

GMCA Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Date: 26 July 2023

Subject: GMCA Overview & Scrutiny Annual Report and Evaluation

Report of: Gillian Duckworth, GMCA Solicitor and Monitoring Officer

Purpose of Report

To provide the GMCA Overview & Scrutiny Committee with an annual report outlining their work over the past municipal year in support of the independent evaluation undertaken by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny.

Recommendations:

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee is requested to:

1. consider the annual report in conjunction with the independent evaluation set out in Annex A.
2. note that this report will be shared with the GMCA at their meeting on the 28 July 2023 and that on an annual basis the GMCA will receive a report on the work of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

Contact Officers

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Risk Management

None

Legal Considerations

None

Financial Consequences – Revenue

None

Financial Consequences – Capital

None

Number of attachments to the report: 1

Comments/recommendations from Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Background Papers

[Review of the GMCA Overview and Scrutiny arrangements – June 2022](#)

Tracking/ Process

Does this report relate to a major strategic decision, as set out in the GMCA Constitution

Yes / **No**

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

1. Chairs Foreword

Introducing the GMCA's new scrutiny model has been very well received, from both elected councillors, officers, the GM Mayor and members of the GMCA. I am grateful to all for their support, which has resulted in a significant uplift in the level of scrutiny activity at a Greater Manchester level and the overall profile of the Scrutiny Committee.

Our role includes holding the delivery of the Greater Manchester Strategy to account and we have been able to do this through regular performance monitoring and a series of overview sessions on each of the key pillars, greener, fairer and more prosperous Greater Manchester. This foundational knowledge at the start of the municipal year has enabled members of the Committee to develop a work programme around the key policy areas which are fundamental to the delivery of each pillar.

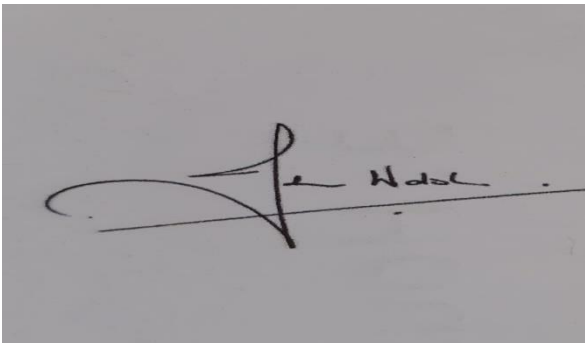
Reviewing decisions or policy development in connection with the discharge of any function of the GMCA or the GM Mayor made up the remainder of our Work Programme and has included areas such as retained business rates, bus fare capping proposals, initiatives to support the cost-of-living crisis and reviewing the Good Employment Charter. My personal highlights have included the consideration the Committee was able to give to Greater Manchester's trailblazer proposals ahead of their submission to Government. In doing so, members were able to shape the priorities and develop an understanding of the way that further devolution would create further opportunities for residents.

Secondly, after an informative overview session on the transport portfolio, the Committee were asked to review the preferred bidders for Bus Franchising Tranche 1, ahead of a decision being taken by the GMCA, with the GM Mayor and senior officers both welcoming the further level of assurances provided by this activity.

These are both strong examples of where we have been successful in undertaking pre-policy scrutiny which have resulted in tangible outcomes and recommendations. Being able to share these directly with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority through a standing invitation to their meetings has also been beneficial and again evidenced how sub-regional scrutiny is considered important across the wider system.

This forthcoming year is one of great significance for GM as we begin to implement the elements of the devolution trailblazer and alongside there will be a need for an even greater level of scrutiny to ensure that the GMCA is fully accountable to both residents and Government.

As I will be stepping down from this role, I wish the Committee every success in continuing to deliver an effective scrutiny function and building on what we have learnt collectively over the past year.

A photograph of a handwritten signature in black ink on a light-colored background. The signature is stylized and appears to read 'John Walsh'.

John Walsh

Chair of the GMCA Overview & Scrutiny Committee 2022/23

2. Introduction

In June 2022 the GMCA approved a series of recommendations following an independent review of the its Overview & Scrutiny function by a group of elected members and supported by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny.

