

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE  
GMCA OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY HELD WEDNESDAY 28 JANUARY 2026 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 Mohammed Ayub	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 Colin McLaren	Oldham Council
Councillor Ken Rustidge	Oldham Council
Councillor Dylan Williams	Rochdale Council
Councillor Terry Smith	Rochdale Council
Councillor Tony Davies	Salford City Council
Councillor Lewis Nelson	Salford City Council
Councillor Helen Hibbert	Stockport Council
Councillor David Sweeton	Tameside Council
Councillor Jill Axford	Trafford Council
Councillor Nathan Evans	Trafford Council
Councillor Mary Callaghan	Wigan Council
Councillor Debra Wailes	Wigan Council

**ALSO PRESENT:**

Andy Burnham	Mayor of Greater Manchester
Dame Sarah Storey	Greater Manchester Active Travel Commissioner

## **OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:**

Karen Chambers	Senior Governance and Scrutiny Officer, GMCA
Richard Nickson	Network Director, Active Travel, TfGM
Caroline Simpson	Group Chief Executive, GMCA, GMFRS & TfGM
Danny Vaughan	Chief Network Officer, TfGM
Nicola Ward	Statutory Scrutiny Officer, GMCA
Steve Wilson	Group Chief Finance Officer

## **O&SC 54/25**

## **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Sangita Patel (Tameside), Councillor Shaun Ennis (Trafford), Councillor Will Jones (Trafford) and Councillor Garry Lloyd (Wigan).

Apologies were also received from Gillian Duckworth, Group Solicitor and Monitoring Officer, GMCA, GMFRS & TfGM.

## **O&SC 55/25**

## **CHAIRS ANNOUNCEMENTS AND URGENT BUSINESS**

To ensure all members had the opportunity to contribute, the Chair advised that questions should be limited to one or two per agenda item, with additional questions to be taken at the end of the meeting if time permitted.

The Chair informed the Committee that this was Nicola Ward's final meeting before she moves into her new role as Principal Policy Officer in the Live Well Team. He expressed the Committee's gratitude for the outstanding contribution she has made to its work.

**RESOLVED /-**

That the Chair's announcements be noted.

**O&SC 56/25**

**DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

**RESOLVED /-**

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

**O&SC 57/25**

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 10  
DECEMBER 2025**

**RESOLVED /-**

That the minutes of the GMCA Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 10 December 2025 be approved as a correct and accurate record.

**O&SC 58/25**

**Active Travel Annual Report**

The Greater Manchester Active Travel Commissioner, Dame Sarah Storey, attended the meeting to present the Annual Active Travel Report for 2025 to Members. She highlighted several key metrics demonstrating progress towards Greater Manchester's (GM's) wider strategic targets. She noted that the Active Travel Mission continued to play a central role in achieving the GM Strategy's ambition for 50% of all journeys to be made by sustainable modes by 2040, while also supporting the Vision Zero strategy and wider health outcomes through encouraging more active lives.

The Active Travel Commissioner explained that since the launch of the Bee Network's active travel programme in 2018, significant progress had been made. Public perception of the transport system's ability to support walking and cycling

had risen from 31% in 2018, to 50% in 2024, although this had dipped slightly to 47% in 2025, demonstrating the need to maintain momentum and address barriers faced by both residents and local authorities.

Members were reminded that the mission was organised around five themes:

- Infrastructure
- School travel
- Integration with public transport
- Road danger reduction
- Access to active travel

Across all themes, the Bee Network continued to operate on the principle of universal accessibility, with regular engagement with the Disability Design Reference Group informing design and user experience. The Active Travel Commissioner emphasised that where infrastructure was delivered, walking and cycling increased, highlighting the suppressed demand among groups who may not vocalise their needs.

Under the infrastructure theme, she reported that 161 km of Bee Network standard cycling infrastructure had now been delivered. Work had also taken place to improve the way progress was measured, noting that walking improvements, often delivered as part of other schemes, had historically been under-recorded. The decision to develop a dedicated walking strategy and delivery plan within the Local Transport Plan was welcomed as an important step.

Regarding cycling, GM Local Authorities had contributed extensively to the identification of a Strategic Cycle Network. A realistic target of delivering up to 50 km per year of connected cycling routes was considered essential for supporting mode shift and improving links with public transport. It was noted that 90% of public transport users walked as part of their journey, underpinning the importance of better facilities such as cycle parking, crossings, and high-quality bus stop bypass designs.

