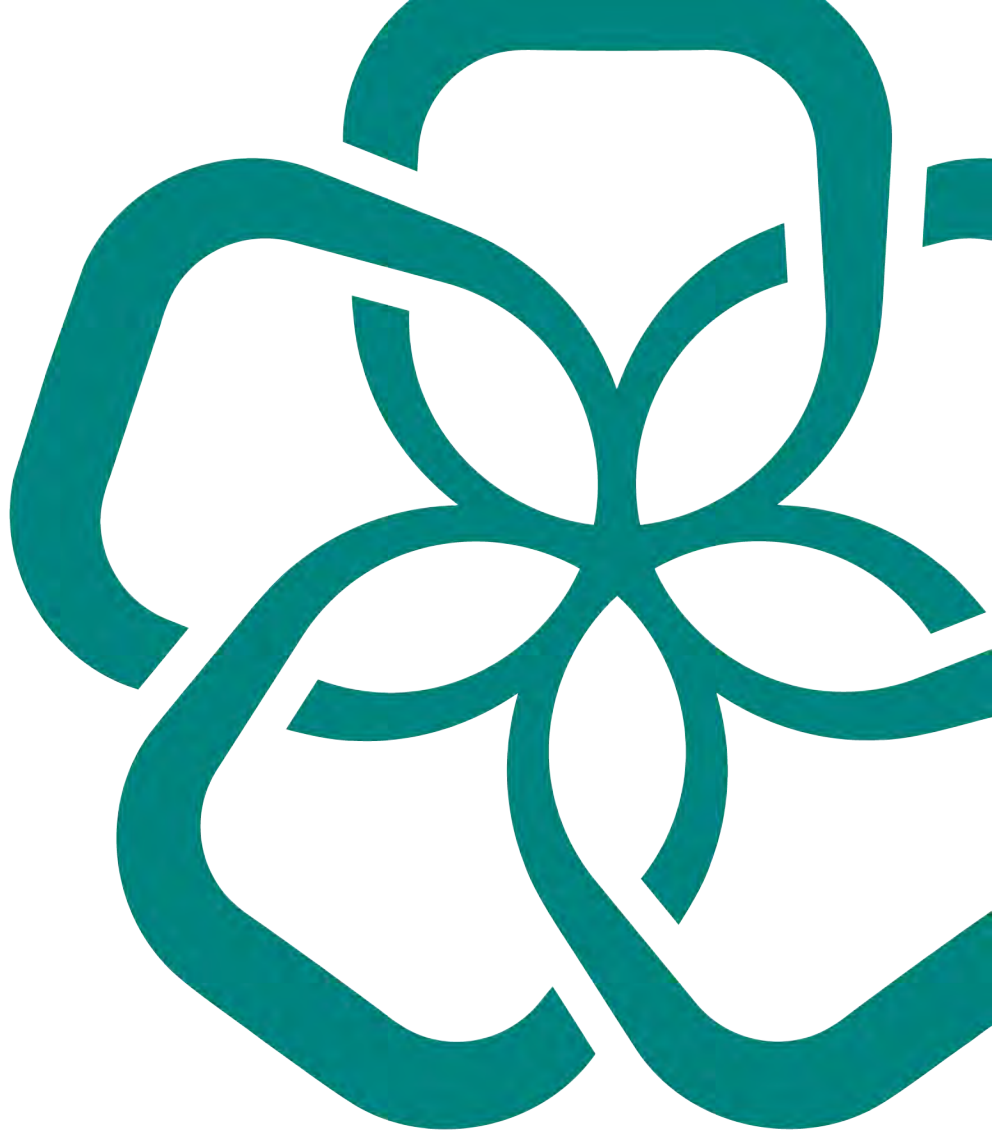




West
Yorkshire
Combined
Authority

Tracy
Brabin
Mayor of
West Yorkshire



Annual Report 2024/25

Scrutiny Committee

July 2025

Contents

Chair's Foreword.....	3
Introduction	4
Membership	5
Work Programme	6
Impact of Scrutiny	7
Bradford Interchange closure	7
Adult Skills Fund (ASF) procurement	7
West Yorkshire's Local Growth Plan	8
Delivery and key performance indicators (KPIs).....	8
Risk Management Framework.....	8
Climate and Environment Plan 2038	9
Other impact made	9
Next Steps for 2025/26	11
New work programme and new protocol	11
Devolution	11
Find out more and get involved.....	12

Chair's Foreword



This year was the first year of a new single overarching scrutiny system which consolidated the previous three scrutiny committees covering economy, transport and corporate issues into one.

