

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
GMCA OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD WEDNESDAY, 11
DECEMBER 2024 AT THE TOOTAL BUILDINGS - BROADHURST HOUSE, 1ST
FLOOR, 56 OXFORD STREET, MANCHESTER, M1 6EU**

PRESENT:

Councillor Nadim Muslim	Bolton Council (Chair)
Councillor Peter Wright	Bolton Council
Councillor Russell Bernstein	Bury Council
Councillor Imran Rizvi	Bury Council
Councillor John Leech	Manchester City Council
Councillor Mandie Shilton – Godwin	Manchester City Council
Councillor Colin McLaren	Oldham Council
Councillor Terry Smith	Rochdale Council
Councillor Dylan Williams	Rochdale Council
Councillor Tony Davies	Salford City Council
Councillor Lewis Nelson	Salford City Council
Councillor Helen Hibbert	Stockport Council
Councillor Rachel Wise	Stockport Council
Councillor Jill Axford	Trafford Council
Councillor Ged Carter	Trafford Council
Councillor Shaun Ennis	Trafford Council
Councillor Mary Callaghan	Wigan Council
Councillor Fred Walker	Wigan Council

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillor Paul Dennett	Portfolio Lead for Housing and City Mayor, Salford
-------------------------	---

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Karen Chambers	GMCA
Gillian Duckworth	GMCA
Steve Fyfe	GMCA

O&SC 48/24 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Basil Curley (Manchester), Councillor Claire Reid (Tameside), Councillor Naila Sharif (Tameside) and Councillor Joanne Marshall (Wigan).

Apologies were also received from Caroline Simpson, Group Chief Executive, Steve Wilson, Group Finance Officer and Nicola Ward, Statutory Scrutiny Officer, GMCA.

O&SC 49/24 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS AND URGENT BUSINESS

Members were reminded of their obligations under the GMCA Members' Code of Conduct and were requested to complete an annual declaration of interest form, which had been emailed to them by the Governance & Scrutiny Officer.

The Chair further advised members that a private briefing on the development of the Greater Manchester Strategy and Delivery Plan would take place from 2-3.30pm and advised that the GM Mayor would be in attendance.

The Chair advised that, as there was no local elections taking place in May 2025, and the Committee had a busy work programme, he had suggested to officers to schedule meeting dates in April and June to provide continuity of scrutiny activity. There would, however, be a short recess in May 2025. He advised that dates would be circulated after the meeting.

The Chair invited the Chair of the Task and Finish Group, Councillor Helen Hibbert, to update the Committee on the progress of the group so far.

Councillor Hibbert advised that the first meeting of the Task and Finish Group was an information and scoping session to agree the focus of the deep dive. It was agreed that the focus would be the Safety of Women and Girls in Travel & Transport, with a particular focus on ensuring that the safety of women and girls is considered consistently in GM policy making. It was noted that the Task and Finish Group included members from the Police and Crime Panel and the Joint Health Scrutiny Committee.

So far, the group has looked at what data was available in relation to the perception of safety on the transport network and incidents that have taken place. The next meeting would be used to look at how the feeling of safety on the network was addressed and what schemes were in place to increase the perception of safety. There were six further sessions planned but the scope for those sessions had not yet been defined as it was important to remain open minded at this stage whilst gathering information. It was anticipated that a draft report would be presented to the Committee in April with the final report being presented in June.

RESOLVED /-

1. That members as per their obligation stated in the Code of Conduct would complete their Annual Declaration of Interest form and return it to the Governance & Scrutiny Officer.
2. That additional Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings would be arranged for April and June 2025 and invites would be circulated after the meeting.

O&SC 50/24

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

RESOLVED /-

No declarations were received in relation to any item on the agenda.

The Committee noted that within the minutes on page 7, point 1 it read:

Concerns were raised regarding a recent announcement on the proposed Post Office closures in GM and it was requested that an impact report be brought to the Committee.

The Chair advised that it was not appropriate for the Committee to take a report on this matter as it was a Local Authority issue, and the request should be made to their local scrutiny committee.

The Committee requested the minutes be amended to read:

Concerns were raised regarding a recent announcement on the proposed Post Office closures in GM and it was requested that an impact report on the proposed closures and the impact of previous closures be brought to the Committee.

