

**Report of North Somerset's
West of England Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members**

Committee Members

Cllr Mike Bird, Cllr Huw James, and Cllr Nigel Ashton (Substituted by Cllr Peter Crew)

The West of England Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting met on January 29th ahead of the WECA & Joint Committee's meeting held on January 31st

During the meeting, David Redgewell, Transport Consultant and Lobbyist, commented that he would like to see a timetable for North Somerset council to join the WECA mayoral combined transport authority and public consultation for the mayoral elections in 2021.

Climate Emergency Plan

Papers: <https://westofengland-ca.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s1689/7a%20-%20Climate%20emergency%20planning%20update.pdf>

Cllrs Bird and James voiced their disappointment with the report. This was the general feeling of the overall Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which had great difficulty in accepting the adequacy of the report as a progress update. Our concerns are summarised below:

- **Immediacy of action**

The key point about the Climate Emergency is that it is an emergency; an emergency is defined as a serious/unexpected and often dangerous situation requiring immediate action. In our view, the action taken to date, as set out in the report, does not indicate that the authority is taking forward action on the Climate Emergency with the required pace and urgency.

- **Climate Emergency action plan**

We note from the report that the "next steps" include the development, in liaison with the West of England unitary authorities, of a Climate Emergency action plan. It was suggested at the meeting that this would be available in the Spring. We would like a clear date to be set by which the action plan will be available to scrutinise.

- **Governance**

The report recommends that a requirement be added to the terms of reference of all the authority's governance boards to consider the impact of all decisions and advice on the climate emergency. Whilst we understand that the rationale behind this proposal is to embed tackling the climate emergency into the authority's governance, we recommend in the strongest possible terms that a new Climate Emergency Board is established to drive forward the regional response, and to ensure that effective actions / priorities are taken forward as quickly as possible. Our view is that the Cabinet lead portfolio member in each of the authorities should comprise this Board, in our case for example Executive Member Cllr Bridget Petty would be the representative. The Board should also maintain strong links with the climate emergency action being taken in each authority. Scrutiny of course has an important role in monitoring progress and holding the authority to account but is not

empowered to take the decisions required moving forwards to ensure that the essential urgent action is being maintained and that the appropriate level of resource is allocated.

- **Resource priorities**

We believe that the £250k currently allocated to support regional climate emergency action is inadequate and should be increased. We are aware that the authority's £350m investment programme was set before the authority declared a climate emergency in July 2019. Nevertheless, we feel it is essential to maintain an ongoing challenge to ensure that investment priorities are re-assessed in light of the Climate Emergency declaration. For example, investment in strategic park and ride sites should be brought forward at the earliest opportunity. We believe that WECA should revisit the prioritisation of the major schemes list that was decided before the declaration of the Climate Emergency and re-assess them in the light of the emergency.

West of England Budget

Papers: <https://westofengland-ca.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s1694/8a%20-%20Review%20of%2031%20January%20WECA%20Committee%20and%20Joint%20Committee%20reports.pdf>

Cllrs James and Bird were unable to stay for this segment of the meeting, given its clash with the North Somerset SPEDR Committee Meeting and its importance to their ward residents. They were able to make their view known at an information meeting. The Scrutiny Committee in their absence noted the following:

- The first 5 year Investment Fund gateway review/evaluation is starting. We feel that in overall terms, the authority is strongly placed in terms of meeting the review's requirements.
- that the Combined Authority must build appropriate checks and balances into their processes to ensure that all proposals brought through for WECA funding have been the subject of all appropriate consultation.

West of England Combined Authority and Joint Committee Response:

- *Cllr Dina Romero, Leader of BANES, asked the Chair what tools would enable the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to hold WECA more to account: The chair responded that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members lacked the resources, time, and skills for holding WECA to account properly on climate change, and most matters, and added that a dedicated officer able to give updates would best help them to better understand the proposals. Cllr Romero asked what action Mayor Bowles would take on the committees' suggestions and following Mayor Bowles answer stressed the importance of actively following up the Overview and Scrutiny Panel's recommendations.*
- *Mayor Bowles noted the report and said that the suggestions would be considered through the normal process.*

- Mayor Marvin Rees of Bristol City Council commented that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee should reach into the expertise of Local Authorities in the future, namely, that of Bristol City Council. He added the danger of convoluting the Climate Emergency with the Ecological Emergency in the West of England, as has been done by Bristol City Council.
- Cllr Don Davies welcomed the work of the Panel and the Chair and asked them to review the existing road infrastructures of Local Authority and use them to prioritise public transport rather than cars.

General Updates

- The West of England Overview and Scrutiny Committee have invited Mayor Tim Bowles to attend our next meeting to provide an extra level of accountability to the coming Budget.
- The West of England Overview and Scrutiny Transport sub-group will meet on February 10th [after the time of publication] to discuss the Joint Local Transport Plan 4 (JLTP 4), Bus Strategy Consultation, and the West of England Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LWCIP). This discussion will then guide and feed into the next Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- The West of England Combined Authority Committee and West of England Joint Committee Forward Plan covers future matters the Overview and Scrutiny Panel may further examine. If there are any items that you would like to find more about or examine in more depth, do not hesitate to contact Officers and email us: <https://westofengland-ca.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s1691/8b%20-%20WECACommitteeJointCommitteeForwardPlanpublish19Dec2019.pdf.pdf>
- The West of England Combined Authority (WECA) is running consultations on a regional Bus Strategy and a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) from 3 February to 15 March 2020: <https://www.westofengland-ca.gov.uk/want-views-bus-travel-cycling-walking/>

To give your views on bus services, cycling and walking in the West of England, visit www.travelwest.info/transportconsultations Here you will be able to complete either or both of the consultations before they close on 15 March, 2020. Paper copies of the published documents and questionnaire are available on request by calling 0117 428 6210 or by email at consultation@westofengland-ca.gov.uk

- Members wishing to watch the activities of the WECA and Joint Committee's Meetings, recordings of the video alongside minutes can be found here: <https://www.westofengland-ca.gov.uk/meetings/>