This review provided a clear remit for the Committee, alongside a new single committee model and a commitment to task and finish activities.

One year in, the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny have conducted an evaluation as to how successfully the review's recommendations have been implemented, however in support of its findings this annual report will also pull out some key reflections.

3. Key Highlights from the past year

The review highlighted that there should be a commitment to focussing scrutiny activity and recommended a single committee model with a 'less is more' approach in order to be most effective. It has been evident that a single committee model has also provided a shared platform from which all Committee members can develop a strategic overview across all portfolio areas and an understanding of the interconnection of key policies to effectively scrutinise cross cutting issues.

Enabling the interconnection of policies across a number of portfolio areas has required members to have an advanced level of knowledge across a range of subjects. To achieve this, we have recognised that all scrutiny members whether appointed to a Committee or acting as substitutes should have access to the same induction and training opportunities as well as regular subject briefings.

Well informed and active substitute members have also provided a greater pool of membership to ensure that meetings are quorate and enables wider engagement of members across the Combined Authority area.

The review stated that the practice of bringing decisions to scrutiny shortly before they are taken should be avoided (whilst recognising the need for urgent exceptions) instead members should be engaged early in the development stage of a policy in order for them to shape its design and add real value. This has been evident in the reports brought to the Committee this year, which have asked for members' contribution in policy shaping, such as the support offered to residents in relation to the cost-of-living crisis.

Having regular opportunities to consider the Forward Plan of Key Decisions has also enabled the Committee to have a breadth of sight across all the work of the Combined Authority, from which members have requested a number of items for their Work Programme including early sight on the Bee Network Proposals in order to extract areas for further in-depth scrutiny.

The review stated that the Scrutiny Committee should be able to contribute to all policy development in respect of high-profile complex issues affecting the whole of the Combined Authority area and that this may include matters of commercial sensitivity, matters awaiting government approval and other confidential matters (in line with Access to Information Procedure Rules), dealt with as appropriately with the exclusion of the public. As a result, when a report has been taken for decision, the comments and amendments following scrutiny engagement can then be highlighted, transparently evidencing further accountability. As an example of this, the Scrutiny Committee have played a vital role in considering the preferred bidders for each tranche of bus franchising as they have progressed, ensuring processes have been robust and provided a further level of assurance.

The new scrutiny model has also enabled the establishment of a small task and finish group to consider the issue of integrated water management, something which affects many GM residents in the form of flooding or drought but was actually found to be a much wider overarching policy issue across many portfolio areas. The review's findings were put forward as a set of recommendations to the GMCA for consideration, and for inclusion into Greater Manchester's Integrated Water Management Plan.

4. Focus for the forthcoming year

The independent evaluation of the GMCA Overview & Scrutiny function (attached at annex A) was commissioned in line with the Combined Authority's commitment to review whether all the initial recommendations had been implemented successfully.

The complete evaluation is appended to this report, however, below are some specific areas of focus that it has highlighted for the forthcoming year and how they will be addressed.

Self-led evaluation and work programming

Actively monitoring the effectiveness of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee in order to demonstrate its tangible outcomes and benefits will be useful in reinforcing the value and relevance of the scrutiny process. An increased number of opportunities will be made available to members, whether this be through informal 'review sessions' following each meeting, virtual work programming sessions or via communications with officers.

Ensuring robust accountability for the trailblazer deal

Through the latest trailblazer devolution deal there will be an increased role for the Overview & Scrutiny Committee to ensure that the GMCA and GM Mayor are not only accountable to GM residents, but also to Government. Therefore, the Committee will be engaged in developing an agreed outcomes framework for the single settlement, alongside the scrutiny of policy development across those specific areas of the deal.

Increasing levels of knowledge

Ensuring members of the Committee are equipped to undertake their role will also be key for the success of the forthcoming year, and therefore we will continue to provide training and support to new and existing members in order to strengthen their skills sets in line with their role description. The provision of information briefing sessions will also support member knowledge to strengthen the overall effectiveness and quality of discussions, whilst providing the opportunity for members to identify any challenges or gaps or potential themes for further exploration.