On school travel, the Active Travel Commissioner confirmed that 39 School Streets were currently active, with an expectation of reaching 60 by the end of the academic year and meeting the mayoral target of 100 by 2028. She described recent visits to several schemes and expressed appreciation for the ambition shown by local authorities in trialling diverse and often complex layouts to deliver safer school environments.

Turning to access to active travel, she highlighted the range of opportunities now available, including cycle training, cycle libraries, loan schemes, and GM's Inclusive Cycling Network. Visits to inclusive cycling centres in Tameside and Leigh had demonstrated the growing demand for such provision. She also referenced the ongoing performance of the cycle hire scheme, which continued to record strong usage despite challenges arising from vandalism. Decisions on future expansion, particularly of e-bikes, would be carefully considered alongside maintenance capacity and efforts to attract more women and girls to cycling.

On road danger reduction, she explained that safety perceptions continued to influence travel choices, especially for women and girls. The creation of the Safer Transport Command was noted as a significant development intended to support improvements in safety and confidence across the network.

It was reported that 52% of journeys in GM were 2 km or less, with 55% of these walked, and cycling increasing from 2% in 2022 to 3% in 2024. TRADS survey data also showed that more residents reported walking for health benefits than in previous years. Continued investment in crossings and pedestrian phases would support this trend.

Members' attention was drawn to the financial summary in the report, which outlined the complex funding landscape and the continued need for sustained capital and revenue investment to maximise the benefits of the Bee Network. She noted that the report also included recommendations for 2026, covering improved monitoring and evaluation, enhanced accessibility, expansion of activation programmes, and development of clearer metrics for tracking progress.

The Active Travel Commissioner thanked all local authorities for their contributions throughout the year and emphasised her commitment to ongoing engagement and support. She looked forward to building on the progress made and continuing delivery at pace over the next 12 months.

Members welcomed the report's proposal to separate the approaches to walking and cycling, recognising that the needs of the two groups were often different and required careful, location-specific consideration.

Members also expressed concern that, despite significant work and investment, mode-shift rates had not improved substantially, and that the continuing growth in car ownership across the city region made behaviour change feel increasingly difficult to achieve. Particular concern was raised regarding the increase in people killed or seriously injured, and Members highlighted the absence of analysis within the report on the impact of the rising size and weight of private vehicles, which they felt posed increasing risks on narrow urban streets with high car ownership and limited space. Members requested that this issue be addressed more firmly in future work. The Active Travel Commissioner emphasised the need to reduce the number of vehicles on the road and noted that the Vision Zero paper was due to be presented at the Bee Network Committee the following day. While acknowledging that individual choices around car ownership and vehicle size could not be controlled, stated that road design and the delivery of ambitious schemes were key to providing alternatives and encouraging fewer short car journeys. She advised that across the region, 52% of journeys under 2 km had been made on foot, and cycling had increased by 50%, supported by the expansion of the cycling network by around 20–25 km in the previous year and suggested that increasing this to around 50 km annually would help create a denser, more connected active travel network, enabling more people to choose not to travel by car. She recognised that achieving this would be challenging and highlighted major upcoming schemes, such as Oldham Road and other radial routes, as crucial components of the network. Collaboration within and between local authorities was described as essential to bring forward the most ambitious designs and ensure clarity during consultation, reducing the likelihood of schemes being altered and protecting space for walking

and cycling. She also referenced the update on pavement parking included in the national Road Safety Strategy, with further detail expected over the following year from Central Government and the Department for Transport and expressed hope that GM would be able to shape how the new guidance would operate locally. Members were advised that the Vision Zero paper addressed concern about the 2024 casualty figures, while noting early indications of improvement for 2025, subject to reporting delays from the Department for Transport. The Active Travel Commissioner reaffirmed GM's continued commitment to reducing the number of people killed or seriously injured on the region's roads.

On school travel, Members stressed the need to ensure children's safety for the full duration of their journey, not solely within School Street zones. They noted that many pupils travelled further than the immediate school area and suggested that access to free public transport for school pupils should be explored to reduce car-based school journeys and improve safety for all road users, including those travelling by active modes.

Members also raised concerns about school streets, noting that although they increased awareness, many parents continued to drive their children to school, often parking slightly further away rather than choosing active travel. They emphasised the need for safer streets overall, alongside more initiatives such as walking buses, which they felt were currently too limited in number.

