

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE  
GMCA OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD WEDNESDAY, 25 JUNE  
2025 AT THE TOOTAL BUILDINGS - BROADHURST HOUSE, 1ST FLOOR, 56  
OXFORD STREET, MANCHESTER, M1 6EU**

**PRESENT:**

Councillor Nadim Muslim	Bolton Council (Chair)
Councillor Peter Wright	Bolton Council
Councillor Imran Rizvi	Bury Council
Councillor Basil Curley	Manchester City Council
Councillor John Leech	Manchester City Council
Councillor Mandie Shilton – Godwin	Manchester City Council
Councillor Ashley Dearnley	Rochdale Council
Councillor Terry Smith	Rochdale Council
Councillor Dylan Williams	Rochdale Council
Councillor Maria Brabiner	Salford City Council
Councillor Tony Davies	Salford City Council
Councillor Helen Hibbert	Stockport Council
Councillor Rachel Wise	Stockport Council
Councillor Sangita Patel	Tameside Council
Councillor David Sweeton	Tameside Council
Councillor Jill Axford	Trafford Council
Councillor Ged Carter	Trafford Council
Councillor Shaun Ennis	Trafford Council
Councillor Mary Callaghan	Wigan Council
Councillor Fred Walker	Wigan Council

**ALSO PRESENT:**

Paul Dennett	Salford City Mayor and Portfolio Lead for Housing First
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Jo Harrison	Director of Strategic Planning and Sustainability, United Utilities
Ian Crewe	Area Director for Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Cheshire, Environment Agency
Nick Pearson	Flood Risk Manager for Greater Manchester, Environment Agency

#### **OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:**

Karen Chambers	GMCA
Dominic Coleman	GMCA
David Hodcroft	GMCA
Carol Judge- Campbell	GMCA
Caroline Simpson	GMCA
Mark Turner	GMCA
Nicola Ward	GMCA

#### **O&SC 94/25**

#### **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Russell Bernstein (Bury), Councillor Colin McLaren (Oldham), Councillor Lewis Nelson (Salford) Councillor Jacqueline Owen (Tameside) and Councillor Joanne Marshall (Wigan).

#### **O&SC 95/25**

#### **CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS AND URGENT BUSINESS**

The Chair informed Members that he would be standing down as Chair but that he was hoping to remain on the Committee for the next municipal year as a substitute member.

The Members thanked the Chair for his fair and consistent leadership.

## **RESOLVED /-**

That the Chair's announcements be noted.

## **O&SC 96/25**

## **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

## **RESOLVED /-**

No declarations were received in relation to any item on the agenda.

## **O&SC 97/25**

## **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD 9 APRIL 2025**

Councillor Carter inquired whether the action for item O&S 91/25, which pertains to obtaining more information about the 3% growth figure mentioned by the GM Mayor, had been completed. The officers assured that they would ensure this information was re-circulated.

## **RESOLVED /-**

1. That the minutes of the GMCA Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 9 April 2025 be approved as a correct and accurate record.
2. That officers would ensure that the information regarding the 3% growth figure quoted by the GM Mayor was re-circulated.

## **O&SC 98/25**

## **GREATER MANCHESTER INTEGRATED WATER MANAGEMENT PLAN**

Paul Dennett, Salford City Mayor and Portfolio Lead for Housing First introduced the report that provided the Committee with an overview of progress made to date on the Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Review recommendations of 2023 on integrated water management. Also in attendance were senior officers from the Environment Agency and United Utilities.

Mayor Dennett advised that this was very much a partnership endeavour, that the Combined Authority had embarked upon in terms of its joint working through a tri-partite agreement with the Environment Agency and United Utilities. It was noted that Mayor Dennett shared the portfolio responsibility with Councillor Tom Ross, Portfolio Lead for the Green City Region within the GM Mayors cabinet.

Mayor Dennett provided the Committee with an outline of how the Integrated Water Management Plan (IWMP) had taken forward the recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Review. He added that understanding the legislation could be complex. Local authorities were responsible for surface water flooding, while the Environment Agency handled fluvial flooding, which was flooding from rivers. It was noted that there was often confusion and displacement within the system regarding who was accountable for what. He added that United Utilities, especially with their role in determining water management capital programmes had a significant impact on this agenda as well.

