

MCA - OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON:

THURSDAY, 23 MARCH 2023 AT 2.00 PM

SOUTH YORKSHIRE MCA, 11 BROAD STREET WEST,
SHEFFIELD, S1 2BQ



Present:

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| Councillor Colin Ross (Chair) | Sheffield City Council |
| Councillor Joshua Bacon | Rotherham MBC |
| Councillor John Clarke | Barnsley MBC |
| Councillor Jeff Ennis OBE | Barnsley MBC |
| Councillor Dianne Hurst | Sheffield City Council |
| Councillor Richard A Jones | City of Doncaster Council |
| Councillor Jane Kidd | City of Doncaster Council |
| Councillor Joe Otten | Sheffield City Council |

In Attendance:

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|---------------------------|--|----------------------|
| Mayor Oliver Coppard | South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority | |
| Steve Davenport | Director of Law and Governance | SYMCA Executive Team |
| Colin Blackburn | Assistant Director - Housing, Infrastructure and Planning | SYMCA Executive Team |
| Tim Taylor | Director of Public Transport Operations | SYMCA Executive Team |
| Daniel Turner | Senior Mayoral Policy Advisor | SYMCA Executive Team |
| Sarah Pugh (Minute Taker) | | |

Apologies:

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|------------------------|------------------------|
| Councillor Bryan Lodge | Sheffield City Council |
| Councillor Ken Wyatt | Rotherham MBC |

61 **Welcome and Apologies**

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting and apologies were noted as above.

Cllr Joshua Bacon, representative for Rotherham MBC, was welcomed to the Committee.

62 **Urgent Items/Announcements**

The Chair raised their recent attendance at a Combined Authorities Scrutiny

Chairs' Forum.

It had been raised here that public participation in Overview and Scrutiny Committees was a common problem at MCAs. However, the Chair was pleased to note that reported issues with reaching quorum were not being seen at the South Yorkshire MCA Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

63 **Items to be Considered in the Absence of Public and Press**

None.

64 **Declarations of Interest by any Members**

Cllr Jane Kidd declared an interest that she was employed by a disability employment charity.

65 **Reports from and Questions by Members**

None.

66 **Questions from Members of the Public**

None.

67 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting Held on**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 19 January 2023 be approved as a true record.

68 **Matters Arising and Action Log**

In terms of the action relating to the ability to have sub-committees of the Scrutiny Committee it was noted a review was ongoing of the MCA's governance structures and this may influence the need for such sub-committees.

It was noted that there were examples elsewhere of Scrutiny sub-committees for transport.

RESOLVED that updates to the Action Log be noted.

69 **Review of latest Forward Plan of Key Decisions**

RESOLVED that the Forward Plan of Key Decisions be noted.

70 **Brownfield Housing**

The Committee was provided with an update on the Brownfield Housing Fund. It noted that:

- The MCA had been allocated £53.3m from Government in Summer
- 2020 to support the development of housing schemes on brownfield land, and to unlock a minimum of 3,300 homes in the region,

- This total had to be spent by March 2025, and could be used across resourcing and staffing needs for housing development, including survey fees and administrative staffing needs,
- In phase 1 of the programme, 5 schemes had been approved which would provide 794 homes,
- In phase 2, 7 schemes had been approved which would provide another 740 homes.
- Two Phase 3 schemes had recently been approved which would provide a further 136 homes

Following the award of a further £13m of funding in early 2022, an open call for schemes had been instigated by the Housing and Infrastructure Board. As a result:

- Over 8 weeks, the MCA engaged with Local Authorities, Housing Associations and developers to promote the Open Call and Fund,
- 39 schemes were submitted, asking for £82m funding in total,
- Successful schemes were scored and prioritised according to how well they would meet the Fund's criteria including environmental standards and how likely they would be to deliver by the end of March 2025 Programme deadline.

There remained a risk that some schemes would not deliver on time due to issues with rising labour and material costs, so the MCA had maintained a list of reserve schemes which may be funded instead if there is any funding headroom.