The Chair advised that it was not appropriate for the Committee to take a report on this matter as it was a Local Authority issue, and the request should be made to their local scrutiny committee.

ADDITION (agreed 11/12/24) - The member who requested this matter be considered by the GMCA Overview & Scrutiny Committee further requested that it be recorded that there were no other indications of support from the Committee for this approach.

RESOLVED /-

That subject to the inclusion above, the minutes of the GMCA Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 27 November 2024 be approved as a correct and accurate record.

The Chair invited Salford City Mayor Paul Dennett, GMCA Portfolio Lead for Housing First, and Steve Fyfe, GMCA Head of Housing Strategy, to present this item.

The City Mayor Paul Dennett introduced the report that provided the Committee with an update on the progress being made in delivering the recommendations from the GMCA Overview & Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish Report on Affordable Living which was presented at the 13 July 2024 meeting.

The City Mayor updated the Committee on the six recommendations, highlighting areas where the GMCA should take the lead, as detailed in the report's table. He provided context on the GM Integrated Settlement, confirmed at the Autumn Spending Review, and discussed strengthening ties with Homes England through a new commissioning model. Additionally, he mentioned the preparation of a 10-Year Plan for Growth and Prevention, which aimed to deliver new homes, jobs, and infrastructure through a place-based approach that aligns national and local investments. Plans were also underway to develop a co-produced GM Housing Strategy, building on the Housing First philosophy, with the goal that everyone in Greater Manchester would live in a safe, secure, healthy, and environmentally sustainable home by 2038.

Recommendation 1 – Bold, national action for the creation of more affordable homes with greater flexibility as a region to ensure that the housing market can line up with affordability of residents in GM. Recognising that the formula for affordable living is multi-faceted and should include rent, energy, and essential food costs. The City Mayor advised the Committee that the housing market was not delivering affordable housing in line with what people are earning and the gap was widening. Issues with data and the national development framework were impacting on this work. GM has committed to providing 75,000 new homes, 10,000 of which needed to be affordable homes, and GM was collaborating with Homes England and local authorities to deliver these.

The City Mayor mentioned that the ongoing consultation on the Social Housing Rent Policy, which was due to end on December 23, could influence this work and may require additional efforts.

Recommendation 2 - Move towards supporting people out of debt at every point of contact, ensuring a minimum standard of welfare advisors to support residents to access unclaimed welfare support and begin their tenancies with no deficit. The City Mayor advised that debt and welfare advice was a non-statutory service, and local authorities did not receive any funding to provide these services. Therefore, this support was delivered via partnerships and collaborative working. He mentioned that the GM Live Well Financial Resilience Group was responsible for coordinating efforts, identifying best practices, sharing knowledge, and standardising approaches across GM to prioritise tackling debt. Additionally, the GM Housing Partnership played a role in that initiative by supporting individuals who may be struggling with rent, service charges, and debt.

Lobbying and campaigning for welfare and debt advice to become a statutory service would also be beneficial.

Recommendation 3 - A GM Housing Strategy that is ambitious enough to deliver what is needed to meet the housing needs of residents in Greater Manchester, including the ambition for all new homes to be zero carbon, enabled by long term partnerships that have the ability to deliver more collaboratively. The City Mayor advised that plans were in place to develop a co-produced GM Housing Strategy in the new year, building on the Housing First philosophy and the ambition was for everyone in GM to have a healthy home by 2038.

Recommendation 7 – Effective promotion of the support available to local residents to assist with energy bills, insulation, food provision etc in recognition of the need to see housing as just one element of affordable living. The City Mayor advised that a package of support for private landlords was being incorporated into the Good Landlord Charter offer.

Recommendation 8 – Creation of a national housing minimum standard for all private rental properties in order to remove any detrimental health outcomes of poor living conditions, driven by the recognised benefits of being an accredited member of the Good Landlord Charter. The City Mayor commented that it was important to acknowledge that there were developments afoot nationally in regard to the National Decent Homes Standard for social and private housing and the Future Homes Standard for new homes committed through and approved by local planning system would have an impact on this work.

The City Mayor confirmed that a partner had been procured to deliver the GM Good Landlord Charter.