On school travel, Members stressed the need to ensure children's safety throughout their entire journey, not just within designated School Street zones. They observed that many pupils travel beyond the immediate school area, highlighting the importance of exploring access to free public transport for school pupils as a means of reducing car-based journeys and improving safety for all road users, including those using active modes. Members further raised concerns that, while School Streets have raised awareness, many parents still opt to drive their children to school, often parking slightly farther away instead of choosing active travel. They emphasised the pressing need for safer streets overall and called for

the expansion of initiatives such as walking buses, which they felt were currently too limited in number.

The Active Travel Commissioner acknowledged that balancing differing community views was challenging, particularly where schemes supported safe routes for high-school pupils but generated concerns from other residents and stressed that while parental choices around driving could not be controlled, the wider approach to school travel needed to be developed in stages: starting with improvements immediately around schools, then delivering supporting crossings, and ultimately addressing the full range of parental journey patterns, recognising that families often combined school travel with onward trips for work, childcare, or other purposes.

Members commented that, despite recent investment in infrastructure, many people were still not cycling because the roads did not feel safe. They expressed concern that cars continued to have priority at most junctions and crossings, and that pedestrians often had to wait a long time to cross, with drivers no longer routinely stopping for them. Members felt that until these safety issues were addressed, a wider shift to active travel would be unlikely.

Members queried how cycling data was being collected, noting the absence of dedicated bicycle traffic counts and highlighting the need for better information to understand cycling levels across the area. Officers addressed how journeys were counted and how scheme benefits were monitored. They explained that the current mode-share measure was a blunt instrument based on travel-diary data from approximately 2,000–2,500 households. Officers confirmed that every scheme included comprehensive pre- and post-implementation monitoring, and while reporting currently showed limited examples, ongoing evaluation would continue to surface benefits. They stressed the importance of hyper-local data to evidence mode shift at neighbourhood level and asked all local authorities to participate in collecting and returning this information; the team would prioritise supporting colleagues to strengthen this evidence over the year ahead.

Members questioned potential positive bias in the report authored by the Active Travel Commissioner and asked what independent sense-checks had been applied to balance the perspective. Officers explained that care had been taken to ensure impartiality. They noted that although the report was authored by the team on behalf of the Active Travel Commissioner, the underlying data was collected independently by the Transport Strategy and Insight Team. This included tools such as the Network Principles Survey, which was an open survey reaching around 5,000 households and asked residents about their experiences of the network. Officers stated that this approach was intended to capture a representative sense of how people felt and what they experienced when travelling.

Members highlighted local concern about two large active travel schemes imposed despite resident opposition, citing examples where infrastructure was perceived as under-used and had removed parking and affected access (including to a church). Members asked whether there was a mechanism to “unpick” schemes found not to be working, or whether the approach amounted to forcing travel patterns that communities did not want. The Active Travel Commissioner acknowledged the location referenced and explained that the crossing near the church had originally been campaigned for by local schoolchildren, who had presented their case to the council over several years. She emphasised the benefits it had brought to students travelling to and from school. She explained that part of the ongoing work involved understanding and “unpicking” the purposes of wider journeys, particularly those linked to work, and identifying how the network could be improved to support onward trips for all users. She highlighted the scheme across the A56, noting a recent visit in which vehicles were observed driving through red lights at the sparrow crossing, requiring schoolchildren to remain especially alert. She stressed that addressing driver behaviour was essential, especially given the recent rise in those killed or seriously injured, and that such facilities were designed specifically to counter those trends. Officers noted that the referenced crossing formed part of a wider plan to address around 2,000 severance points across the Bee Network for people walking, wheeling, using pushchairs, and cycling. Assessments considered both site-specific outcomes, which might be modest in some locations, and the aggregate impact on reducing road danger by tackling missing facilities. Around

200 similar improvements had been delivered, beginning to change how the road network functioned for priority modes, particularly pedestrians and those without access to a car, as well as cyclists.

The Active Travel Commissioner reported that the active travel scheme through Stretford, initially trialled under emergency Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) during COVID, was now heavily used and had shown no negative impact on bus or private car journey times. From junction 2 at the M60 to Manchester Cathedral, a fully protected route was now in place, a significant achievement originally introduced to help key workers and others who could not work from home travel safely during the pandemic.

