

SYMCA Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chair's Annual Report

2023/24

Contents

Foreword from the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

1. Introduction

2. Membership

3. Summary of Work Undertaken and Highlights

4. Performance and Engagement Information

5. Self-Evaluation of Committee Effectiveness

6. Effectiveness Improvement Plan

Foreword from the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

I am pleased to present the report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee ('The Committee') for the municipal year 2023/24. The report covers the period from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 and is the first annual report prepared by the Committee since its establishment.

South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (MCA) continues to undergo significant change since its inception. It has taken on a broader set of statutory responsibilities and powers, seen the election of the new Mayor in May 2022 with an ambitious Manifesto for South Yorkshire, and the completion of governance review in 2023.

The past year has been no less challenging for the MCA Overview & Scrutiny Committee, with an almost complete turnover in membership of the Committee in 2023/24, and the publishing of the Scrutiny Protocol by Government, setting out ambitious standards for the function of Scrutiny in Authorities with devolved powers.

Combined Authorities are more strategic organisations, and so delivering highly focussed scrutiny is more of a challenge than at Local Authority level, and, as a new Committee on the path to establishing its ways of working, we weren't able to achieve a suite of significant outputs in the year 2023/24 alone.

Nonetheless, this Committee has played its part in building towards a culture of robust and effective scrutiny in South Yorkshire. Our work programme in 2023/24 focussed on the most significant upcoming change programmes and high-priority areas of work for the MCA and South Yorkshire's Communities. It also remained flexible enough to accommodate short-term issues as they arose during the year.

Our Committee has developed its relationships with the MCA Executive Team, the Mayor, and subject-experts at the MCA through regular briefings and touch points, and therefore kept abreast of the most critical MCA business.

With the tram transfer programme, the bus franchising proposals and the transfer of police and crime commissioner functions to the Mayor, 2024/25 will continue to be a year of significant growth and ambition in South Yorkshire;

With the implementation of the Scrutiny Protocol dovetailing with these projects, I know the Overview & Scrutiny Committee will play its part in making a tangible difference to the work of the MCA, and driving real change for the residents of South Yorkshire.

Cllr Tim Huggan, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

1. Introduction

This report is produced in accordance with best practice guidance¹ and demonstrates the MCA's commitment to operating the highest standards of scrutiny and governance. It demonstrates how the Overview & Scrutiny Committee has successfully fulfilled its terms of reference and acted as a 'critical friend' challenge to the Mayor, the MCA, its committees, and Officers.

The Committee plays a key role in scrutinising the decisions of the Mayor and the MCA, and to make recommendations for improvement and/or change. The Committee investigates matters of strategic importance to residents and businesses within South Yorkshire and to reports recommendations as appropriate to the Mayor and the MCA.

Minutes of the Committee's meetings are available on the MCA's website².

2. Membership and Nomination of a Chair

Following the agreement of the MCA Board on 5th June 2023 the Committee composition was agreed as follows.

As required by 'The Combined Authorities (Overview and Scrutiny Committees, Access to Information and Audit Committees) Order 2017'³ the membership of the Committee, so far as reasonably practical, reflects the balance of political parties of the constituent councils.

Appointments are made annually at the first quorate meeting of the Committee after the MCA's AGM. Cllr Tim Huggan was elected Chair at the meeting held 22nd June 2023.⁴

During the year the membership comprised the following:

Councillor	Party	Authority represented	Formal meetings attended
Cllr Jeff Ennis	Labour	Barnsley MBC	4
Cllr Hannah Kitching	Liberal Democrat	Barnsley MBC	4
Cllr Jake Kearsley from 6 October 2023 (Cllr Barry Johnson was appointed in June, and stepped down on 6 October 2023)	Labour	Doncaster Council	0 (0)
Cllr Jane Kidd	Labour	Doncaster Council	0
Cllr Joshua Bacon	Conservative	Rotherham MBC	3
Cllr Ken Wyatt	Labour	Rotherham MBC	3
Cllr Tim Huggan (Chair)	Liberal Democrat	Sheffield CC	4