Recommendation 10 - An annual GM Strategic Place Partnership event with key planning influencers (elected members and officers) to begin to break down any planning barriers to viable schemes and to hold further

conversations regarding capacity and required expertise. The City Mayor advised that an annual GM Strategic Place Partnership event would be an opportunity to come together locally, creating space for local elected members and officers to share best practice was a positive suggestion and an Affordable Homes Roundtable with providers had already taken place. Members were encouraged to hear that the Affordable Homes Roundtable that took place was welcomed by housing providers and hoped these would continue.

The City Mayor highlighted the significant challenges and pressures that housing providers faced due to the Grenfell tragedy and the tragic case of Awaab Ishak in Rochdale. He expressed concerns that these issues could impact the ability to deliver new housing at pace.

It was confirmed that the integration of the GM Strategic Place Partnership into the emerging governance for the Housing First Unit would ensure the alignment of priorities and decision-making processes.

The City Mayor advised the Committee that a great deal of work was underway to implement the recommendations of the task and finish review. They were not isolated efforts but were integrated into the broader activities within housing and spatial planning.

Officers advised that the Devolution White Paper would further influence this work. A new version of the NPPF (National Planning Policy Framework) was expected and officers were in the process of writing some guidance setting out how net zero and Places for Everyone should be operationalised.

The Committee thanked the City Mayor and officers for the report.

Members asked what support could be provided for vulnerable residents struggling to pay historical pay day loan debt. The City Mayor agreed that this was important to address and stated that local authorities would like to do more than they currently could. This was due to, as previously mentioned, to these services being non statutory and consequently the local authorities did not have the resources to provide the support that was needed. Local Authorities were working with partners to ensure that there was some support available, but more was needed to ensure that there was a systemic change to address debt and the impact of the cost of living on those struggling with debt.

Members commented that it was important to ensure member representation on Housing Association Boards as currently in some areas there was no political oversight, and homes were continuing to be demolished and sold which was further diminishing the social housing stock. Members asked if anything could be done to ensure a minimum number of Councillors were appointed on the boards. The City Mayor advised that, at the moment, there was no data to explore this as it does not include how many LHA (Local Housing Association) homes and below were being built so there was no complete stock total. In relation to the Housing Association Boards, the City Mayor advised that a piece of work was taking place to look at the democratic oversight of these and a report would be presented to GM Leaders with a

view to them to advising of the next steps. The City Mayor recommended that members speak to their Leaders about this to ensure it was on their agenda.

Members asked about the benefits of a partnership with Homes England, compared to the national model. The City Mayor advised that the benefits of the partnership were closer working relationships and collaboration. That close working allowed GM to access funding streams and investments that sit outside the partnership which Homes England manage and oversee.

Members asked if the new funding arrangements would impact on GM's ability to deliver more housing. The City Mayor advised that £500m has been allocated to the Affordable Homes Programme (AHP) for one year. This was important as schemes were stalling and progress was not being made as GM had already exhausted the previous AHP funding. The City Mayor advised that a significant increase in funding was needed in the next spending review, to address the challenges in viability, and gap funding was also critical to allow GM to deliver affordable housing.

Members commented that Salford City Council had been successful in delivering more affordable homes within private housing developments and asked if that success could be transferred wider. The City Mayor stated that Salford had made housing a priority and had developed their own housing company, using commuted sums from other developments, land holding and unsupported borrowing from PWLB (Public Works Loan Board) to build council housing at a very high standard. This was a lengthy process, taking over a year to establish the legal and group structure. He commented that Local Authorities had to take an active role in tackling the housing crisis, as the Government did post WW2; that was the only time that homelessness was rendered statistically insignificant.

Members were concerned that there was no mention of the Nature Recovery Strategy in the report, and how this links in with the need to build new homes whilst preserving green spaces. The City Mayor advised that the Spatial Plan for GM prioritises urban density to protect our green spaces. Bringing access to green spaces into the urban environment was very important and should continue to be a

priority and the benefits of green spaces on health and wellbeing should be available to all residents of GM.

Members asked how private landlords would provide cost-of-living advice to their tenants. The City Mayor explained that parts of the public sector would offer this advice, ensuring landlords have access to information about available schemes, such as warm homes. He confirmed that officers were incorporating this into the Good Landlord Charter.