Officers cautioned that benefits should be viewed in the context of an incomplete network, currently around 5–6% of the planned future network and about 20% of the strategic network, so some sections would only show full value once connected. They advised that time was needed to deliver aggregate changes in driver behaviour and pedestrian facilities, and noted that the third annual report had begun to reveal benefits at network level.

Members highlighted a potential disconnect between the long-term aims of the wider network and the immediate impact experienced by residents, particularly where schemes resulted in changes to access or reduced parking. Members noted that some residents did not always see the link between short school-run car journeys, congestion, and the measures being introduced to encourage walking. They added that concerns often focused on the loss of parking or perceived lack of benefit at individual junctions, without recognising the improvements for pedestrians, including those who were partially sighted, wheelchair users, or pushing prams.

Members reported receiving similar correspondence from residents about changes along major routes and felt that some communities believed money was being spent with no visible impact, despite schemes delivering important benefits for other users. They suggested that improved communication was needed to help residents

understand the purpose of interventions, the groups they supported, and how they contributed to the overall network and that responsibility lay in designing consultations in a way that brought communities into the process. The Active Travel Commissioner stated that the original Beelines plan was still being delivered, although it was never intended to be completed quickly and recalled that the Beelines brand had later been revised due to trademark issues, leading to the adoption of the Bee Network name, but emphasised that the underlying 2018 active travel plan remained in place. She explained that the network had originally been developed through collective work across local authorities, mapping out routes and identifying opportunities, and that local authorities and their officers retained responsibility for bringing forward schemes based on that knowledge. The consultation phase was described as the point at which communities could review whether what had been proposed originally, and what had since evolved, still aligned with current needs.

Members expressed interest in understanding more about the earlier reference to improving the granularity of data, particularly in relation to walking. They welcomed the volume of data and statistics included in the report but agreed that there was a need to drill down further to a more local level. Members also acknowledged the importance of considering what could be done within their own local areas to support more detailed data collection.

Members observed that, within wider transport discussions, the strategy often appeared to be engineer-led rather than community-led. They referred to previous extensive engagement work undertaken as part of the Beelines project, during which communities had contributed many meaningful ideas on improving walking, cycling and public transport access, but noted that this had ultimately resulted in no delivered schemes and expressed concern that current processes continued to limit early community involvement, citing a recent active travel proposal where the only opportunity for residents to participate was through objections at the TRO stage. By that point, residents felt that decisions had been made without them, reducing the potential for co-designed and more impactful schemes.

Members reiterated that lived experience was often missing from active travel and transport planning, despite strong support for modal shift. They stressed that a more balanced approach, combining technical expertise with genuine community participation, would lead to better outcomes. They noted that the GMCA had recently launched a participation playbook and suggested that its principles should be embedded in active travel and transport planning to ensure greater alignment with community needs. The Active Travel Commissioner emphasised the importance of lived experience in shaping the network and noted that the report already included several case studies demonstrating how people were using the Bee Network for both multimodal and single-mode journeys, and referenced the “It’s Your Move” campaign as further evidence of public engagement. She stated that it was not an engineer-led approach and highlighted that placemaking was as central to the work as creating journey options. She explained that different communities had varying needs, citing the contrast between new developments such as Victoria North and older, denser neighbourhoods built around former industrial areas. As a result, she acknowledged that consultation methods needed continual review and encouraged both the Active Travel team and local authorities to keep evolving their approaches. She added that feedback often came predominantly from those who were unhappy, and encouraged finding ways to draw out positive experiences, particularly from young people who benefitted from crossings and school-street schemes but might feel they had no voice. She explained that highlighting such positive engagement would help shape future steps and improve the overall consultation process. Officers reported that they had worked closely with local authority staff on the use of “framing” to position schemes clearly and explain their purpose. However, they acknowledged that when schemes resurfaced many years later at the TRO stage, much of the original context and community engagement could be lost. Officers agreed this was a valid concern and undertook to reflect on it as part of developing the new Local Transport Plan. Officers highlighted that the report contained extensive information on engagement and communication between pages 39 and 49. They noted that significant work had been undertaken both at GM level and within local authorities, involving thousands of people through cycling groups, walking and wheeling groups, and the UK’s largest inclusive cycling network, which had recently received national recognition.

Officers explained that while strategic delivery inevitably followed an engineered approach, substantial effort had been made to balance this with lived-experience content, reflected in the latter sections of the report.