¹ [Overview and scrutiny: statutory guidance for councils, combined authorities and combined county authorities - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/68421/Overview_and_scrutiny_statutory_guidance_for_councils_combined_authorities_and_combined_county_authorities_-_GOV.UK.pdf)

² <https://governance.southyorkshire-ca.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?Committeed=138>

³ [The Combined Authorities \(Overview and Scrutiny Committees, Access to Information and Audit Committees\) Order 2017](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/68421/The_Combined_Authorities_Overview_and_Scrutiny_Committees_Access_to_Information_and_Audit_Committees_Order_2017.pdf)

⁴ <https://governance.southyorkshire-ca.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=138&MId=1652&Ver=4>

Cllr Sioned-Mair Richards	Labour	Sheffield CC	4
Cllr Douglas Johnson	Green	Sheffield CC	3
Cllr Zahir Naz	Labour	Sheffield CC	1

Table 1 Overview and Scrutiny membership

To support quoracy requirements, the Committee has in place a 'reserve' member arrangement for elected members. Reserve members are as follows:

Reserves	Party	Authority represented	Formal Meetings attended as substitute
Cllr John Clark	Labour	Barnsley MBC	0
Cllr Steve Hunt	Liberal Democrat	Barnsley MBC	0
Cllr Ian Pearson	Labour	Doncaster Council	0
Vacant	Labour	Doncaster Council	N/A
Cllr Lee Hunter	Conservative	Rotherham MBC	0
Cllr Maggi Clark	Labour	Rotherham MBC	0
Cllr Joe Otten	Liberal Democrat	Sheffield CC	0
Cllr Laura McClean	Labour	Sheffield CC	0
Cllr Christine Gilligan Kubo	Green	Sheffield CC	1
Councillor David Barker	Labour	Sheffield CC	0

Table 1 Overview and Scrutiny Committee reserve membership

3. Summary of Work Undertaken and Highlights of the year

The Committee agreed a work plan at its meeting in July 2023 and included the following:

1. Bus Franchising
2. Tram Ownership
3. Skills & Community Education
4. Active Travel
5. Police and Crime Commissioner Powers
6. £2 Bus Fares and Concessions
7. Local Nature Recovery Strategy
8. Safe Place to Sleep Programme
9. Health Inequalities
10. Community Transport

At an informal workshop on 30th January 2024, the Committee considered suggestions for a 2024/24, which included:

1. Police and Crime Commissioner powers
2. Level 4 Devolution
3. Scrutiny of Mayoral Initiatives such as Tree Planting and Safe Place to Sleep
4. Bus Franchising & Community Transport
5. Active Travel
6. Tram Ownership
7. Skills provision

Some key outcomes and benefits of the work of the committee during the period have included:

3.1 – Work Programming

The MCA has supported the Committee this year to develop and deliver an effective work programme; The committee developed a proposed workplan at a collaborative workshop in July, which was circulated with the MCA Executive and the MCA Board. The committee has subsequently considered and amended its workplan at each formal committee meeting, ensuring that it remains robust and responsive to the changing work of the MCA.

The Committee showed a particular interest in the implementation of £2 single bus fares across the region. Alongside this, the committee requested more insights into the impacts of changing fare concessions. Updates on this topic were provided by officers to the Committee at their June⁵ and September⁶, and an informal committee briefing on the topic was delivered in November. A final report with full analysis and recommendations was received at the 14 March Committee meeting.⁷

3.2 – Member Induction and Briefings

Significant developments were made to the member induction offer in year. A welcome and induction session provided members with an induction to the institution, its powers, roles, and responsibilities at the beginning the municipal year. A mid-year follow up session with the Executive team was delivered in December 2023. A mid-year review workshop was delivered with members in January 2023, which provided an opportunity to review the delivery of their workplan in 2023/24 and begin to shape upcoming workplans.

Further, a series of informal knowledge briefings has been delivered in year, with 10 briefings delivered by MCA Officers across a range of topics. In particular, the committee have had the opportunity for 3 informal briefings on the Bus Franchising assessment process, as well as created time for briefings on ad-hoc topics such as health inequalities and community transport outside of the formal committee meeting cycle.

Invites to these briefings have been extended to ASRC Members to boost links between Committee workplans.