Mayor Dennett advised that the Committee's recommendations had been disseminated to the Chairs of Scrutiny Committees across the 10 local authorities in Greater Manchester (GM), as well as to the Executive and Cabinet members responsible for planning. This dissemination was crucial, as the successful implementation of the plan would require a collective effort from all parties involved.

Mayor Dennett advised that surface water flooding was recognised as the most significant climate related challenge that GM was facing. Recruiting local authority flooding officers was challenging and there was significant reliance on the private sector for this agenda. Workforce planning and skill development was crucial and incorporating into education at both higher education and further education levels, as well as in schools, would be vital. It was also important to link this to apprenticeships and job opportunities for young people in GM, to provide training for the water engineers of the future and collaboration across local authority boundaries would be essential. And whilst some capacity had been built, it was still insufficient.

The tripartite Integrated Water Management Plan (IWMP) provides GM with a vision and strategy for integrated water management across the city region. The plan was also supported by a detailed annual business plan. Progress of the plan would be monitored by the Trilateral Board, which includes the Combined Authority, the Environment Agency, and United Utilities. The plan's rationale was to establish a shared evidence base, analyse and understand key issues, and develop appropriate projects. The goal was to collectively agree on how to prioritise those projects, given the limited funding available. Utilising data sets from United Utilities, the Environment Agency, and potentially DEFRA was crucial for informed decision-making. Further to this, United Utilities were developing the first city-region-wide water management plan with Manchester University, incorporating extensive data to improve water management.

Mayor Dennett added that one of the recommendations of the Task and Finish review was to view this through a social justice lens. This was crucial, as national data showed that the poorest communities were often the most affected by flooding, whether fluvial or surface water. Currently, applying this perspective to water management schemes nationwide had been difficult.

He advised that the country was currently facing significant challenges in terms of this agenda. When prioritising projects, DEFRA, the Environment Agency and United Utilities considered different geographies and perspectives. He added that there was a need to be sensitive to these broader challenges and work together to deliver better water management solutions in the future.

Mayor Dennett added that GM was actively presenting its case, lobbying, and influencing decisions regarding funding and prioritising key issues, including the workforce challenges previously highlighted.

He emphasised the importance of lobbying and influencing planning laws to support effective management plans. Current viability constraints, such as biodiversity net gains, presented challenges nationwide. Sustainable drainage and nature-based

solutions were crucial, but the National Planning Policy Framework lacked mechanisms to capture land value uplift. Transparency in policy requirements aimed to manage land values and fund infrastructure, but more lobbying was needed. Implementing Schedule 3 of the Flood and Water Management Act was an area where GM could get more traction with regards to delivering its aspirations. Members were keen to prioritise nature-based solutions. Acknowledging that was challenging work because those solutions were less easily measurable, bringing with them a range of accountabilities and tasks that would need to be addressed. Officers from United Utilities advised that it was important to recognise the opportunities and risks around housing growth and sustainable drainage and added that there was a need for better planning.

Mayor Dennett advised that GM had been invited to the Water Regulators Board meeting this coming Friday to provide an update on the Integrated Water Management Plan and officers were attending.

It was noted that raising awareness among residents about climate change challenges was crucial. Progress had been slower than desired, which highlighted the need for more information, advice, and guidance. Residents must take responsibility and change behaviours that exacerbate flooding issues. Promoting nature-based solutions and creating a movement for water management and conservation, similar to the living wage initiative, was essential.

