

Cllr Cathy Bayton  
Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee

13<sup>th</sup> December 2021

Sent via email to: [Cllr.Cathryn.Bayton@dudleymbc.org.uk](mailto:Cllr.Cathryn.Bayton@dudleymbc.org.uk)

Dear Cathy,

Thank you for inviting me to speak at the Overview and Scrutiny meeting in October. I found the discussion with you and your colleagues very useful, and welcome your continued commitment to hold the CA, its officers and portfolio-holders, and me to account.

In the subsequent notes from the meeting, there were four observations submitted to me for consideration and response:

- 1. The committee recognised the existence of collaborative powers being exercised jointly by the Mayor/WMCA and constituent authorities. There was the impression that these powers were not currently being fully utilised. The committee stressed the importance of the Mayor working collaboratively with Leaders to ensure the development of a shared ambition and vision for the region was then translated into the transformative change that was needed.*
- 2. The committee welcomed evidence of the Mayor working with other mayors across the country through the 'M10' group to pursue a shared agenda. It was hoped that this would develop further over time where regional leaders were able to collectively demonstrate the changes they required from Government to enable them to deliver local solutions most beneficial to their own regions.*
- 3. The committee welcomed the submission of a bid for funding from the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement, particularly as this would devolve responsibility for prioritising schemes to the West Midlands. However, it was recognised that this prioritisation process needed to be transparent, clearly understood by all stakeholders and undertaken in a timely manner to ensure the effective delivery of these vital infrastructure projects.*
- 4. The committee noted that the Kickstart programme was due to end in March 2022. Given the noted concerns regarding the effectiveness of the Department for Work & Pensions' active engagement with young people wishing to access this scheme, could the Mayor consider whether there was any potential for the WMCA to take on additional regional responsibility for programme delivery?*

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**Mayor of the West Midlands**

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I would like to make the following comments on each in turn:

1. On the general issue of collaborative powers and their exercise in the context of a shared ambition and vision for the region, I remain eager to find ways to further deepen partnership work across the region, and between the WMCA and its constituent authorities. I believe that we have established a strong track record here thus far, but there is certainly more that we can do. To that end, in conjunction with the leaders of our constituent authorities, I have commissioned work on the one hand to reform and enhance our governance and decision-making processes (which has already seen the creation of the new Economic Growth Board), and on the other to bring forward key strategic documents that will further articulate our shared regional vision, such as our Plan for Growth and our new Local Transport Plan.

On the specific area of collaborative powers on transport, TfWM (on behalf of the WMCA) and the constituent authorities have been working closely together using the KRN concurrent powers and wider WMCA duties and functions. This has helped to start the development of a set of action plans to improve the Key Route Networks (KRN), delivering a programme of highway infrastructure and signals upgrades, major schemes such as A34 and A45 Sprint-BRT, and joint working through the Regional Transport Coordination Centre (RTCC). Looking more closely at the issue of highway maintenance and the KRN, for instance, close collaboration between TfWM and the constituent authorities has led to joint initiatives including: sharing highway condition data; reviewing/researching new technology for data collection; bidding successfully for funding of infrastructure improvements to structures, renewing roads and footways renewals; and developing greater cohesion in winter service provision.
2. On the issue of the M10 group, there have been a number of areas where we have already found common cause, either as a whole group or in smaller subgroupings, such as in proposing additional support measures for hard-hit sectors during lockdown to the Government. I will continue to work closely with other mayors where there is our mutual interests coincide, including in the broader set of discussions around levelling up and devolution.
3. On the issue of the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement, I would begin by welcoming the region's success in securing an allocation over £1 billion from Government for transport funding, as was announced in late October. This is the largest single transport sum we have ever received, which will enable us to substantially improve our transport network in the West Midlands, supporting economic growth and our net zero targets. As we now move to prioritise our programme of schemes, in advance of a final submission to the DfT on 14th January, TfWM officers have been leading with their counterparts in each of the constituent authorities a series of collaborative and transparent discussions to facilitate this process. The leaders of our local authorities and I have also been closely consulted on this.

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4. On the issue of the Kickstart programme, it is clearly very important that we do our part, alongside the DWP, to ensure that as many young people as possible can access good jobs. This may include progressing through the Kickstart programme as a route into work, and as such it is important that they are closely engaged and enabled to participate in the scheme. The DWP are taking a number of steps to improve the focus and impact of a range of pre-employment programmes like Kickstart, which we support, including undertaking progression discussions with Kickstarters prior to completing Kickstart, and running a series of webinars between Kickstart Gateways and apprenticeship providers to support transition into apprenticeship jobs. We have been taking steps to catalyse these efforts, including by the use of our Youth Employment Platform and Youth Hubs to connect young people to Kickstart opportunities. We are also continuing to discuss Kickstart progression to apprenticeships with DWP and DfE, and to deepen our partnerships with both departments as through the Levelling Up White Paper.

I look forward to attending the forthcoming Overview and Scrutiny session on the WMCA Budget later this month.

Kind regards,

**Andy Street**  
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