This stronger approach to member training, delivered through an ongoing programming of events and activities has support the engagement of members with the MCA and developed a culture of collegiate and efficient working, ultimately contributing to the smooth delivery of MCA business.

3.3 – Mayoral Scrutiny

The Mayor has been in attendance at every committee meeting in 2023/24 to present updates and to take questions on the full breadth of the MCA's work and his manifesto. Committee Members have valued the Mayor's engagement, and Mayoral Scrutiny is often an item which uses a significant portion of committee meeting time.

Mayoral Scrutiny is a key facet of Scrutiny at Combined Authorities, and the Mayor's attendance at all committee meetings brings South Yorkshire in line with other Combined Authority practices. Mayoral engagement with Scrutiny is a regular feature of governance at Greater Manchester Combined Authority, and the Mayors of West Midlands and West Yorkshire Combined Authorities attend regular dedicated Question Time meetings.

⁵ <https://governance.southyorkshire-ca.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=138&MIId=1652&Ver=4>

⁶ <https://governance.southyorkshire-ca.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=138&MIId=1653&Ver=4>

⁷ <https://governance.southyorkshire-ca.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=138&MIId=1655&Ver=4>

The Mayor and Committee Chair had an introductory meeting in August 2023, and the Chair has subsequently had quarterly meetings with the Chief Executive to remain abreast of the most critical MCA Business.

4. Performance and Engagement Information

Quorum and attendance

Four meetings were held between June 2023 and March 2024. All but the meeting on 14th December 2023 were quorate.

Report publication

For the meetings held between June and March 2024 a total of 13 substantive reports were considered by the Committee. No reports were published late.

Public Engagement

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee is a statutory meeting, is required to be held in public and receive and answer public questions.

No members of the public attended any of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee meetings during the year or submitted any questions.

Through Mid Cycle Briefings, questions to the MCA Board have this year begun being reported to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

Meetings of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee are webcast live and made available on the MCA's website for six months, after which, they are archived and available on request. At time of writing, live and archived views of Overview & Scrutiny Committee meetings that have taken place in 2023/24 total 281, and for the meetings held between June and December 2023 the Committees webpages received 361 visits.

5. Self-Evaluation of Committee Effectiveness

The newly published Scrutiny Protocol⁸ recommends that Scrutiny Committees undertake an assessment of their own effectiveness annually. An online survey to facilitate this was conducted, closing on 20th February. Based on the substantive membership of the Committee the survey received an 80% response rate.

An informal workshop was also delivered with the Committee on 30th January 2024 where member feedback on Committee Effectiveness was collected.

The survey focussed on 3 key areas:

- The skills and knowledge of the Committee.
- Relationships between members, members and MCA officers and members and the MCA Board and Mayor.
- Administration and operational requirements of the Committee.

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/scrutiny-protocol-for-english-institutions-with-devolved-powers/scrutiny-protocol#:~:text=The%20Protocol%20provides%20guidance%20for,1.11>.
SYMCA Overview and Scrutiny Committee Annual Report 2023/24

Overall, members were somewhat satisfied that the Committee was effective in these areas. However, members expressed that the scale of work required in the scrutiny function is a significant burden requiring much resource from members alongside their other responsibilities.

The key findings were as follows:

5.1 Skills and Knowledge

Members strongly expressed that specific training on key scrutiny skills, such as effective and impartial questioning techniques and making effective recommendations, and techniques to encourage members to focus on the “bigger picture” would be beneficial. There were references made in survey to “point scoring” in councillors questioning currently.

Members were very satisfied with knowledge briefings delivered this year, and welcomed the contribution of greater technical expertise on topics such as bus franchising, the skills agenda or tram operations, to support their understanding of the core knowledge of the core business of the organisation.

Members expressed willingness to be more informed across the breadth of the MCAs portfolio areas, but economic growth, net zero and environment and travel and transport were highlighted in particular as topics where greater expertise would be beneficial.

5.2 Relationships and Communication

Responses indicated that overall members felt their relationships with MCA Executive Officers were effective, though it was noted that meeting agendas tend to be “officer-led” as opposed to member-led.