Members raised concerns about the monitoring and evaluation of schemes. They noted that, although it had been stated that every scheme was fully monitored, the report indicated that this was not happening consistently. Members questioned who was responsible for overseeing monitoring and evaluating impacts, particularly on surrounding local streets. They highlighted that schemes were often introduced to address specific issues without sufficient consideration of wider network effects. Members also raised recurring concerns about Cyclops junctions, observing that some cyclists did not use them as intended and that design issues, such as turning movements for buses, were not being picked up through evaluation. Officers explained that monitoring and evaluation for the active travel programme had been delivered in two parts. They noted that the original Mayor's Challenge Fund required each local authority to produce individual evaluation plans for every scheme. More recent funding from Active Travel England had introduced a centralised monitoring approach. Officers reported that, recognising the pressures on local authorities through the wider CRSTS programme, they planned to take a more active role in analysing local-level data in the coming year. They confirmed that they would engage directly with local authority teams to review what had happened at specific locations and help lift some of the burden from colleagues by supporting the collection and interpretation of monitoring data. Officers reported that drone evaluations had been carried out at several Cyclops junctions, noting that designs varied between locations. They stated that the analysis showed the vast majority of users were following the intended routes. Officers reminded the Committee that cyclists were not legally required to use designated cycle lanes, meaning some confident riders would continue to use the carriageway. They also acknowledged issues where some cyclists used pedestrian facilities, suggesting that an education campaign would help address this behaviour. Officers emphasised that the findings did not indicate a flaw in junction design but reflected variations in user behaviour, similar to non-compliance observed among some drivers. They added that Vivacity cameras were also used to monitor movement

patterns, which confirmed that most users navigated the junctions correctly, although misuse by a minority remained a source of frustration for both pedestrians and cyclists.

Members requested clarification on decisions and processes for allocating the remaining unallocated funds. Officers explained that, under the move to a single-settlement funding approach, work was underway with the GM Transport Commissioner to accelerate decisions on allocating the full block of Transforming Cities funding. They noted that closing out schemes within a £300m capital programme had identified pockets of unspent funding, and the next step was to determine how this should be redistributed. Officers confirmed that discussions were taking place with Directors of Place and highways teams across all local authorities to agree allocations. They added that some of the funding would be used for remedial works in locations where schemes were not yet performing to the expected standard, such as areas affected by drainage, surfacing, or safety issues, and that councils would be engaged to identify priority sites.

Members reported that some residents had expressed the view that they still needed to use a car and stressed the importance of ensuring that reports and future work maintained balance. They commented that while active travel was important, car users also had to be considered and that the approach should not be perceived as anti-car. Officers noted that they fully recognised the need for people to use cars and confirmed that achieving the right balance was central to the Local Transport Plan. They explained that the aim was to ensure an appropriate mix of modes, including considerations of modal space and modal share.

Members referred to the section of the report relating to speed cameras and asked how such measures could be implemented. They highlighted ongoing issues with speeding vehicles, including cars, vans and motorcycles, and stressed that these behaviours contributed significantly to accidents and fatalities. Members emphasised that while other improvements were welcome, road-safety enforcement also needed to be considered as part of the wider approach. Officers noted that the discussion on safety-camera criteria related closely to the Vision Zero plan, which

was due to be considered by the Bee Network Committee the following day. They confirmed that previous programmes had funded the reinstatement of safety cameras and that earlier presentations to the Committee had outlined how this work would be taken forward. Officers emphasised that managing the safety of bus operations and the wider road network remained essential and that these issues would be addressed in detail within the Vision Zero and Bee Network Safety Plan.

Members raised concerns about school drop-off and pick-up issues, noting that while the report proposed restrictions, these would not be effective without proper enforcement of parking controls. Members asked for views on how such enforcement could be strengthened to ensure the success of school-related safety measures. Officers explained that work was underway with local authority colleagues to develop suitable approaches for enforcing school-street schemes. They stressed that there would be no centralised model and that enforcement needed to be locally driven and tailored to each area, whether through cameras, staff presence, or other methods. Officers also noted that, following the recently adopted school travel strategy, future investment through the Local Transport Plan would need to consider not only school-street enforcement but also improvements to the wider surroundings of schools, developed from the ground up through local implementation plans.