Members stated that in the past, relationships between Local Authorities, the Environment Agency and United Utilities could be strained as there appeared to be no consistency in relation to the approach to managing the maintenance of gulleys and removal of waterway blockages. And in some instances, Local Authorities were not able to remove excess surface water from parks into drains. Members were keen to ensure that these relationships improved. Mayor Dennett advised that this was a new approach for GM, and it was important to acknowledge that both GM and organisations like the Environment Agency and United Utilities were learning from this different way of working and he acknowledged that there were longstanding issues, some of which related to legislation as the current legislation allowed

wastewater to mix with water system during heavy rainfall, which was problematic. He added that GM's participation in reviewing and shaping the legislative environment was crucial for this agenda, but it was possible that collectively, a system that works could be created. Officers from the Environment Agency responded to the question regarding the removal of waterway blockages; and stated that if they were to shift their resources to cover areas where the risk or responsibility should be someone else's, it meant neglecting their own responsibilities. And whilst they had done this in the past when an authority was struggling, they needed to ensure that they collaborated effectively and address long-standing issues together. Officers were happy to provide support for members if more information was provided.

Members asked in relation to Recommendation 6, how confident GM was that the DLUHC (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities) would recognise house building projects in areas currently at risk as there was a significant concern that the natural flood risk in some areas was not being properly acknowledged. Members were concerned that the DLUHC was more determined to construct houses rather than to recognise the potential danger by building in areas prone to flooding. Mayor Dennett advised that solutions to problems needed to be derived locally, and that lobbying for necessary legislation, resources, or ministry engagement in national workforce planning was required. The Green Review highlighted the allocation of public capital, with significant investments in London and the South for infrastructure. Therefore there was a need to address the economic metrics and orthodoxies behind that review and there was a clear acknowledgment that there was insufficient emphasis on place-based objectives, specifically for GM. Decision-making continued to overly focus on benefit-cost ratios, and the guidance provided was excessively long and complicated. Additionally, there was inadequate capacity and capability across the public sector, particularly in local government. Officers from the Environment Agency advised that they do provide developers with advice regarding flood risk, but they did not have the power to prevent developments going ahead.

Members noted that the Task and Finish Report and recommendations were shared with local council members and asked what the outcome of this was. Members were particularly interested to know how many local scrutiny committee chairs had taken the report through their committee as that could be quite insightful. Mayor Dennett advised that it was challenging to assess the impact of sharing information with chairs of scrutiny at this point due to the nature of our responsibilities. However, the responsibility for addressing surface water flooding, the biggest risk, did lie with local government and therefore solutions needed to come from local authorities in collaboration with United Utilities. Members from Tameside advised that the report had reached their scrutiny committee and their programme of maintenance was strengthened on the recommendations of the review. Mayor Dennett agreed that GM should learn from best practices and leverage the Combined Authority and soft power of the Mayor's office to utilise that potential effectively.

Members reported that it was disappointing to read in the recommendations that GM was prioritising water quality improvements over addressing climate risks, whether from rivers or surface water and stated that it was clear that United Utilities should have historically invested more, which had led to this situation. Whilst poor water quality affects everyone and was undesirable, those impacted by flooding face even more severe consequences, affecting their lives directly. Additionally, it was disheartening to see that the conflicting priorities between Defra and local authorities prevented GM from addressing the issue through a social justice lens. This was something the committee felt was extremely important and must keep at the forefront of GM's priorities whenever possible. Mayor Dennett advised that he sympathised with the situation due to his experience with river work, where ecologists had significant influence over decisions. While the local authority aimed for dredging, the Environment Agency raised the banks, but ecologists ultimately decided the actions. It was important to consider this influence. Although GM's goals included improving water quality, rewilding waterways and green spaces, and bringing wildlife back to urban areas, in the short term, prioritising human safety and responding to risks must be the top priority. Mayor Dennett added that he agreed regarding investment issues as GM was dealing with the consequences of many years of historical investment. Additionally, it was important to consider the various approaches the Government



was taking to address this agenda, particularly in creating investment structures for infrastructure rather than direct funding. He added that there was indeed a need to keep social justice on the radar and that this would move into the lobbying and influencing space. It was important to base the actions on evidence. If necessary, GM would escalate matters to the Environment Agency, United Utilities, Natural England, Defra, or even the Treasury. Collaboration on a project-by-project basis was essential. Addressing these issues was critical if GM was to make progress in what was an overly complicated system.