Responses indicated that the infrequency of meetings makes it difficult for members to form strong working relationships, though responses also stressed the importance of all committee members attending meetings and contributing to the work of the committee.

Survey responses welcomed the Committee’s relationship with the Mayor as positive, but noted that this is a developing relationship and regular engagement will continue to be beneficial. Members felt that the relationship between the Committee and the MCA Board was somewhat ineffective.

5.3 Administration and Operational Requirements

Members were asked about the Committee’s effectiveness in work programming, and responses indicated that overall members agreed that “effective and robust work planning” had been undertaken in year.

Greater use of Task and Finish exercises has been requested, but members have expressed again that their limited resource restricts the scope and scale of work which can be undertaken.

Members expressed that a Vice-Chair of the Committee should be appointed going forward to support management of Committee meetings.

Finally, the Committee has noted the lack of public awareness of the scrutiny function in the region, and highlighted communications around decision-making and their role in holding the Mayor to account, as an area for development.

6. Scrutiny Protocol 2023

The Levelling Up White Paper set out a mission that by 2030, every part of England that wants a devolution deal will have one. The English Devolution Accountability Framework was published in March 2023, and sets out how areas with devolution deals will be scrutinised and held to account through local scrutiny, by the public and by Government.

The Scrutiny Protocol ('The Protocol'), published in November 2023, sets out non-statutory guidance for how the overview and scrutiny and audit committees hold Authorities with devolved powers and their mayor or directly elected leader to account.

Improvements to committee effectiveness made during 2023/24 have been outlined in this report, and the Protocol sets a number of 'key principles' which Authorities should aspire to deliver, these are:

1. Pool of Members
2. Politically Balanced Membership
3. Geographically Balanced Membership
4. Appointment of Chair
5. Sustained Appointments made on Interest and Skills
6. Well-resourced Training
7. Inviting Technical Expertise
8. Remuneration and Status
9. Holding the Mayor or Directly Elected Leader and the Institution to Account
10. Participation in Pre-policy and Pre-decision scrutiny
11. Provision to Call-in
12. Regular Performance Monitoring
13. Robust Work Planning
14. Focussed Task and Finish Exercises
15. Strong Relationships with Stakeholders
16. Regular Self Evaluation and Reflection
17. Access to data Research and Analysis
18. Strong Relationship With Audit Committees

These themes were also used to shape the questions in the 2023/24 Committee Survey. Therefore, the themes of the Protocol and feedback from the Committee through their workshop and responses to the committee survey have formed the basis of the following improvement plan.

7. Scrutiny Effectiveness Improvement Plan

	Area	Recommended actions
7.1	Skills and Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continuation of programme of subject specific knowledge briefings,• Deliver training on essential scrutiny skills such as questioning techniques,• Facilitate sustained appointment of members through nominations documentation; inclusion of role specification and term length in nominations documentation.• Election of a Committee Vice-Chair,• Continue to build on introductory material and briefings and produce a toolkit to boost members knowledge and skills,

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase Committee access to access to data, research and analysis of the organisation's performance. • Greater use of technical expertise to enhance scrutiny of decisions and provide training to Committee members.
7.2	Relationships and Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop links between Scrutiny and Audit committees and Chairs through regular catch ups and alignment of Committee workplans, • Continue to deliver the current model of Mayoral Scrutiny at meetings, • Continue to deliver regular contact between members, the Chair and Senior MCA Officers, • Enhance visibility of the Scrutiny and the MCA's Committees and decision-making, • Alignment with Local Authority Scrutiny Committee workplans and developing adequate report-back mechanisms.
7.3	Administrative and Operational Arrangements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit an annual report to the MCA Board and to set out Committee workplans and a formal mechanism to escalate any recommendations to the MCA Board, • Implement an additional committee meeting per year, aligned to the MCA meeting cycle, • Continue to develop and enhance Committee work planning mechanisms, • Make greater use of Scrutiny tools available to members such as Task and Finish Groups, • Continue to deliver committee surveying and self-reflection mechanisms, • Encourage more effective use of apologies and substitute members to ensure quoracy at all meetings.

Table 3 Scrutiny Effectiveness Improvement Plan