Throughout the year several new approaches to scrutiny were introduced including inputting earlier in the decision-making process, greater emphasis on reporting scrutiny's work in public and focusing strongly on demonstrating impact – which this report outlines.

A greater use of officer briefings was also used to maintain overview and 'triage' initial scrutiny enquiries. These initial enquiries led to working groups on the Climate Plan, Rural Issues, Devolution and Bus Reform being established, and workshops on the reopening of Bradford Interchange and the new budget and financial strategy, which enabled smaller groups of members to work together to investigate issues in more detail, seek strong assurances on areas of concern and make recommendations on improvements.

I'm satisfied that the Committee provided some robust challenge to the Mayor, council leaders, committee chairs and officers and held to account on their areas of responsibility including two successful question session with the Mayor, under a new format, focusing on delivery of her pledges and her impact as Mayor – and scrutiny sessions with council leaders acting as portfolio holders for Transport and the Economy, questioning them on improving bus services and supporting businesses and economic growth.

In addition, Scrutiny this year also ramped up its direct engagement with external experts and stakeholders to hear from them directly on areas it scrutinised. This included the chair of the West Yorkshire Business Board, representatives from business organisations, experts from think tanks, the Local Government Association and the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny and more 'junior' but technically expert officers.

Overall, the implementation of the new scrutiny system has been strong step in the right direction, enabling scrutiny members to monitor and keep an overview of complex crosscutting topics, follow up on enquiries into specific areas of concern and make an impact on improving transparency and decision-making processes.

I'm delighted to have been reappointed Chair for the coming 2025/26 municipal year.

My priorities next year will be to focus on building on the reforms to date, regrouping to refine the work programme inherited from the previous scrutiny committees, expanding the amount of recommendations made and reports produced, demonstrating scrutiny's impact to the public with a communications plan, further engagement with stakeholders and a strong focus on the pivotal issue of further devolution to ensure the organisation is ready.

As always, I would like to thank all Members of the Committee for their dedication and hard work over the year, especially outside of meetings, as well as officers for their diligent support, advice and guidance.

I look forward to working with everyone again.

Cllr Barry Anderson
Chair, Scrutiny Committee

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Barry J. Anderson".

Introduction

This annual report provides a general summary of “overview and scrutiny” work undertaken by the Combined Authority’s Scrutiny Committee during the 2024/25 municipal year.

Scrutiny is a vital piece of accountability in a democratic system as a key ‘check and balance’ on decision making at the West Yorkshire Combined Authority.

It holds the Mayor and other decision-makers to account for the decisions they make, the policies they adopt, the money they spend and the services they provide.

The Scrutiny Committee **investigates**, **influences**, **reports**, and **recommends** ways to strengthen policies, improve services, ensure best value for money and secure long-lasting positive outcomes for local people.

Although Scrutiny does not have the power or duty to make, ‘greenlight’ or block any decision of the Mayor or Combined Authority, it does have the power to:

- ‘call-in’ decisions (i.e. delay them) to make a case for them to be reconsidered or changed
- oblige the Combined Authority to respond to its recommendations publicly within two months
- require any member (or officer) of the Combined Authority to appear before it or report
- request any information or data held by the Combined Authority relevant to its enquiries

The Scrutiny Committee also directly questions the Mayor of West Yorkshire multiple times a year on her impact as Mayor and delivery of her electoral pledges and the Combined Authority’s priorities.

Membership

The Scrutiny Committee consists of 16 cross-party 'backbench' councillors from across West Yorkshire (and 1 from York) who are not members of any authority's 'cabinet' or executive board.

The Committee is chaired by Cllr Barry Anderson (since 2023) who's supported in his work by Vice Chairs Cllr Richard Smith (since 2021) and Cllr Matt Edwards (since 2024).