Members sought clarification on the integration of transport access to hospitals across the conurbation. They reflected on how, historically, council-run bus services had provided extensive night-time coverage that supported workers such as nurses travelling to and from shifts. Members noted that although bus service quality had declined during the period of privatisation, improvements had been seen since the introduction of the Bee Network. Members gave examples of older residents now being able to reach key sites such as Rochdale Infirmary and The Christie more easily by bus and tram. However, they expressed concern that as healthcare facilities were being reorganised across GM, particularly following recent discussions regarding services at North Manchester, there was a need to ensure that transport access to hospitals remained properly integrated across the whole city-region. It was noted that this report focused solely on active travel and not other

transport modes. This was because the Local Transport Plan covered all modes, but the purpose of this report was specifically to extract and present the elements relating to active travel. Officers reported that work was ongoing across bus, rail and tram services, with a particular focus on improving pedestrian access to bus stops as part of wider bus-network upgrades. They explained that many bus schemes now included measures to enhance crossings and ensure stops were accessible. Officers also noted that a small allocation of funding was being used to deliver minor highway improvements around several rail stations.

Members commented that the report had prompted them to review their own local statistics, and they were alarmed by the increase in fatalities. They noted that local authority officers had suggested road behaviours had worsened since COVID, and this aligned with the volume of complaints they received about speeding, poor driver conduct, and unsafe parking around schools. Members also highlighted that many residents wanted to cycle but felt it was too dangerous, sometimes due to difficulties at specific crossings. They recalled earlier task-and-finish group discussions on behaviour change and asked what more could be done, working alongside GMP and partners, to address driver behaviour, which they felt was not adequately recognising the importance of road safety. Officers noted that they could not confirm whether driver behaviour had changed, as this was difficult to measure objectively. They highlighted that the Government had recently published its first National Road Safety Strategy in a decade and encouraged members to respond to the consultation. Officers confirmed that Transport for Greater Manchester would be submitting a coordinated response with district partners and were undertaking wider stakeholder engagement with third-sector and interest groups.

Officers also reminded the committee that GM had already adopted a Vision Zero approach and that further updates, including the Bee Network Safety Plan, would be published the following day. They emphasised that concerns about road safety and fear of collisions heavily influenced whether people chose to walk, wheel or cycle, often leading them to opt for car travel. Officers stressed the need to better understand these behavioural dynamics.

They noted that the National Road Safety Strategy called for improved national communication campaigns, observing that public “Think!”-style messaging had largely disappeared in recent years. Officers added that new approaches, such as graduated driver licensing now being introduced in Northern Ireland, were emerging as potential tools to help improve driver behaviour.

Members suggested that more could be done to encourage walking around schools, noting that parents often felt conditions were not safe for children. They also highlighted that an ageing population and limited public transport meant some residents still needed to rely on cars. Members stressed the importance of a balanced approach that did not demonise car use. They raised concerns about cycle-lane design in some locations, noting examples where lanes appeared wider than the adjacent car lane and were rarely used. Members felt that cycling infrastructure should not unnecessarily restrict vehicle movement and that a more balanced 50/50 approach between modes was needed.

Members highlighted the value of GM's loop-line network, particularly in outer areas, but noted that many routes felt unsafe due to poor lighting, lack of CCTV, dog fouling and fly-tipping. They stressed that these issues affected confidence in using the routes, especially for women, girls and children travelling to school, and during darker winter months. Members felt that improving safety on loop lines required joint work between the GMCA, local authorities and the police, and suggested that future reports should set out how public safety and confidence in these assets could be strengthened. Officers noted the point raised about opportunities within GM's green and blue networks and highlighted positive results from recent schemes such as the Welly Loop and Standish Loop in Wigan, where significant growth in walking and wheeling had been observed. They explained that when areas were designed with a strong placemaking approach, they saw substantial increases in active travel linked to health and wellbeing. Officers added that this year's analysis showed that people's motivations for walking and cycling were strongly health-driven. They emphasised that active travel work supported wider GM health priorities through partnerships with GM Moving and investment in

greenways, including upgrades to routes such as the Fallowfield Loop, helping to integrate lifestyle and transport choices.

