

GMCA Overview & Scrutiny

Annual Report 2023/24

June 2024

Chair's foreword



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Chair of the GMCA Overview
& Scrutiny Committee

It is well recognised that scrutiny is a fundamental part of any efficient and equitable governance structure and decision-making process.

National discussions over the past couple of years have placed scrutiny centre stage more than ever before, the pursuit of English devolution has required all public authorities to strengthen their accountability arrangements.

Over the past two years there has been an increased cultural commitment across the GMCA senior leaders and officers to scrutiny and accountability. There is a growing recognition that good governance is not just about having risk processes and structures in place but using the unique powers of scrutiny to question and challenge senior leaders but also support them in making services better for the residents of Greater Manchester.

My personal highlights this year have been the ability to have a real oversight of the priorities and focus of the Combined Authority whilst scrutinising in more detail those issues that have the most significant impact to residents, including the cost of public transport, our waste contractual arrangements and the benefit of business rate retention. Having a standing invitation to the GMCA meetings also gives the Overview & Scrutiny Committee the ability to provide challenging and constructive feedback to members of the GMCA directly on both portfolios and policies, and further reflects the significant regard for the function.

We build on a heritage of sub regional scrutiny taking place in Greater Manchester for numerous years but having implemented the recommendations of our independent review, I believe that the current scrutiny function is effectively assisting the GMCA in moving to its next phase.

Nadim Muslim

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1. Background

In 2021 the GMCA undertook a significant independent review of its scrutiny function, arriving at a singular committee model that has now been in place for its second year.

The review recognised the role of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee as –

- to contribute to policy development in respect of high profile, complex issues affecting the whole of Greater Manchester,
- to review and evaluate the performance of the Mayor and GMCA, and the way it works with its partners to deliver for local people,
- to investigate more complex cross-cutting issues

It further set a series of nineteen recommendations that have shaped the model that is currently being delivered including the appointment of members based on skills and interest for more than one year, the effective use of task and finish activities and a varied offer of training and information briefings.

At the start of the municipal year, members were able to reflect on the priorities within the Greater Manchester Strategy (GMS) in order to develop a skeleton work programme which was then further populated by the areas of work contained within the Forward Plan of Key Decisions which were felt to be of the most significance for local residents. The work programme is fluid and is considered by the Committee every month to ensure that it remains relevant, member-led and subject to continual reflection.

During 2023/24 the Committee has met on ten occasions, held nine informal briefings and undertaken an in-depth task and finish review into affordable living.

Membership

Member		Substitute	
Jill Axford	Trafford	Shan Alexander	Stockport
Russell Bernstein	Bury	Dane Anderton	Wigan
Tom Besford	Rochdale	Liam Billington	Tameside
Joshua Brooks	Salford	Nathan Boroda	Bury
Basil Curley	Manchester	Maria Brabiner	Salford
Patricia Dale	Rochdale	Ged Carter	Trafford
Sean Ennis	Trafford	Mike Cordingley	Trafford
Nathan Evans	Trafford	Ashley Dearnley	Rochdale
Jenny Harrison	Oldham	Linda Foley	Manchester
Helen Hibbert	Stockport	Holly Harrison	Oldham

John Leech	Manchester	John Hughes	Manchester
Joanne Marshall	Wigan	Champak Mistry	Bolton
Colin McLaren	Oldham	Eddie Moores	Oldham
Nadim Muslim	Bolton	Robert Morrissey	Bolton
Lewis Nelson	Salford	Claire Reid	Tameside
Imran Rizvi	Bury	Arnold Saunders	Salford
Naila Sharif	Tameside	Lisa Smart	Stockport
Mandie Shilton-Goodwin	Manchester	Debra Wailes	Wigan
Fred Walker	Wigan	Mary Whitby	Bury
Peter Wright	Bolton	Sameena Zaheer	Rochdale

2. Key achievements

Devolution Deal

Throughout the previous year, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee was engaged with the development of the trailblazer devolution deal for Greater Manchester, recognising that this would be a significant opportunity to better align resources with the needs of our residents.

In light of the specific new powers being agreed in this Trailblazer Devolution Deal, including the single settlement, and in the spirit of greater power requiring greater accountability, GMCA commits to building a culture of greater scrutiny and accountability.¹

Throughout this year, the Committee has been able to provide further scrutiny to the proposed implementation of the deal and have been given the opportunity to recognise its role in ensuring greater accountability for the devolved responsibilities.

The trailblazer deal called for continuity across the membership of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee which was helpful in ensuring continued growth alongside the wider organisation. This year there were a mix of newly appointed and elected members who had previously been appointed to the Committee, which brought together new perspectives, fresh conversations and a strong knowledge base from which to undertake mature scrutiny activity.

Membership on committees and in particular the role of chair should be prized and competed for. Retention of members for several years should be common. Members should be able to devote the time to the role. The committees should have the profile and cache to ensure that their findings are brought to the attention of the public wherever necessary.²

Evidencing the outcome of scrutiny work has been assisted by the continued presence of the Chair of Overview & Scrutiny being provided with the opportunity to report back to the GMCA on their findings against the reports that have sought the engagement of the Committee.

Pre-policy scrutiny of high profile and complex issues

The benefits of engaging the Overview & Scrutiny Committee in the early development stages of a policy has been further evidenced throughout this year through their input into the development of the Race Equality Strategy, Violence Reduction Strategy, Vision Zero

¹ [Greater Manchester Combined Authority Trailblazer Deeper Devolution Deal](#)

² [Greater Manchester Combined Authority Trailblazer Deeper Devolution Deal](#)

Strategy and Local Transport Plan. In each of these instances, portfolio leaders and officers brought their initial thoughts to the committee for robust challenge well in advance of the policy being prepared for publication. As recommended by the independent review, this approach enables members to ensure that its ambitions are in line with those of the Greater Manchester Strategy and has the opportunity to develop political debate on matters which are complex and important.