Some Members took a lead on certain topics. This year these were: Cllr Barnes on *finance*, Cllr Edwards on *transport* (along with Cllrs Rontree and Jenkins), Cllrs Smith and Carter on *rural issues*, Cllr Watson on *climate*, Cllrs Marchington and Felstead on *economic strategy*, Cllr Berry on *culture and youth*, and Cllr Haigh on *devolution and governance*.

The members for the 2024/25 municipal year were:

Council	Member	Deputy
Bradford	Cllr Ralph Berry	Cllr Safina Kauser
	Cllr Paul Godwin	Cllr Carol Thirkill
	Cllr Bob Felstead	Cllr David Nunns
	Cllr Matt Edwards	Cllr Anna Watson
Calderdale	Cllr Mike Barnes (until April 2025)	Cllr Helen Brundell
	Cllr Jonathan Timbers (from April 2025)	
	Cllr Geraldine Carter	Cllr Peter Hunt
Kirklees	Cllr Harry McCarthy	Cllr Jane Rylah
	Cllr Richard Smith	Cllr Mark Thompson
	Cllr Andrew Marchington	Cllr John Lawson
Leeds	Cllr Kate Haigh	Cllr Jane Dowson
	Cllr David Jenkins	Cllr Jordan Bowden
	Cllr Barry Anderson	Cllr Matthew Robinson
	Cllr Andy Rontree	Cllr Mahalia France-Mir
Wakefield	Cllr Richard Forster	Cllr Julie Craig
	Cllr Betty Rhodes	Cllr Deb Nicholls
York	Cllr Dave Merrett	Cllr Conrad Whitcroft

Note on substitute arrangements: Each member is assigned a deputy member who they work with as a partner to support their non-meeting and topic lead activities. Their deputy may substitute for them at meetings (as can any other member from the same council and party as them).

Work Programme

The Scrutiny Committee determines its programme of work at the beginning of each municipal year. Members choose which unfinished tasks from previous years to continue or revisit, and which new tasks to accomplish in the year ahead.

The Scrutiny Committee receives an outline of key pieces of work and significant decisions planned for the year from the Mayor, Combined Authority and officers to support this process.

Every year the Combined Authority updates its Corporate Plan¹, which outlines its ambitions and targets for the 4-year mayoral term, with a delivery plan for the year.

The Corporate Plan aims to fulfil the missions of the West Yorkshire Plan – which are:

1. *A prosperous West Yorkshire- an inclusive economy with well paid jobs*
2. *A happy West Yorkshire- great places and health communities*
3. *A well- connected West Yorkshire- a strong transport system*
4. *A sustainable West Yorkshire- making lives greener*
5. *A safe West Yorkshire- a region where all can flourish*

Summary of topics

This year the Scrutiny Committee inherited the work programmes of its three predecessors and took on board the key decisions in the corporate plan and the Mayor's Pledges in selecting an ambitious and comprehensive work programme consisting of numerous sub-topics under the below themes:

- Corporate readiness
- Monitoring performance and delivery
- Financial planning
- Devolution and governance
- Bus reform
- Mass Transit
- Asset management
- Climate Plan
- Building and retrofitting homes
- Economic strategy
- Skills system
- Access to culture
- Rural issues

Each of these topics were tackled in a few different ways including at formal committee meetings, in workshop settings, by a smaller number of members in a working group or by individual members doing 'solo scrutiny'.

¹ <https://westyorkshire.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s37606/Item%2017%20-%20Appendix%201.pdf>

Impact of Scrutiny

This section highlights the impact Scrutiny has made this year. The Committee makes an impact on decision-making and delivery in many ways including through formal recommendations as well as informally through “soft scrutiny” – providing advice which influences the Combined Authority’s decisions, processes and approach.

Bradford Interchange closure

In January 2024, Bradford Interchange bus station was closed for over a year due to falling debris from its ceiling having an impact on bus services in the region, the Bradford City of Culture and traffic.

Scrutiny Members reviewed the closure of the Interchange and work undertaken to manage the impact, review the cause and determine its future – through briefings, site visits and workshops.