Members noted that fewer pupils used active travel to get to school in the past year. They asked whether there was any evidence explaining the decline and what work was underway to address it. Officers reported that there was no specific evidence explaining the recent changes in school-travel percentages, but suggested that COVID-related factors in 2021–22 may have influenced travel patterns, with more parents working from home and able to support school journeys. They noted that as commuting had returned closer to pre-pandemic norms, travel patterns had also begun to stabilise. Officers added that the report showed an increase in short general walking trips and a reduction in short car journeys, indicating some degree of behavioural shift. They explained that such changes could take around 90 days to embed, and that both short-term and longer-term effects of the pandemic had influenced travel behaviour across the wider network.

Members commented that the process for local authorities to put forward schemes for the Active Travel Fund has on some occasions created tension between communities and the proposals being developed. They encouraged a review of the process to enable genuinely community-led input at a much earlier stage, before significant design costs were incurred. Officers acknowledged that some earlier Bee Network schemes had taken a long time to progress, which had contributed to a sense of predetermined outcomes. They noted that as the programme moved into the next phase, particularly under the single integrated settlement and the new Local Transport Plan, they aimed to return to a “ground-up” approach through local implementation plans. Officers agreed that stronger local ownership of outcomes was essential and that quicker scheme development would help maintain the link between early conversations and delivery. They added that the emerging local Bee Network Committees could play a greater role in supporting smoother and faster progression of schemes.

The Chair referred to the National Road Safety Strategy consultation and asked that the formulated response be circulated to all members. The Chair noted that this

would support the discussion held at the meeting and ensure members could see the responses being submitted by the Combined Authority.

**RESOLVED /-**

1. That the comments of the GM Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the Greater Manchester Annual Active Travel Report are noted.
2. That the comments of the GM Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the Commissioner's Mission Priorities are noted.
3. That the future priorities and the commitment to work more closely with the local authorities, national government, community partners and across TfGM to deliver the actions set out in Section 4 of this paper are noted.
4. Officers to circulate the Combined Authority's formulated response to the National Road Safety Strategy consultation to the GM Overview and Scrutiny Committee once completed.

**O&SC 59/25                      Mayoral General Budget and Precept Proposals - 2026/27**

The GM Mayor attended the meeting to present the proposed Mayoral General Budget and Precept for 2026–27 ahead of consideration by GMCA members. The proposals included the budget for the Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service (GMFRS), which falls under the GM Mayor's responsibilities. The report also set out the supporting information for the proposed precepts within the Mayoral General Budget.

The GM Mayor outlined what approval of the proposed Mayoral General Budget and Precept for 2026–27 would mean for the Bee Network and for GM more widely. He explained that the proposal included an overall £25 increase in the Mayoral General Precept for a Band D property, comprising a £6 increase for the Fire and Rescue Service and £19 for other Mayoral functions, primarily to support the continued development of the Bee Network. He noted that most properties across GM fell into Bands A–C, meaning the majority of residents would pay less than the Band D amount.

The GM Mayor highlighted the strong progress made by GMFRS under the current Chief Fire Officer, emphasising significant operational improvements and enhanced capability, including the service's effective response to the recent Operation Plato incident. He noted that GM was one of only two fire services nationally to deliver universal marauding-terrorist-attack training to all frontline firefighters. He also confirmed that GMFRS continued to strengthen resources, increasing the number of pumps across the city-region and maintaining response times despite rising demand.

He stated that the proposed budget provided a stable financial platform for GMFRS, enabling continued improvement and allowing investment in estate and capital upgrades, although further work would be needed to modernise several older fire stations he confirmed that efficiencies had been incorporated to support these improvements and that the budget would ensure frontline services were protected.

Officers noted that the GM Mayor's comments reflected the stability and sustainability provided by the proposed budget for GMFRS. They reported that, for the first time in a decade, the service had received a multi-year national funding settlement, enabling a meaningful and more reliable medium-term financial plan. Officers reminded members that the 2025–26 settlement had been particularly challenging, with reduced funding nationally for fire services and pressures linked to national insurance changes. While the 2026–27 settlement did not fully resolve these issues, the confirmed three-year funding position allowed GMFRS to maintain improvements, support a 52-pump operational model, continue investment in prevention and protection, and progress the estates and capital programme. Officers added that rising capital charges reflected the need to self-fund all fire-service capital investment, but the multi-year settlement now provided a sustainable basis on which to deliver improvements in 2026/27.