Questions were raised by members regarding the lower number of schemes being funded in Barnsley, noting specific brownfield sites in the area which were not being progressed by developers.

A response was given that every scheme brought forward by Barnsley MBC and the other Local Authorities in the region which meet the Fund's criteria and can be delivered within the Programme timescale, are being progressed in liaison with the Local Authorities. It was noted that the MCA also continues to work with developers to address issues and opportunities as much as possible. However, due to the complexity larger sites can take several years to develop and deliver.

It was noted that brownfield sites are more expensive to develop, and it was asked therefore how this fund could be used to enhance sites and encourage development on them. A response was given that the MCAs Assurance Process is applied to all scheme applications and allowed the MCA to work with applicants to enhance their proposals to better meet energy efficiency or affordability, for example.

Questions were raised regarding how well successful schemes met carbon neutral targets, and how many homes had been built to date under the programme. It was noted that all proposals must meet at least an Energy Performance Certificate C energy efficiency rating, but many would be delivering higher efficiency than that. To date there were 27 homes that have been completed with a further 52 homes that have started on-site and are currently being built.

It was asked whether schemes could deliver beyond 2025. It was noted that the MCA had an ongoing dialogue with Government, and was working closely with local authorities, housing associations and developers to support scheme delivery, such as supporting business case development and recognising the impacts of inflationary pressures on development costs.

It was noted that the programme had been a success so far, and that all schemes approved would not have been viable without receipt of this funding, but there remains challenges in this current economic climate to ensuring schemes are developed and delivery on time.

RESOLVED that the Brownfield Housing Update be noted.

71

Bus Funding Update

The Committee was provided with an update on Bus Funding. It noted that due to the nature of last-minute announcements and awards made by Government for bus funding in recent years, the MCA had put aside reserves to protect a number of bus routes in South Yorkshire. In particular, this would be used to protect non-statutory school bus services for 2 years.

The Government had also announced on 17th February 2023 a continuation of the Bus Recovery Grant until the end of June 2023, which would be used to fund commercially unviable routes. As a result, there would be less reliance on MCA reserves in the short term.

The MCA was planning for funding not to continue beyond June 2023, and as result, to implement a more secure and sustainable plan for future funding use. This included:

- Engagement with Local Authorities, who had expressed that protecting school services was a high priority,
- Tendering for network service contracts for the next 3 years.

It was asked whether 3 year contracts would overlap with implementation of a franchised bus network, if franchising was approved by the MCA in future. A response was given that the MCA is working towards completing its required assessment work in 2023/23 but should this recommend a franchised bus network and that decision be taken, that contracts could be terminated early if required.

It was asked how far bus patronage had recovered. A response was given that patronage was at an average of 79% of pre-pandemic levels. Some user groups, such as school children, had returned to 100% or more, with patronage by other groups such as the elderly and disabled at 65%.

It was asked how high take up was of free bus passes for pensioners. As of April 2023, there were a total of 218,522 elderly ENCTS passes in circulation.

It was asked whether patronage had decreased due to cuts to bus services. It was noted that this would have had an impact on patronage as the service is less attractive, but that other factors such as changes in working patterns have

also had an impact.

It was asked whether incentives such as the £2 fare had encouraged patronage. A response was given that again this varied, but for longer journeys, where a £2 fare presented a greater saving to the passenger, increased use had been documented. Further, increase in tram use had been noted following the introduction of a £2 tram fare. **ACTION: Director of Public Transport Operations** to share the impact evaluation report on £2 fares at a future Committee meeting.

RESOLVED that the Bus Funding Update be noted.

72

Mayoral Scrutiny

The Chair welcomed the Mayor to the meeting and invited him to address the Committee.

A question was asked regarding economic inactivity, and what could be done to support disabled people to enter the workforce.

The Mayor agreed that lack of access to proper healthcare presents barriers to workforce development. He praised the Working Win programme, which had recently been renewed following lobbying efforts by the MCA. He stated that a better business charter was currently being developed to drive growth in the economy. The Board noted the Disability Employment Charter, and agreed that the MCA would look into its benefits for the MCA..