The Scrutiny Committee:

- Secured a postponement to the decision so all relevant information and analysis, such as in-depth structural surveys, were available to Combined Authority Members in full for their consideration.
- Ensured that the Transport Committee was able to provide comments and advice on the options under consideration, for maximum democratic oversight, before the Combined Authority decided.
- Reviewed the history of the Interchange and the key findings from the survey reports and assessed the different options under consideration for reopening and rebuilding in future.
- Submitted its conclusions and assurances to the Combined Authority prior to their final decision– focusing on challenges identified and lessons learned – such as:
 1. A new communications strategy.
 2. A customer service offer refresh.
 3. Amending contingency plans for other stations.
 4. Designing and building more modern bus stations.
 5. A comprehensive asset review and new assets strategy.
 6. Assessing impact on other programmes e.g. mass transit.
 7. The possibility of peer reviews in future.
- Committed to following up on the main ‘lesson learned’ to conduct a comprehensive Asset Review and develop a new, modern Asset Management Strategy ahead of bus franchising and mass transit.

Adult Skills Fund (ASF) procurement

Following a press query, a group of Scrutiny Members investigated an issue with scoring methodology in the procurement of training contracts in the Adult Education Budget (now “Adult Skills Fund”).

This consisted of several technical briefings with officers Scrutiny had positive relationships with on origin of the problem, technical challenges and risks, and vital background context on the training provider sector.

Assurances were given that Combined Authority Members would be briefed via a report and internal “lessons learned” and internal audit reports would be conducted, with findings circulated to Scrutiny.

West Yorkshire’s Local Growth Plan

The Scrutiny Committee was involved in the development of the Economic Strategy for over a year before it became the Local Growth Plan (LGP).

The Committee, and then smaller groups of Members, discussed and fed into every draft of the LGP as it progressed through the consultation and decisions process.

Scrutiny secured changes and clarifications on a number of strategic points, including:

- clarity on the range and duality of the identified economic corridors,
- commitments to ensure the Plan didn’t have the appearance of being “Leeds-centric”,
- that the concerns of rural areas being left behind be addressed,
- that cross-border challenges be included under the holistic approach and
- that the economic plan strongly aligns with the climate and transport plans also in development.

Delivery and key performance indicators (KPIs)

The Scrutiny Committee took a keen interest in performance monitoring and reporting this year as a new framework and internal officer reporting system was planned.

Ultimately, Scrutiny cannot scrutinise what it does not know and quarterly and annual reporting based on accurate, well-assessed data is key to Scrutiny being able to identify and monitor systemic issues.

The Combined Authority’s delivery and approach to performance monitoring was scrutinised in committee sessions with officers and the Mayor and follow up briefings with a smaller group of Members.

The Committee’s recommendations on how performance and KPIs are collected, analysed and – especially – presented publicly were taken on board and helped shape the new approach.

Scrutiny secured a commitment to scrutinise the Performance Management Framework before it is adopted for full use and receive access to a future KPI dashboard in development for Members to use.

Risk Management Framework

Risk has been consistent theme of discussion for Scrutiny Members, as one of the Committee’s key roles is in focusing on high-risk topics and receiving assurance that risks have been identified and mitigated.

As a result of Scrutiny campaigning and advice:

- a new small but effective risk team has been recruited
- a new risk management strategy and framework has been developed and adopted
- extensive training on risk was rolled out for senior officer, junior officers and elected members
- an expansion in depth of risk analysis in committee and project reports,
- closer oversight by an increasingly independent Audit Committee – to be made up of “backbench” members from now on (as recommending in the Scrutiny Protocol Review).

Climate and Environment Plan 2038

The Combined Authority declared a climate emergency in 2019 and environmental outcomes remain a key focus of a Mayoral Pledge and West Yorkshire Plan Mission – with a new climate plan to be adopted.

The Scrutiny Committee dispatched a working group of Members to participate in a series of wide-ranging cross-sector stakeholder workshops debating and designing the policy particulars of the climate plan.

The working group produced conclusions note on its observations and policy suggestions for officers to consider and then followed up with officers to workshop the strategic challenges in implementation.

This resulted in a series of recommendations submitted to, and welcomed by, the Climate, Energy and Environment and then the Combined Authority when it adopted the new climate and environment plan.

The three strategic conclusions from Scrutiny were:

1. Inclusion of Scope 3 Emissions in procurement practices with a view to it being widened through the CA's influential role as a regional ‘systems enabler’.
2. Further clarity is needed on where investment will be prioritised and in which programmes; successful delivery in one area can accelerate delivery in others.
3. Accountability for strategic alignment needs to be clearly established and transparent so conflicts between priorities can be suitably identified and resolved.

These strategic conclusions will form the basis of Scrutiny's tracking and monitoring of the climate plan's implementation in the future, including subsequent plans such as the nature strategy.

Other impact made

Other impact made by the Scrutiny Committee this year included:

- Securing reforms and clarifications on the access of highly confidential and commercial information for the purposes of legitimate scrutiny, by building trust and new robust mechanisms with officers.
- Partnering with colleagues on the Transport Committee to agree cooperative ways of working to ensure that transport matters – proportionally large part of the organisation's work and public's interest – are fairly but efficiently scrutinised without duplication and within available capacity.

- Persuading more and more external stakeholders, experts, partners and political leaders to participate in the scrutiny process in public and private meetings, briefings, and workshops.
- Increased the number of times the Mayor attends Scrutiny Committee annually to present a new written report addressing the issues the Committee wants to discuss, such as delivery of her pledges and impact made in her “soft power” activity.
- Increased the amount of information, context and scrutiny of Key Decisions published in the Forward Plan in follow up overview briefings with delivery officers – with some escalated to full committee.
- Modified the budget scrutiny process so that it starts much sooner in the year, considers a longer medium-term strategic view, and presents a more transparent picture of options available to political leadership for decision.
- Provided advice and assurance challenge on the approach to a number of decisions and future schemes on a confidential basis before they are progressed to decision point (i.e. Bradford City Village, White Rose Station).

Next Steps for 2025/26

New work programme and new protocol

A new Scrutiny Protocol is expected to be published by the government in 2025 alongside the Devolution Bill, so the scrutiny system will continue to be reviewed and improved.

There will be a focus on building on the scrutiny reforms to date – likely including, but not limited to:

- A refined, focused work programme based on new robust criteria designed to focus on impact of scrutiny.
- A larger and more frequent number of formal recommendations arising out of scrutiny meetings and session for decision-makers, to be later tracked.
- Greater engagement and cooperation with other local and regional scrutiny bodies in each council and WY-level joint committees.
- Building stronger more direct relationships with external and internal stakeholders vital to the scrutiny process.
- A new communications approach to ensure that Scrutiny's work is widely publicised and impactful, with a view to including the public more.

Mayoral Combined Authorities cover large geographic areas and focus on long-term strategic, cross-cutting programmes which can take many years to deliver and even longer to properly assess the specific impact of. Scrutiny must balance a proactive work programme which tackles long-term challenges with more immediate problems requiring solutions.

Next year's work programme is due to be refined soon, with many possibilities for Scrutiny to tackle due to their high-risk, high-impact nature – including: Bus Franchising, Mass Transit, Budget and corporate planning, Asset Management and the Local Transport Plan.

The biggest, most unavoidable issue of all is Deeper Devolution.

Devolution

The government is expected to publish a new 'revolutionary' Devolution Bill in 2025 which will have a massive impact on how mayoral authorities operate, including in West Yorkshire.

This year the Scrutiny Committee pre-emptively approved a working group to begin the groundwork, which it has done by scoping the focus of its coming review and gain a strong grounding in the devolution agenda and plans.

The working group will largely focus on the topic of "Devolution Readiness" and whether the Combined Authority's existing governance structures and organisational capacity is ready to undertake any new functions or exercise any new financial autonomy under integrated settlement funding.

Find out more and get involved

Find out more about scrutiny at the Combined Authority and to view agendas, reports, and minutes, please visit the website here: <https://westyorks-ca.gov.uk/>

Scrutiny committee meetings take place in public and everyone is welcome to attend.

Get in touch

Scrutiny is keen to hear from members of the public on issues of concern in the West Yorkshire area that relate to the functions and responsibilities of the Combined Authority.

You can contact Scrutiny:

By email: scrutiny@westyorks-ca.gov.uk

In writing: Scrutiny Team
Legal, Governance & Compliance
West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Wellington House
40-50 Wellington Street
Leeds
LS1 2DE



West
Yorkshire
Combined
Authority

Tracy
Brabin
Mayor of
West Yorkshire