Members acknowledged the challenges relating to future workforce planning and asked who was responsible for advancing the development of skills and creating a pipeline for this, as it was clear that GM urgently need to address this in the future, and it would be a fantastic opportunity for local people. Mayor Dennett advised that all agencies shared responsibility for advocating more devolution of skills as the GMCA controlled the allocation of adult education funding and added that universities and colleges also had a significant role. A focus on finding solutions could be delivered by bringing together all responsible parties to create something greater.

Members were eager to accelerate the messaging to individuals about what they could do personally to reduce water use, capture water on-site, and manage these resources. It was noted that whilst individual actions may seem small, collectively they would have a significant impact. Officers from United Utilities brought the “Unpave the Way” project to the members attention. This was an innovative and collaborative project between the North West Regional Flood and Coastal Committee, the Environment Agency, United Utilities, and Lancashire County Council which sought to address and raise awareness of the impacts of an increasing national trend of householders choosing to create impermeable front gardens to accommodate motor vehicles and other needs. They added that it was important to note that alongside flood forecasting services from the Environment Agency and Met Office, residents and businesses needed to understand what actions they could take, how to prepare, and how to limit the financial and mental

health impacts of flooding. It was crucial to work together to ensure everyone was prepared.

Officers from United Utilities advised that GM had a unique opportunity to move away from traditional approaches in the water industry, integrating flooding, water quality, and water resources management. The Integrated Management Plan, along with the Natural Course project, encouraged innovative thinking and collaboration. They added that the Government recognised this approach as exemplary, providing significant funding and that over the next five years, £2b would be invested in infrastructure, with nearly £300m dedicated to managing surface water sustainably. Achieving water quality targets required removing surface water from sewers and managing it naturally would be challenging. It was noted that local authorities were invited to bid for funding to implement sustainable water management solutions. It was agreed that information regarding the funding from United Utilities would be shared with the Committee after the meeting. Members asked for more information in relation to the plan for this funding to ensure that local authorities were aware of the possibilities. Mayor Dennett advised that there was a coordinated approach via the Combined Authority. He added that officers had been discussing this with district engineers and had asked them to propose projects to build a pipeline of work for GM but agreed that it was important to ensure that members were also informed and involved, not just the engineers.

Members commented on how new housing developments, especially those added to existing communities, impacted on infrastructure, including issues such as increased surface water and the strain on current systems and emphasised the importance of personal responsibility and effective communication with residents, as residents often did not see the extensive planning and discussions that occur beforehand. This communication would be crucial for long-term programs and addressing public concerns. Mayor Dennett advised that the Places for Everyone Strategy was focused on increasing housing density in city cores to protect green spaces and meet government housing targets. He added that national policies lacked mechanisms to capture land, relying heavily on funding from the Environment Agency, funding through our water bills, and other United Utilities funding. He emphasised the need

for combined efforts from the Combined Authority, United Utilities, the Environment Agency, and other regional bodies and highlighted the availability of £25m for nature-based solutions and sustainable systems to tackle surface water issues. He also stressed the importance of district-level responsibility in delivering the agenda and the need for effective lobbying and influencing national policy. In terms of communication with the public, Mayor Dennett agreed that this was a point well made, He advised that the water management system was complex and difficult for the average person to understand. There was a need to simplify this system to make it more accessible for residents. The IWMP was a step in the right direction, but GM must focus on clear communication and guidance. The goal should be to make it easy for people to access support and understand how to navigate the system. This would require a collective effort from districts and the Combined Authority to drive this initiative forward.

Members asked how the Environment Agency and Combined Authority were collaborating to identify and address gaps in data, particularly regarding developments close to watercourses and what funding was available to support these improvements and ensure better future outcomes. An example was given of a brook in Trafford that did not register on Environment Agency data. Mayor Dennett advised that when flooding occurs, there were statutory responsibilities to conduct an assessment, and that information should be fed into the system. If there had been recurrent flooding affecting properties and these assessments had not been included in the Environment Agency's data analysis, that needed to be addressed as it indicated a system failure. GM must be able to rely on data and empirical evidence to guide its actions and priorities, especially in the context of the "Places for Everyone" initiative. Using data to inform decisions and actions across GM should be standard practice. Using that approach would help us learn from past experiences and prioritise projects effectively. It was essential for GM to adopt this method to ensure focus was on the most impactful initiatives.

Members noted that groundwater entering the sewage system was outdated and obsolete and provided an example, where in Bury, United Utilities performed a

temporary fix, but despite being informed by authorities about the necessary repairs, the issue was neglected for years. That neglect eventually caused a sinkhole, which made the news. Members asked United Utilities to take responsibility to ensure the sewage system was properly maintained, in collaboration with local authorities, and that funding and partnerships were managed effectively. Mayor Dennett agreed and shared his experience of flooding in Salford in 2015 and more recently in Stockport, he added that GM needed continued collaboration, using all available intelligence to guide its operations. That strategic, partnership-based approach was essential for effectively managing GM's collective responsibilities in water management. Members from Salford commended the flood basins built through partnership with Salford Council and the Environment Agency. Communication had been key, and the Environment Agency's effective flood alerts via landline, mobile texts, and emails worked well.

Members noted the impact of increased utility bills on residents, and it was important to consider this, as was the need to make water management understandable and accessible for communities across GM. It was important to communicate effectively and highlight the significant amounts of money involved in the water industry, as well as pollution issues. Members stated that the current system did resemble privatisation failure and asked if GM should consider how to bring this to the attention of the Government to emphasise the importance of saving our water resources and protecting our communities. Mayor Dennett agreed, he stated that increasing bills and the cost-of-living crisis were significant issues. GM and its partners needed to work together to support the poorest in our communities. Government funding and programs could help those struggling to make ends meet. It was crucial to understand and simplify access to these resources for our residents, as many organisations were tackling these challenges. He added that an emphasis on working together would make it easier for communities to access support to highlight the issue of pollution in rivers. In relation to the cost-of-living crisis, a £25m fund to help those struggling to pay bills had been created which was supporting 30,000 people in GM with nearly 97,000 customers receiving priority services for emergencies.

Members recognised the advantages of cross partnership work through the Regional Flood and Coastal Committee (RFCC). Enhancing collaboration among existing partners and welcoming new ones to drive economic growth was encouraging. Mayor Dennett agreed, he stated that the RFCC partnership had been vital. He encouraged all to continue to maximise local authority contributions to the RFCC as it attracts other access to capital to enable GM to do even more on this agenda.

Members reported instances where they had to address infrastructure issues, but it was initially unclear who was responsible, leading to some confusion and were interested in seeing how leadership could help build district forums to escalate issues when necessary and navigate through bureaucratic obstacles, especially concerning the 2050 target for leakage. Mayor Dennett agreed that displacement of responsibility was an issue. Historically, GM had seen evidence of that, especially with the underfunded regulatory environment which often lacked the resources needed to do their job effectively. He added that regulators needed to have the necessary resources to avoid frustration. In terms of district forums, Mayor Dennett advised that GM should learn from its experiences and integrate those lessons into the business plan.

Members stated that it was disappointing that the mandatory SuDS adoption regulation was not implemented in 2024 despite the pledge from Defra and asked if a mandatory approach could be instigated by GM. Mayor Dennett advised that mandating policies in GM would be challenging, particularly with economic viability. The main issue was that if schemes were not economically viable, they did not have to meet certain requirements. The Government had not fully addressed these issues, and current regulations were not effectively tackling them. Developers often did not contribute to infrastructure needs, which was a significant problem. Recent changes in regulations aimed to address these issues, but there was no case law to show their effectiveness yet. Ensuring resources were available to meet policy requirements was crucial, but it remained challenging. He added that the hope was that future settlements and Government reviews would help address these challenges and improve delivery mechanisms.

Members noted that councils were generally excellent at unblocking grids and gullies on roads and managing surface water with many councils responding to reports and unblocking these within a couple of weeks, which was very effective. However, some councils in GM were not as efficient. An example was given of instances where gullies that flood significantly during heavy rain were reported regularly, and the response had been that the local authority unblock gullies on a rolling programme, rather than on a responsive basis. Members asked if there was a way to hold underperforming councils to account? Other issues raised, such as debris in brooks and rivers had not been addressed by the Environment Agency and issues with increased water flow and erosion caused by a water treatment facility had not been addressed by United Utilities.

Officers from the Environment Agency thanked the Committee for their comments and added that they were aware of the specific issue in Trafford and would address it separately stating that although it had not moved forward yet, it did not mean it would not. The Environment Agency had committed to spending £25m on flood risk projects across GM over the next 12 months, with 40 projects currently underway.

## **RESOLVED /-**

1. That the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding the progress on the delivery of the recommendations made at the Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting, February 2023 and the Integrated Water Management Plan Annual Business Plan 2025-2026 were noted.
2. That information on the funding from United Utilities would be shared with the Committee.

**Additional Note** - Members highlighted issues and questions during the meeting as did leaders at the GMCA on the 30 May 2025, therefore Officers have arranged to meet with the local authorities on a 1-2-1 basis to identify issues and projects. Members were encouraged to highlight specific issues, examples or concerns to

ensure we have fully captured the request at both the CA and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

**O&SC 99/25**

**DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE GM  
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY TASK AND FINISH  
REVIEW: IN HER SHOES, A REVIEW OF THE SAFETY  
OF WOMEN AND GIRLS ON PUBLIC TRANSPORT**

Councillor Helen Hibbert, Chair of the Task and Finish review, presented this report to the Committee which was undertaken by members of the GM Overview & Scrutiny Committee, the GM Police, Fire & Crime Panel and the GM Health Scrutiny Committee on the safety of women and girls on public transport and the wider public realm.

Councillor Hibbert advised the Committee that the review had been the product of months of dedicated inquiry, collaboration, and heartfelt testimony, and thanked all members of the group for their commitment and compassion throughout the process.

She further stated that the work of the group was driven by a simple but powerful truth: that no woman or girl should feel unsafe when moving through our city-region. Yet, as the group heard time and again—from data, from expert witnesses, and from lived experience—that this is not the reality for many women. Whether walking to a bus stop, waiting on a platform, or travelling home at night, too many women and girls were forced to make decisions based on fear rather than freedom.

This review did not just highlight the challenges. It offered a roadmap for change. Using a socio-ecological model, the review had examined the issue from multiple angles—individual, social, institutional, environmental, policy, and cultural—and developed a set of recommendations that, if implemented together, could deliver real system change.

The group had been inspired by the courage of those who shared their stories, and by the commitment of partners across GM who were already working to make our

transport network safer. But it was also recognised that more must be done—and that this work must be embedded across all portfolios, all policies, and all places.

Members involved in the review thanked the Chair and officers for their commitment to the Task and Finish Review.

The Committee were encouraged to review and act on the numerous recommendations, as not all would be for the GMCA and highlighted the successful projects in Trafford and Oldham with Government Safer Streets funding. It was noted that this funding was not confirmed to continue into the next financial year, therefore clarity regarding any future funding was essential. Members emphasised the need for consistent funding for projects as devolution progresses, rather than relying on intermittent funding and stressed the importance of sustained efforts to implement and develop projects effectively. Councillor Hibbert agreed that a review the current funding situation was needed, as there were various sources of money that may or may not be available. She added that this was not just the GMCA's responsibility; if changes were needed to access funding, which should also be considered.

Concerns regarding taxi Licensing were also raised, with Members referring to the Casey report and its recommendations regarding local control over taxi licensing, highlighting the importance of regulating taxis as part of public transport. Whether these standards would be GM wide and what the thresholds would be would need to be further debated. Councillor Hibbert agreed and advised that regardless of whether a GM standard was set, a review of individual licensing approaches was needed to ensure GM adopted the highest standards. Concerns about taxi practices were long standing and it was agreed that this issue was right to be addressed in the report.

Members stated that the safety of women and girls was an issue that affects all areas of life and would require commitment from all councils and the GMCA and added that it was important to involve women and girls in the design of spaces and listen to their experiences. It was noted that it would be beneficial to audit existing buildings and public transport areas to improve safety and accessibility, and not just focus on new developments. Councillor Hibbert stated that comparing and possibly



implementing a uniform mechanism for managing our public spaces, with a focus on assessing our impact, was also worth considering.

It was noted that the conversation about young men and positive masculinities was crucial across multiple agendas. It was important to create a space where young people felt safe using public transport, as many currently did not. Interestingly, both adults and young people often cited young people as a source of their unease. Therefore, establishing culturally acceptable and normalised behaviour patterns could help ensure that all young people felt safe and were safe to be around. Councillor Hibbert added that the report was timely, as the influences on men and boys were significant, with women and girls feeling more vulnerable, suggesting that progress was stalling.

Members were shocked to see the testimony in the report regarding a man sitting in the seat next to a woman on an otherwise empty bus and asked if single seat buses had been discussed as part of the review and asked if bus drivers could see every area of the bus in their CCTV. Councillor Hibbert advised that the group did look at the design principles in relation to CCTV on buses but not seat placement. It was noted that Travelsafe Officers had been increased but how bus drivers dealt with incidents could be examined more.

Officers from the Safer and Stronger Communities Team advised that the Greater Manchester Gender-Based Violence Strategy involved all local authorities and relied heavily on domestic abuse coordinators in each district. The strategy was made up of 18 priorities, including transport, housing, health, policing, and criminal justice. Significant progress had been made in relation to the performance of GMP, such as the dismissal of 64 police officers for police perpetrated abuse, and the successful implementation of domestic abuse protection orders in various districts. The strategy emphasised continuous improvement and investment, and officers welcomed further input on enhancing its effectiveness.

Members stated that being involved in the review was incredibly eye-opening. Having participants share their experiences, along with colleagues sharing their

personal stories, had been invaluable. One aspect of the report was its focus on root causes. Local authorities often concentrated on physical spaces rather than addressing the underlying issues. Tackling those root causes was crucial, and the approach promising.

Members added that multi-agency partnership between Stockport's control room and GMP was innovative and something all members should consider implementing across all authorities moving forward.

Members stated that making it easier for people, especially women and girls, to report incidents at night was important as was educational initiatives, such school projects, to raise awareness about sexual harassment.

Members asked how Active Bystander training might be delivered and if it could involve social media campaigns for regular transport users. Officers from the Safer and Stronger Communities Team advised that officers were in the early stages of developing a comprehensive virtual reality training program for transport staff across GM and the goal was to train a significant number of staff members, including station staff, to enhance their skills and preparedness. One of the key components of that training would be a focus on addressing coercive control, which was a particularly insidious form of gender-based violence. The initiative was part of a broader campaign that has gained considerable momentum due to its impactful message. The term "active bystander" had been redefined to "people who care," emphasising that we are not merely bystanders but individuals who actively care about and challenge inappropriate behaviour. The new terminology was more proactive and powerful, reflecting GM's commitment to fostering a safer and more supportive environment.

Members advised that increased public transport usage needed to be addressed as continuing the current path was unsustainable. Additionally, addressing cultural shifts, particularly regarding boys in our society and how we can tackle this within the 'Live Well' initiative, would be valuable to examine in more detail and possibly conduct further work on.

Councillor Hibbert emphasised the need for a cultural shift in behaviour, not just individual changes and highlighted the importance of personal responsibility rather than blaming others or expecting others (like the council) to take action. Cllr Hibbert acknowledged that certain negative behaviours were deeply embedded and often accepted in society, particularly affecting women and expressed a desire for a better society for future generations. She added that some of the issues discussed were quite specific, whilst others involved larger, systemic changes that could be addressed through major projects. It was important to recognise that this was a collective effort, not just the responsibility of one organisation and all individuals had a role to play to create an integrated transport system that was safe for everyone.

#### **RESOLVED /-**

1. That the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee relating on the draft recommendations from the GM Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Review be noted ahead of the final review being presented at the GM Overview & Scrutiny Committee taking place on 23 July 2025.
2. That a further recommendation relating to securing long term and consistent funding to enable step change to see the safety of women and girls engrained throughout the design on spaces be added.
3. That a further recommendation relating to an audit of all public transport infrastructure, starting with interchanges to identify immediate actions needed be added.