A discussion was held on the Mayor's work to address health inequalities, and in particular recent evidence was raised showing that Barnsley had the highest rate of Covid deaths in the region.

The Mayor noted that he had taken on the role of Chair of the South Yorkshire Integrated Care Partnership (ICP). As part of this body and other workstreams, the following initiatives were underway:

- Engagement with the Health Equity Commission led by Sir Michael Marmot,
- Establishment of a Health Inequalities Task and Finish Group to create an action plan for addressing health inequality in the region,
- The appointment of an Active Travel Commissioner to promote and support walking and cycling,
- Work with Harvard Bloomberg Philanthropies to investigate best practices on this topic and what could be done in South Yorkshire.

A follow up question asked how mental health would be addressed in this work. The Mayor agreed that this was an important subject, which formed a part of the ICP Strategy, but stated that without better Government strategies and funding, it would not be possible to solve this problem in South Yorkshire alone.

A question was also raised regarding early years and family support in relation to health inequalities. The Mayor put forward his support for the Sheffield Clean Air Zone and public transport developments as methods for creating healthier

communities.

The Committee raised the announcement that Doncaster had not been successful in its bid to host the new Great British Railway headquarters. The Mayor shared his disappointment regarding this outcome, but noted that the Secretary of State for Transport had stated that Doncaster's bid and ranking in the public vote had been strong, and would be writing to the Mayor with more detailed reasoning about why the bid had been unsuccessful.

It was raised that the Mayor of West Yorkshire had announced an ambition to create a mass transit system for the region, and it was asked whether the tram system could be extended to Barnsley and Doncaster. The Mayor agreed that the tram network was a good asset for the region, but noted that South Yorkshire had been unsuccessful in a number of Government funding bids, and that extending the network would not be possible without more funding. He noted the potential use of rail lines for extending the tram network, as well as The MCA's decision to take the tram system into public ownership in March 2024.

Cllr Joshua Bacon raised particular bus routes which had been lost in Rotherham; he asked why a response from the Mayor on this issue had taken so long, and why no representative of the MCA attended a public meeting held on the matter.

The Mayor offered to attend a future public meeting. **ACTION: The Mayor** agreed to look into the concern raised about delayed correspondence.

The Committee asked what impacts the recent Government Budget announcement might have on the MCA and the region. The Mayor noted that there had been no mention of further UK Shared Prosperity Funding, but that South Yorkshire had been invited to make an Investment Zone submission, which could bring growth and investment opportunities to the region.

He also highlighted "trailblazer" devolution deals which had been agreed with Greater Manchester and West Midlands Combined Authorities, which the Government intended as blueprints for all future devolution deals.

The Mayor was asked how the £2 fare cap was funded. The Mayor informed the Committee that it had been funded through a combination of MCA and Government funding. It was noted that the "Mayor's fare" campaign had included an extension of the £2 fare beyond what had been provided by Government and also included the 80p fares for young people.

A concern was raised about the possibility of job losses in the transition of taking the tram system into public ownership. The Mayor responded that the detailed work on transferring the operations to a new operating entity had now commenced and that the precise operating arrangements for 2024 onwards would be part of that work. TUPE regulations will apply, meaning that there will be no job losses as a result of the change of operator. The Mayor offered to keep the Committee apprised of developments as that detailed work progresses over the next few months.

It was asked what updates there were on the closure of Doncaster Sheffield Airport. The Mayor responded that Doncaster Council was currently pursuing options for a potential compulsory purchase order of the Airport, which, if pursued, could take several years to complete. However, the MCA was also working closely with Doncaster Council and interested investors to try to secure private investment in the airport.

RESOLVED: that the update be noted.

73 **Any Other Business**

It was noted that this was Chair, Cllr Colin Ross', final meeting on the Committee. The Committee thanked him for his contribution to the MCA and on his chairmanship of the Committee.

I, the undersigned, confirm that this is a true and accurate record of the meeting.

Signed

Name

Position

Date