful.

Yours sincerely,



Ben Still
Managing Director