Members expressed concerns about Landlord Selective Licensing, noting that some landlords might neglect necessary home repairs to meet the Good Landlord Charter standards. They also highlighted that these landlords would not ensure homes were energy efficient and questioned how the Good Landlord Charter would address these issues. The City Mayor recognised concerns about inconsistencies in the Government's approach to selective licensing and the 20% limit. While we were not advocating for landlord licensing across GM, we need to assess the interest in this area to determine if it could add value, as it falls under local authorities' jurisdiction. Regarding the Good Landlord Charter, GM have the authority under the Housing Act, to require property checks and recharge landlords for necessary work. However, there were capacity issues within local government to carry out this work, necessitating significant efforts to enhance skills and capacity.

Members noted the ambition in GM to build 10,000 net zero affordable homes and enquired whether these would be allocated through Places for Everyone at 1,000 per borough. They also questioned the consequences if local authorities failed to meet this target. The City Mayor responded that this would be addressed in the local plan, with each local authority working with partners. However, he emphasised that collectively, GM must achieve this target and is committed to doing so.

Members expressed concerns in relation to GMCVO (Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisations) going into administration and the implications of this on the Housing First initiative. The City Mayor advised that he was aware of the situation and noted that the GMCA was working with the administration to understand the

impact of this. At the moment our priority was supporting those staff that might be facing redundancy.

Members expressed concern that debt advice and support was not within the City Mayor's remit and questioned whether an affordable living approach could be adopted within his portfolio. The City Mayor emphasised that housing and service charges were the main drivers of poverty. By making housing more affordable, issues related to food, transport, and debt could be addressed. He noted that while there were many initiatives targeting food poverty and improving access to good food at the local level, there was currently no strategic approach to integrate all these efforts. However, focusing on affordable living could provide a comprehensive solution.

Members observed inconsistencies in how residents reported housing disrepair and enquired about ways to remove barriers for a more streamlined approach. The City Mayor responded that this issue would be addressed as part of the Good Landlord Charter, in collaboration with partners and local authorities.

Members remarked that the Local Plan should ensure local homes were reserved for local residents. The City Mayor explained that each district has its own lettings system and policy, which dictated property allocation but there was some variation across GM. While there was ongoing work on issues including a GM policy for out-of-borough placements, there was currently no intent in establishing a unified GM-wide lettings policy.

Members emphasised the importance of recognising the connection between housing and health, noting that people need to live in healthy homes to lead healthy lives. They welcomed the focus on delivering this objective.

Members enquired about the possibilities of establishing a GM affordability standard and what additional measures could be taken to assist people in temporary accommodation, such as implementing social tariffs for utilities to prevent crises. The City Mayor responded that part of the definition would involve ensuring homes were

available for those on housing benefits. He acknowledged that this was a growing issue and highlighted the challenge of accessing social rents without an increase in government allowances. While he agreed that a GM affordability standard would be beneficial, he noted that it would be difficult to implement.

Members expressed concerns about the challenging delivery targets of affordable homes. The City Mayor responded that GM was performing exceptionally well compared to other regions and was leading the way. He acknowledged the delivery challenges, citing the impact of Grenfell and housing standards, which have diverted significant capacity to upgrading existing housing stock. Additionally, there were workforce, skills, and education challenges in the construction sector that needed to be addressed to better align industry needs with educational offerings. He emphasised that there was no Plan B, as non-collaborative efforts would not suffice; therefore, prioritising joint working was essential to deliver the homes the city region needs.

RESOLVED /-

That the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the Task and Finish Report on Affordable Living update be noted.

O&SC 53/24

**OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME &
FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS**

RESOLVED /-

1. That the proposed Overview & Scrutiny Work Programme for December 2024 – February 2025 be noted.
2. That Members use the Forward Plan of Key Decisions to identify any potential areas for further scrutiny.

RESOLVED /-

That the following dates for the rest of the municipal year be noted:

- 29 January 2025 – 1pm to 3.30pm
- 5 February 2025 – 1pm to 3.30pm
- 26 February 2025 – 1pm to 3.30pm
- 26 March 2025 – 1pm to 3.30pm
- April 2025 – to be confirmed
- June 2025 - to be confirmed