Due to a strong relationship of trust between the GMCA and the Overview & Scrutiny Committee there have been several occasions throughout the year where members have been asked to review highly sensitive policy decisions of a commercial nature, including the options for a future GM waste contract and the indicative preferred bidder for the final tranche of bus franchising.

Reviewing the performance of the Mayor and the GMCA

Members of the Committee were provided with an overview of the Greater Manchester Strategy at the beginning of the year to provide a framework for their scrutiny activity. Building from this knowledge base the Committee has been offered a range of overview sessions on all portfolio areas across the GMCA, from digital to the green city region. With this foundation, they are able to more effectively scrutinise the performance of the organisation.

One example of this was a Business Board update, which not only provided the Committee with an overview of the priorities of the Business Board, but an opportunity to review how these priorities were delivering against the priorities of the Greater Manchester Strategy.

Reviewing the financial performance of the organisation was also further supported by a series of informal briefings and a separate opportunity to consider the mayoral precept proposals ahead of the wider budget proposals. These were significant opportunities for budget scrutiny but were alongside regular financial considerations on each of the reports brought to the Committee.

A six-monthly review was also an opportunity for the Committee to consider how the recommendations from its task and finish report in March 2021 were being implemented across the organisation and with partners. This provided a check-in on previous work to ensure that outcomes were being delivered.

In line with the GMCA's commitment to an effective scrutiny function, the relevant portfolio lead has been in attendance for their own reports, this includes the GM Mayor for transport related items to his portfolio or other mayoral items. Over the last year the Mayor has been present to respond to questions from the Committee on issues such as Greater

Manchester's bus fare initiative, a cycle hire recovery plan and the proposals for the allocations within the forthcoming mayoral precept.

Investigating cross-cutting issues

Empowering members through a strong knowledge base and a clear role and remit for the Committee has enabled them to engage in a number of complex and cross-cutting reviews, including the potential implications of a National Waste Strategy, initial reflections on the implementation of phase one of the franchised bus network and the process by which applications to the GM Investment Fund are assessed.

The central threads of the Greater Manchester Strategy for a greener, fairer and more prosperous Greater Manchester ran through the entire work programme for 2023/24 with this lens being applied to a range of cross cutting policies and initiatives, such as the consideration as to how a capped fare proposal would reduce carbon emissions.

The Committee also requested several portfolio overviews on topics of interest this year including housing and school readiness. The housing session was a helpful contributor to this year's task and finish review for which members of the Committee selected the topic of affordable housing. As the review began, they were minded to change the scope in recognition of the wider determinants affecting affordable living for residents in Greater Manchester. This task and finish approach provided the opportunity for a small group of members to take a closer look at the many facets that have resulted in a national housing crisis, from a reduction on social rental properties, to increased rental costs driven by demand and the exponential rise in fuel prices.

3. GM Scrutiny in 2024

English Devolution Accountability Framework and Scrutiny Protocol

The Government's recognition of the importance of an accountable culture was made apparent in the English Devolution Accountability Framework (2023) which sets out their approach to the blend of national and local accountability and the central role of good scrutiny.

For devolution to succeed it is important not just that UK government relinquishes powers and funding so that areas can forge their own path to prosperity. Effective local government and devolution requires local leaders to take on responsibility for delivery in the eyes of the public. This requires residents to understand the role of local institutions and make informed assessments of the performance of their local leaders through clear metrics and robust scrutiny.³

The GMCA was able to advise the Government on the contents of the Scrutiny Protocol (2023), whose eighteen principles were based strongly on the current GM scrutiny model. It states that

Effective scrutiny is critical for ensuring there is appropriate accountability for the decisions made by local decision makers. When done well, local scrutiny should drive understanding, enhance the performance of services and improve the outcomes for those people affected by those decisions and;

that in adopting the key principles and provisions of this Scrutiny Protocol, each institution will ensure it has a focus on a sustained culture of scrutiny.

Although it was based on our model, there are still areas of good practice that we can strengthen, for example, a closer working relationship with the GMCA's Audit Committee.

Single settlement and outcomes framework

The Greater Manchester Strategy still underpins all the ambitions of the GMCA and sets out the outcomes that will be seen through its delivery, however the latest devolution deal between Central Government and Greater Manchester brings with it a sub-set of outcomes which will ensure that there is robust accountability alongside a single settlement of funding.

³ [English Devolution Accountability Framework](#)

As this becomes embedded across the organisation there will be a role for the Overview & Scrutiny Committee in ensuring that the right outcomes are being measured, that there are no outcomes which are working against the objectives of the GMS and that it evolves in line with potential further devolution.

As the Combined Authority moves into this next phase, there is also a role for Overview & Scrutiny in sense checking what needs to change in order for all the elements of the trailblazer devolution deal to be delivered and in creating spaces for discussion as to how policies should link across to other portfolio areas to ensure the best outcomes for residents.

It is envisaged that this annual report is used to inform the forthcoming Overview & Scrutiny Committee of the work undertaken throughout this municipal year in order to help them shape their own work programme.

4. More information and contact

For more information about the GMCA's Overview & Scrutiny Committee please visit our website - [Greater Manchester Combined Authority \(greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk\)](https://greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk)

Or contact Nicola Ward, Statutory Scrutiny Officer, GMCA Nicola.ward@greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk