

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
GMCA OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY HELD WEDNESDAY, 20TH AUGUST 2025 AT
THE TOOTAL BUILDINGS - BROADHURST HOUSE, 1ST FLOOR, 56 OXFORD
STREET, MANCHESTER, M1 6EU**

PRESENT:

Councillor John Walsh	Bolton Council (Chair)
Councillor Peter Wright	Bolton Council
Councillor Russell Bernstein	Bury Council
Councillor Imran Rizvi	Bury Council
Councillor John Leech	Manchester City Council
Councillor Mandie Shilton Godwin	Manchester City Council
Councillor Colin McLaren	Oldham Council
Councillor Terry Smith	Rochdale Council
Councillor Dylan Williams	Rochdale Council
Councillor Maria Brabiner	Salford City Council
Councillor Lewis Nelson	Salford City Council
Councillor Helen Hibbert	Stockport Council
Councillor Sangita Patel	Tameside Council
Councillor Jill Axford	Trafford Council
Councillor Shaun Ennis	Trafford Council
Councillor Will Jones	Trafford Council
Councillor Mary Callaghan	Wigan Council

ALSO PRESENT:

Andy Burnham	Mayor of Greater Manchester
--------------	-----------------------------

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Karen Chambers	GMCA
Kate Davies	GMCA
Sarah Horseman	GMCA
Caroline Simpson	GMCA
Nicola Ward	GMCA
John Wrathmell	GMCA

O&SC 14/25

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Basil Curley (Manchester), Councillor Terry Smith (Rochdale), Councillor Tony Davies (Salford), Councillor David Sweeton (Tameside) and Councillor Samantha Brown (Wigan).

O&SC 15/25

CHAIRS ANNOUNCEMENTS AND URGENT BUSINESS

The Chair advised members to keep questions to a maximum of 1 or 2 per agenda item, to ensure there was time for everyone to ask a question.

The Chair expressed appreciation to those members who had volunteered to participate in the Task and Finish Review of Early Education and Childcare and noted that there remained an opportunity for additional members to come forward. A scoping session would be scheduled at the earliest opportunity.

Members were reminded of their obligations under the GMCA Members' Code of Conduct and were requested to complete an annual declaration of interest form, which had been emailed to them by the Governance & Scrutiny Officer.

RESOLVED /-

1. That members consider if they wish to be involved in the Task and Finish Review of Early Education and Childcare.

2. That members as per their obligation stated in the Code of Conduct would complete their Annual Declaration of Interest form and return it to the Governance & Scrutiny Officer.

O&SC 16/25

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

RESOLVED /-

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

O&SC 17/25

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD 23 JULY 2025

RESOLVED /-

That the minutes of the GMCA Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 23 July 2025 be approved as a correct and accurate record.

O&SC 18/25

GREATER MANCHESTER STRATEGY

The GM Mayor presented the report, which offered the Committee an overview of the Greater Manchester Strategy (GMS) to support the development of its work programme.

The GM Mayor reflected on the strategy and provided the Committee with an overview of how Greater Manchester (GM) was leading the way in securing and shaping English devolution and referenced the region's pioneering role in advocating for a bottom-up approach that integrated transport, housing, and skills to drive growth. He added that over the past decade, GM had achieved an average annual growth rate of 3%, with productivity increasing faster than in London. While the region had not yet reached parity with capital cities elsewhere in Europe, the trajectory was positive and continued to move in the right direction.

The GM Mayor highlighted that 85,000 new homes had been delivered during the period and significant changes had been made to the transport system. He noted that the strategy summarised these achievements and now looked ahead to the next phase, covering 2025 to 2035. The GM Mayor, alongside the ten local leaders, agreed that this was the time to be ambitious, given the current momentum in GM's economy.

The GM Mayor advised that the ambitions outlined in the GMS had the potential to represent the most significant period of growth for GM, should they be fully realised. This was not only in terms of the overall economic expansion but also in the inclusive development across all parts of the region. He added that the 10-year Investment Pipeline was developed in collaboration with local leaders and was linked to key growth locations familiar to Members. It was believed that this approach could substantially enhance the GM economy. He acknowledged that previous growth had been concentrated in specific areas, which had developed rapidly and distinctively, while other parts, particularly those on the outskirts, had seen limited change. However, it was felt that these areas now had the opportunity to benefit from the continued success of the city region's core, positioning GM for more balanced and widespread growth.

Alongside the development of the strategy, a task and finish process had been undertaken with the Government, led by the Group Chief Executive. The process was concluded following the publication of the Devolution White Paper in December 2024. A draft letter had been received from the Government, setting out the settlement arising from that process. While the letter was not yet in the public domain, it was noted that the contents provided sufficient assurance to support the strategy's ambitions. Members were informed that the pledges outlined from page 17 of the GMS reflected clear commitments to the GM public during the upcoming period. The GM Mayor emphasised that these pledges could be delivered with confidence, based on the outcomes of the negotiation process and the spending review. It was also noted that, as devolution in GM continued to mature, there was a growing need to move away from the traditional Whitehall model and adopt a more locally driven approach to governance and investment.

The GM Mayor acknowledged that deep-seated inequality remained across the city region, not everyone had been able to access the benefits of the thriving economy. As such, the strategy aimed to clearly define the fundamentals required for all residents to live a good life, which was the overarching theme of the strategy. It was emphasised that this began with housing. The time was considered right to elevate the status of housing within GM, recognising that a good life was not possible without a good home. Housing was described as the cornerstone of well-being. The “Housing First” philosophy was highlighted as a recurring and central approach, with the aspiration that it could be replicated across districts. That included building more council and social homes, supporting local authorities to do so, and improving regulation of the private rented sector through mechanisms such as the Good Landlord Charter.

The second fundamental identified was safety. It was noted that people must feel safe both within their homes and in their communities. A lack of safety was seen to undermine well-being and limit individuals’ ability to live fulfilling lives. Greater Manchester Police’s tougher stance, particularly through Operation Vulcan, was cited as a key part of tackling criminality and ensuring that no community was left to endure persistent low-level crime.

The third fundamental was connectivity. Once individuals had a good home and felt safe, it was essential that they could connect to opportunities across the city region. This had long been a strategic priority, with the Bee Network playing a central role in enabling both physical and social mobility. It was acknowledged that many young people still did not feel they had a clear path or opportunity and addressing that remained a critical focus for the next phase of work.

It was recognised that supporting residents to live well in their communities required a rethinking of practical, everyday support, particularly in light of the devolved powers available to GM. The GM Mayor advised that this support should be shaped not only through local initiatives but also through collaborative working with health service colleagues. He confirmed that GM had been accepted by the Government

as a National Prevention Demonstrator. This designation was also to be formally acknowledged in the forthcoming task and finish letter. The opportunity was seen as a significant step forward in demonstrating a new model of support, one that prioritised better homes, safer environments, improved mobility, and enhanced life chances. This approach was described as a true embodiment of prevention, which had not previously been implemented effectively at a national level. Through the “Live Well” initiative, GM aimed to lead the way in delivering this model, offering practical and meaningful support to residents.

Members noted that the strategy document was silent on potential risks, and it was agreed that identifying and addressing these risks was essential to successful delivery. The GM Mayor advised that the biggest risk to delivering the strategy was the region’s infrastructure. Over the past decade, economic growth had outpaced infrastructure development, leading to increased congestion and strain on transport systems, particularly roads, trams, buses, and the rail network. The continued reliance on outdated rail infrastructure was highlighted as a major concern, with issues such as reduced Sunday timetables deemed unacceptable for a city region of GM’s scale. He emphasised that national attitudes toward infrastructure investment needed to shift, recognising it as essential for regional growth rather than discretionary expenditure. Without proactive infrastructure planning, reputational risks could emerge, undermining housing, mobility, and broader strategic goals. The case was made for serious consideration of expanded tram-train routes and the long-term ambition for an underground system, reflecting GM’s status as the UK’s second city with a population exceeding 3 million. Skills were identified as another risk, particularly in relation to workforce development in key sectors such as digital and tech. The current education system was not yet fully aligned with the region’s economic needs, contributing to significant vacancies. The Group Chief Executive advised that engagement with the business community across sectors revealed consistent priorities, including skills and talent development, infrastructure, and connected spaces for business growth. These priorities closely aligned with the themes of the strategy, reinforcing its integrated, place-based approach. She added that, beyond practical needs, businesses placed high value on the culture, confidence, and vibrancy of GM. A strong sense of pride

and positivity in the region was seen as essential not only for growing local businesses but also for attracting and retaining talent. This cultural identity was considered a key factor in making GM a desirable place to live and work.

Members asked about investment and funding to support the "feeling safe" pledge, particularly in relation to visible policing and its impact on community reassurance and concerns were expressed about the continued shortage of police presence in local areas. The GM Mayor advised that current figures around feelings of safety were already relatively high and highlighted that Greater Manchester Police (GMP) had undergone significant improvements, with officer numbers returning to 2010 levels and a more effective approach to handling violence and domestic abuse. The leadership of Deputy Mayor Kate Green and the focused work of GMP were credited with driving genuine progress in public safety. He added that while officer numbers had returned to 2010 levels, the region's rapid growth and increased visitor numbers had significantly outpaced that recovery. It was noted that GMP had been managing high-profile operations, such as Operation Wildfire, without receiving additional funding support comparable to capital cities. He added that the lack of recognition in national funding settlements was a major challenge, with city centre pressures impacting district-level policing and called for GMP to be considered an exceptional force requiring discretionary funding. In response to these pressures, it was noted that under the new right to request powers proposed in the Devolution Bill, the GM Mayor intended to formally request the ability to introduce a visitor levy. This would provide an alternative funding mechanism to support policing and other services, reducing reliance on council taxpayers.

Members noted that it was important to ensure that outlying areas of GM were able to feel the benefits of the strategy. It was noted that while central areas have seen significant progress, some communities feel disconnected from the impact, and clarity was sought on how the strategy would address that imbalance. The GM Mayor advised that while Stockport had already benefited significantly from regeneration initiatives, the strategy now aimed to extend similar focus to other outlying areas. Middleton was confirmed as a future Mayoral Development Corporation (MDC), generating local excitement, and discussions were underway

regarding a potential MDC in Leigh and Bolton. Broader regeneration efforts were also progressing in areas such as Atom Valley and Old Trafford. Examples such as Farnworth's transformation demonstrated how targeted investment could drive meaningful change beyond the city centre, and this approach would increasingly shape the next phase of delivery.

Members asked how they could have greater visibility of upcoming agenda items to enable more meaningful contributions to the development and delivery of the strategy, noting the importance of democratic oversight. The Group Chief Executive advised that the delivery plan would be critical in demonstrating progress towards the 10-year vision outlined in the strategy and she highlighted the importance of mapping delivery across key milestones, at years 1, 4, 7, and 10, linked to clear outcomes and measured through a performance framework.

It was noted that whilst the plan would not serve as a detailed task list for every organisation across GM, it would provide a structured approach to tracking delivery of the pledges and commitments within the strategy. It was acknowledged that this was a complex process currently underway, and a draft version of the delivery plan would be brought forward for the Committee to review.

Members raised the issue of long-term unemployment among older residents, highlighting the need for the strategy to address not only young people but also those who have been out of work for extended periods. It was suggested that more focus be given to supporting these individuals into higher-quality, better-paid roles, particularly in emerging industries. The GM Mayor advised that the Economic Inactivity Trailblazer Programme was actively working with local teams and districts to identify 4,500 economically inactive individuals across GM, with a particular focus on older workers. The aim was to offer tailored support through initiatives such as the Live Well model and the Adult Education Budget, including retraining opportunities for sectors like the digital economy. A whole-person approach was seen as key to successfully engaging and transitioning individuals back into the workforce, with further work planned for the autumn to deepen that effort.

Members noted that tackling child poverty through health-related outcomes appeared to be missing from the current list of priorities. It was suggested that GM did already undertake valuable work in this area, and there was an opportunity to embed this more explicitly within the wider strategy. The GM Mayor highlighted that major drivers of child poverty, such as the two-child benefit limit and overall benefit cap, were outside local control. He suggested that GM could strengthen its approach through actions within its remit, such as reducing the number of children in temporary accommodation.

Members raised concerns regarding the potential vulnerability of the Live Well model to funding cuts, particularly in light of ongoing NHS reforms and clarification was sought on whether this issue had been considered and whether any assurances could be provided. The GM Mayor advised that concerns might be raised at the upcoming Integrated Care Partnership meeting regarding the potential direction of NHS reforms, particularly if they signal a return to a more top-down, NHS-centric approach. Such a shift could risk undermining the logic of GM's designation as a National Prevention Demonstrator. He emphasised the importance of preserving the locality-based, integrated care system, which was essential to achieving the region's prevention ambitions. Further work was acknowledged as necessary to secure and protect this model.

Members raised the need to not only continue but expand and enhance the A Bed Every Night (ABEN) programme and highlighted that it would be beneficial for ABEN to increase its capacity to support individuals with complex needs, particularly by improving access to suitable single-person accommodation. Members also raised concerns about the overuse of Homes of Multiple Occupancy (HMO's), which can be inappropriate and potentially harmful for individuals with complex needs. The GM Mayor advised that the vision for ABEN and the Housing First approach should go beyond continuation and focus on expansion and improvement, noting that the programme had grown to around 600 places. He added that a key priority was the development of suitable move-on accommodation to support individuals in progressing beyond initial support.

Members asked about the implementation of the Good Landlord Charter, specifically the right for all renters to request a property check by 2030. Clarification was sought on whether retrofit grants would be linked to landlord accreditation, to support improvements in the quality and sustainability of rented housing. The GM Mayor noted the importance of linking retrofit funding to housing standards, particularly through the Good Landlord Charter and added that GM now had greater discretion over integrated funding streams, and there was concern about allocating public money to properties where landlords fail to maintain basic building standards. Consideration would be given to the suggestion that accreditation under the Good Landlord Charter could act as a gateway to retrofit and other funding, ensuring responsible use of public resources.

Members highlighted the need for the strategy to closely monitor rising house prices and affordability challenges, noting that many residents in GM struggled to access home ownership. The GM Mayor confirmed that the plan aimed to deliver 10,000 truly affordable homes during the period, supported by a strong government settlement outlined in the Task and Finish letter, which gave confidence in delivery, with potential support from the release of public land. The Government had announced £39b for housing over ten years, with 60% allocated to council and social homes. A plan outlining our contribution had been requested by Government, and work on this was underway, offering a more substantial response to the housing pressures raised if approved.

Members raised concerns regarding the financial implications of the Bee Network, specifically the lack of clarity around how it will be funded long term and the potential cost impact on council budgets. The GM Mayor advised that maintaining a low-fare system was important due to its wider social benefits, including improved connectivity and reduced isolation. Passenger growth was noted at 15% year-on-year up to July in the initial rollout area, with further data still to be collected. He added that whilst a settled funding solution was needed, the integrated settlement might offer transitional support, including flexibility to switch transport funding from capital to revenue. Again, a potential visitor levy was mentioned as a funding option, subject to cross-party support. Although changes to the fare structure

remained an option, there was a preference to retain the current low fares and the GM Mayor suggested that the Committee could receive a more detailed briefing on Bee Network long term funding options at a future meeting.

Members noted that while smoking rates were referenced in the strategy, there was no mention of vaping rates, which are believed to still be rising. It was suggested that vaping trends should be considered as part of the region's wider public health approach. It was noted that Officers would provide the Committee with more data in relation to vaping.

Members asked how GM was ensuring that key infrastructure challenges were recognised by Government. While infrastructure was acknowledged as a major barrier to success, concerns were expressed that Whitehall may still underestimate the scale of the issue. Members emphasised the importance of making a strong, coordinated case to Government to secure the necessary support and investment. The GM Mayor provided an update on infrastructure lobbying efforts, with particular focus on securing support for a new rail line leading to an underground station at Manchester Piccadilly, aligned with the HS2 route. He added that whilst recent confirmation was received that an underground station was possible, national funding for the full scheme had not yet been secured, and local contributions might be required. A decision was expected in September regarding Northern Powerhouse Rail, following strong joint lobbying efforts with by the GM Mayor, Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM), and the business community. It was also noted that the city region received a significantly improved allocation in the latest round of the Sustainable Transport Settlement.

Members asked about the nature of the skills gap in GM and how the strategy would ensure that underemployed residents were upskilled, rather than relying on skilled individuals relocating to the region. It was also asked how potential changes to immigration policy might affect the ability to close the skills gap and meet workforce demands. The GM Mayor updated Members on the current skills gaps, with digital and tech identified as the top sectors with significant vacancies. Construction was also highlighted, with Wigan Leigh College recently designated as

a National Centre of Excellence for construction skills. Health and care were noted as areas of concern, particularly in light of recent immigration changes. Positive developments included the rollout of T-level placements in NHS settings, with Stockport NHS Foundation Trust, Royal Oldham, and The Christie all actively involved. New pathways into NHS careers from age 16 were also being explored as part of efforts to address workforce challenges. He added that whilst this did not deal with the full extent of the immigration challenge in the short term, it was part of GM's long-term answer.

Members referenced the Live Well centres and asked if extra funding would be available to develop these centres and whether the centres could be used to bridge the digital divide, especially for older people. Additionally, concerns were raised about digital exclusion, particularly in areas with limited access to broadband and digital skills, emphasising the importance of ensuring no communities were left behind. The GM Mayor referenced the work undertaken during the pandemic to connect people online and highlighted the importance of digital inclusion. It was noted that the "Live Well" initiative would continue to build on this by strengthening its digital offer, including training for residents to ensure they do not feel isolated or disconnected. The GM Mayor informed Members of recent developments in Sale West, where the NHS practice team was now based within the Live Well Centre, offering a range of support services. Digital support was highlighted as a key component, particularly in strengthening the evidence base for local delivery.

Members were updated on the August trial concerning the older people's travel concessions, during which the 9:30am travel restriction was temporarily lifted. The initiative aimed to reduce isolation by enabling earlier travel for those who might otherwise be unable to afford it. Approximately 5,000 older people and an additional 1,000 disabled people used their passes before 9:30am during the trial. Given the positive uptake, a further trial was being considered for a busier period, potentially in November, to assess the impact under normal school-term conditions. A final decision on whether to support a permanent change would follow careful evaluation of the outcomes. Members reported receiving positive feedback about the trial. The

GM Mayor welcomed this feedback and advised that the Committee would be Consulted on the outcomes prior to a further decision.

Members asked what could be done to bring more Live Well Centres forward. The GM Mayor advised that funding allocated at local authority level could be used to establish new Live Well bases. The Group Chief Executive advised that £10m had been distributed to the ten local authorities on a per capita basis and was currently being managed through locality boards. There was a commitment for 50% of this funding to flow directly to VCSE organisations and the infrastructure supporting the Live Well model. Part of the funding was also intended to support the establishment of additional Live Well centres. She added that work was ongoing to ensure longer term funding was secured. Members suggested that a briefing on the Live Well model would be timely, given that the original approach involved broad discussions and options, whereas the current model had evolved with several elements no longer in scope. An updated position would help clarify the direction and changes made.

Members discussed the importance of ensuring the strategy was inclusive and reflective of all areas, including town centres. Whilst the ambition was for everyone to be able to lead a good life by the end of the strategy period, concerns were raised that the current draft appeared to focus predominantly on Manchester City Centre, particularly in its imagery and emphasis on economic growth. A request was made for greater clarity and reassurance on how town centres were being incorporated into the strategy. The GM Mayor acknowledged that while some areas had seen more visible growth than others, the strategy aimed to reflect and include all places. The Group Chief Executive advised that work was underway to compile a pack of materials, including videos and case studies, to evidence that inclusivity and demonstrate the intent to ensure every area in GM feels part of the strategy. This pack would be shared with Members once complete.

Members raised concerns about the lack of detail in the strategy regarding budget alignment and resource planning. Specifically, members noted the absence of clarity on the financial contributions expected from each local authority, the

availability of officer capacity and how the programme would integrate with local budgets. It was also unclear how the strategy aligned with existing commitments such as Places for Everyone. Members emphasised the need to address these operational pressures to ensure each authority could meet its targets and maintain progress over the strategy period. The GM Mayor advised Members that the delivery plan would be a key mechanism for testing and refining the strategy. It was acknowledged that further support was needed for local authorities, particularly in terms of adding resource and capacity. The 10-year investment pipeline was based on building resilience at the Combined Authority level to support local authority level delivery. While funding challenges remained, especially with the impact of unfunded pressures on councils, it was noted that Live Well funding had already been distributed to districts, supporting both prevention work and NHS budgets. He added that although the strategy was ambitious, high aspirations were appropriate given the scale of the societal challenges being addressed across the ten authorities. A briefing session on the 10-year delivery plan was proposed to provide reassurance and address any concerns. The GM Mayor suggested that, over the next decade, there might be opportunities to streamline certain processes across the region, such as taxi licensing and highways, where duplication across ten authorities might not be efficient. Whilst no commitments were made, Members were encouraged to explore shared approaches that preserve local decision-making while benefiting from centralised support, in line with the strengths of devolution.

Members raised a question regarding the realism of the housing targets, noting that whilst 85,000 homes had been delivered since 2016, the new target of 75,000 by 2030 would require a 50% increase in delivery rate and sought reassurance on how achievable this level of growth would be. The GM Mayor updated Members on the significant housing growth achieved over the past decade through the Housing Investment Loans Fund. It was noted that although development had been concentrated in specific areas, the current focus was on building capacity at the GM level to support more simultaneous development across all ten districts.

Members asked if 10 years was a realistic timescale for the Live Well Centres to be up and running in all areas. The GM Mayor advised that there are already many Live Well Centres in GM that did not require formal designation, he added that many of the VCSE organisations that were operating in key areas were under pressure and could not be assumed to remain without sustained support. The ambition was to provide more consistent core funding to these organisations through the Live Well programme. The Task and Finish letter proposes that if Live Well successfully supports more people into work, a share of the resulting savings should be returned to GM and localities. This revenue model, though not yet agreed, would enable further expansion and improvement of infrastructure. The GM Mayor added that Live Well centres were to be designated across all ten boroughs as part of the initial delivery plan, supported by a wider network of partner organisations. The Live Well model was seen as a more effective, bottom-up approach to supporting people through trusted local organisations, compared to traditional top-down systems.

Members questioned how the strategy would support issues such as drug use and off-road bikes, which were prevalent in areas like Tameside. Concerns were also expressed about long NHS waiting times and patients with critical conditions and Members sought clarification on how these challenges would be addressed through the strategy. The GM Mayor advised that GMP now had the equipment needed to pursue bike-related offences, addressing the previous gap in capability. The prevalence of drug use was acknowledged as a growing societal issue, with associated criminality posing significant challenges. Operation Vulcan was recommended as a key initiative tackling serious crime in areas such as Cheetham Hill and Piccadilly Gardens, though further work was needed to address everyday issues across the region. He added that issues such as drug use and antisocial behaviour were often symptoms of deeper, entrenched problems. GMP was working to identify and target areas where those issues created a climate of fear for residents. Operation Vulcan would continue to support enforcement across all boroughs. The approach combined tough policing with preventative work through Live Well, aiming to provide young people with positive pathways and reduce the risk of involvement in criminal activity. The GM Mayor informed Members that the

Live Well model aimed to divert non-clinical cases away from NHS services by addressing social needs through trusted local support. Many individuals currently contacting GPs or attending A&E could be better supported through Live Well, helping to ease pressure on NHS systems. The Department of Health and Social Care has shown interest in this approach, designating GM as a Prevention Demonstrator. He added that the strategy integrates Live Well with housing, transport, and other services to create a broader prevention framework, which will be tested over the coming period.

RESOLVED /-

1. That the content of the Greater Manchester Strategy be noted.
2. That the Overview & Scrutiny Committee consider how the Greater Manchester Strategy could inform the work programme of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
3. That a draft version of the GMS 10-year delivery plan would be brought to a future meeting for the Overview & Scrutiny Committee to review.
4. That the Overview & Scrutiny Committee would receive a more detailed briefing on Bee Network funding options at a future meeting.
5. That Officers would provide the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with more data in relation to vaping.
6. That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be involved in the decision-making process in relation to any future changes to the older people's travel concessions.
7. That a future report on the Live Well model would be arranged for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
8. That the media pack of materials, including videos and case studies, for the Greater Manchester Strategy be shared with Members.

O&SC 19/25

GMCA INTEGRATED SETTLEMENT

John Wrathmell, Group Director of Strategy, provided the Committee with an update on GMCA's Integrated Settlement.

The Group Director provided background on the flexible funding received from the Government following the Trailblazer Deal signed three years ago with the previous administration. He advised that the funding forms part of the Integrated Settlement, which allocates resources directly to GM across various areas of responsibility. It was noted that the arrangement offered increased flexibility in how the funding was distributed, bypassing traditional departmental routes.

The Group Director outlined the current year's settlement, which covered five key areas: housing, local transport, skills, economic regeneration, and retrofit and noted that ongoing efforts to expand into further areas, particularly around prevention and the Live Well model. He added that while the funding offered flexibility, it remained subject to parameters on how much could be reallocated between policy areas and required delivery of agreed outcomes through a national outcomes framework. However, there was greater flexibility in how those outcomes were achieved. The settlement applied only to the current financial year, limiting multi-year planning opportunities. A key benefit was streamlined reporting, with only one return required to Government rather than multiple programme-level reports. It was noted that a report on the delivery plan was scheduled to be presented to the Committee in October.

The Group Director informed the Committee that the settlement enabled new cross-policy working, such as linking transport with housing or aligning business support programmes. Flexibilities included switching capital to revenue funding and vice versa and advised that further updates would be brought back to the Committee. He added that the current settlement covered only one financial year, limiting multi-year planning. However, the next spending review, starting in April and spanning three years, was expected to offer greater opportunities to align funding with strategic priorities set out in the Greater Manchester Strategy (GMS). It was noted that Government was in the process of determining which recent announcements would fall within the scope of the settlement, which would inform funding levels for the next period. A final funding figure was expected by the end of the year. Risks

were identified around potential delays in confirmation, which could complicate budget-setting processes, though these would be managed accordingly.

The Group Director advised that ongoing negotiations were taking place with Government regarding the next round of agreed outcomes linked to future funding. Priorities for negotiation included aligning outcomes with the GMS, focusing on meaningful changes for residents and businesses rather than programme-level outputs, and minimising the number of indicators reported back. Efforts were also being made to secure greater devolution in areas such as employment and retrofit, moving beyond delegated delivery of national programmes. Additionally, there was a push to agree cross-cutting outcomes, such as decarbonisation, spanning multiple policy areas to encourage integrated local delivery.

Members asked in terms of flexibility, were there any examples of what GM could not do that it wanted to and how much funding was available for infrastructure. J The Group Director advised that the settlement included flexibility to transfer funding between policy areas, supporting delivery of the GMS. The most impactful flexibility to date had been the ability to move away from rigid national programme structures, allowing more integrated and efficient local delivery, for example, combining investment zone funding with support for digital manufacturing. While year-to-year carryover of funding was not yet in place, future multi-year settlements were expected to enable this, helping address common delivery challenges such as staffing and continuity. Looking ahead to 2026–27 and beyond, a more strategic and joined-up approach to using funding flexibilities was anticipated. The Group Chief Finance Officer advised that while the infrastructure funding within the settlement was not new or additional, it now flowed through the integrated settlement, allowing for greater flexibility. Of the £630m allocated, 61% supported major infrastructure programmes, including housing, brownfield land, and transport. The £2.5b for transport city regions, to be delivered over seven years, would also be managed through this framework. Flexibilities included the ability to allocate up to 10% as revenue and to coordinate infrastructure funding across multiple sectors. Although the integrated settlement represented less than half of GMCA's total funding, it enabled more strategic planning. Future infrastructure delivery would

require aligning various funding streams beyond the settlement to meet GM's ambitions.

Members asked whether the Government could potentially override GM's spending decisions under the settlement, particularly if they disagreed with how funds were being used, and concerns were expressed about possible caveats or limitations that might reduce the flexibility initially promised. The Group Director confirmed that a Government policy paper published in July outlined how the settlement would operate and under what conditions intervention could occur, offering some protection for local flexibility. However, it was acknowledged that departments were still adjusting to this new approach, and there remained a risk of informal controls or resistance. Ongoing engagement with Government would be needed to safeguard GM's ability to deliver outcomes without unnecessary additional interference.

A question was raised about GM's transport infrastructure, highlighting issues caused by population growth and congestion, particularly around the M60. Members welcomed investment in rail and underground systems and asked what further action was being taken to expand transport infrastructure across the North of England. Concerns were also expressed about regional funding disparities compared to London and the South East.

The Group Chief Executive acknowledged that transport infrastructure funding, whilst generous in parts, remained insufficient given GM's growth potential and decades of underinvestment. Local issues, such as congestion on the M60, were highlighted as barriers to unlocking further development. The GM Mayor's collaboration with Liverpool City Region leaders aimed to redirect funding from HS2 into upgrading the Liverpool–Manchester line, supported by private sector engagement. While upcoming Government announcements on northern infrastructure were expected, it was emphasised that GM's ambitions far exceeded current funding levels, and a more substantial, long-term investment was needed.

Members emphasised that strong local infrastructure was essential, particularly to support business growth and connect it with local training, education, and

employment. Concerns were raised about the need to monitor how businesses use funding, ensuring they invest in and retain local workers. The importance of collective bargaining and protecting local communities was highlighted to help improve residents' quality of life. Members highlighted that support for people with long-term health conditions needed to be protected, particularly for those who want to work but struggle to maintain employment. Based on long-term experience, it was noted that individuals were often given opportunities but lose them quickly, underscoring the need for more sustainable and supportive approaches. The Group Director explained that the integrated settlement provided valuable flexibility by removing the need to follow rigid national programme structures, allowing GM to respond more effectively to local challenges and priorities. A key example was the ability to join up services, such as skills and employment, into a single, coherent response. The prevention demonstrator was highlighted as a successful model of integration. Looking ahead, GM was pressing for more national programmes to be included within the settlement to expand this flexibility, particularly in areas like unemployment support and early years provision.

Members stressed the importance of receiving clear reports and appropriate tools to enable effective scrutiny, especially in relation to financial strategy. The Group Chief Executive advised that it was important that we move beyond the high-level principles and start getting into the detail. She added that this was now part of our annual GM budget-setting process, and the integrated settlement should be seen as one element within that broader context. Looking at it in isolation does not reflect the scale of integration GM were aiming for. This year's process should feel different because of the settlement, even if it was not yet as streamlined as GM would like.

The Chair advised the Committee that before the meeting, he had spoken with Officers about reviewing the remit of the Committee in relation to the Audit Committee to ensure proper integration and avoid duplication and added that given that GM was still in the early stages of this process and working within a single-year settlement, it was important to develop a more in-depth approach. The Chair advised that he would continue that conversation with Officers.

RESOLVED /-

1. That that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the update on the Integrated Settlement and agree that an update should follow in the autumn prior to the outcome's framework being agreed when at a more advanced stage.
2. That the Chair would continue discussions with Officers on reviewing the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's remit in relation to the Audit Committee to ensure integration and avoid duplication, and to support a more in-depth approach during the early stages of the single-year settlement.

O&SC 20/25

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME & FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS

Officers asked the Committee to review the forward plan and work programme in order to identify key areas for deeper scrutiny, including elements of the Greater Manchester Strategy and Integrated Settlement. Members were invited to submit suggestions via a digital work programming form, considering alignment with strategic priorities, relevance to residents, and the Committee's added value. Several potential topics were noted during the meeting, with further contributions welcomed throughout the year.

Members suggested that refuge, including cross boarder usage of recycling centres and fly tipping, taxi licencing would be areas to explore along with a series of briefings on each of the GMS pledges. Other proposals were social care, strategic rail, skills shortages in GM, especially in light of immigration changes with a focus on upskilling our local workforce rather than relying solely on skilled workers from outside the region and how to reduce the risk of flooding.

RESOLVED /-

1. That the proposed Overview & Scrutiny Work Programme for August 2025 - October 2025 be noted.
2. That Members use the Forward Plan of Key Decisions to identify any potential areas for further scrutiny.
3. That Members to complete the digital work programming form, which will be circulated via email following the meeting.
4. That suggestions made during the meeting to be incorporated into the Committee's work programme.

O&SC 21/25

FUTURE MEETING DATES

RESOLVED /-

That the following dates for the rest of the municipal year be noted:

- Wednesday 24 September 2025
- Wednesday 29 October 2025
- Wednesday 26 November 2025
- Wednesday 10 December 2025
- Wednesday 28 January 2026
- Wednesday 11 February 2026
- Wednesday 25 February 2026
- Wednesday 25 March 2026