The GM Mayor explained the proposal to increase the Mayoral General Precept (excluding fire) from £42.75 to £61.75 (for Band D) and outlined the reasons for the change. He reminded members of the original £134.5m funding plan for bus

franchising and confirmed that, despite delays to a planned £17.8m district contribution, the Bee Network transition had been delivered on time and on budget. He stated that he hoped that remaining funding would instead be raised through the precept to avoid placing further pressure on local authority finances.

He highlighted the benefits enabled by the increase, including:

- the permanent removal of the 9:30am restriction for older and disabled concessionary pass holders;
- retention of the £2 single fare cap and wider capped fare structure;
- and expansion of the TravelSafe programme, including additional uniformed presence funded through £6m in the precept.

He reported continued growth in bus patronage following franchising, with increases of around 29% in the west and 15% in the north, and noted further improvements expected as Bee Network rail services were introduced.

The Chair asked for clarification on the £2 fare cap, noting that the GM Mayor had said it would be retained for the calendar year, while the report referred to funding through to 31 March 2027, and asked which position was correct. It was noted that the budget had been set on the basis of funding the cap for the full financial year, meaning no further request for funding would be required for the final three months. However, the decision on continuation would be reviewed at the end of the calendar year and would take into account the affordability in the context of the overall transport budget.

Members noted that the proposals represented an overall increase of around 19% for a Band D property and asked whether, given the new three-year funding settlement, similar levels of increase should be expected in future years, or whether this proposal front-loaded the pressures to allow for lower percentage increases over the remainder of the period. Members emphasised that they supported the improvements to bus services and the success of the £2 fare cap but sought clarity on the likely trajectory of precept increases over the next three years. The GM Mayor explained that similar precept increases should not be expected every year.

He stated that the rise for 2026/27 was linked to two exceptional pressures: completing the transitional funding required to deliver the Bee Network, and addressing last year's unexpectedly poor national settlement for GMFRS. He noted that future increases would depend on whether GM chose to fund further improvements to public transport, but these would not be of the same scale unless justified by specific needs.

He added that work was underway nationally to introduce an overnight visitor levy, which he believed should play a future role in funding public transport and reducing the reliance on council taxpayers. He noted that nationally, Mayors had pressed for the levy to begin in 2027/28 and that, if confirmed, it could ease pressure on future precepts.

In relation to the fire precept, the GM Mayor said the recent higher increases reflected the need to stabilise the service after last year's difficult settlement. He confirmed that, going forward, any further rise would only be expected if the city-region identified a need for additional frontline capacity, rather than to maintain day-to-day operations.

Members noted the increase in the non-fire element of the Mayoral Precept and questioned the impact of transferring the previously planned £17.8m district contribution into the precept. They explained that some local authorities had already held funding in earmarked reserves for several years in anticipation of this contribution, meaning the money had been tied up without being used. Members asked whether councils would now be able to release those reserves, and if not, whether this meant residents were effectively paying twice for the same commitment. Members also sought clarification on whether the precept increase was genuinely a temporary measure to meet the capital requirement for bus franchising, or whether it would become a permanent, "baked-in" increase. They further asked for an update on the long-term financial projections presented several years earlier, querying where the Bee Network's finances currently sat between the previously modelled optimistic (£30m surplus) and pessimistic (£290m deficit) scenarios. The GM Mayor stated that a final decision had not yet been made

regarding the previously earmarked district reserves but indicated his intention to release them, subject to the approval of the budget proposals before the Committee. He explained that once the £134.5m commitment for bus franchising had been fully met through the precept, the intention was to allow districts to release the funds they had held aside within the new three-year financial settlement. He added that while part of the precept increase was linked to one-off transitional costs, some elements, such as permanently lifting the 9:30am concessionary travel restriction and supporting the TravelSafe programme, were ongoing commitments. He acknowledged the financial pressures faced by certain districts and reiterated that the approach sought to balance funding requirements with the need to support local authority positions. Officers acknowledged that although deferring the district contribution had been welcome, it offered limited benefit to councils while the money remained tied up in reserves. They explained that this was why the current proposal included work to assess the feasibility of permanently writing off the £17.8m contribution, which would allow local authorities to release those earmarked reserves. Officers clarified that the £134.5m franchising requirement was revenue rather than capital, meaning the cost could be managed over several years through reserves rather than being applied in a single year. This approach would avoid returning to Local Authorities for contributions while still funding ongoing commitments, such as lifting the 9:30 concessionary travel restriction and supporting TravelSafe, from the £19 precept increase.

Members welcomed the continuation of the £2 fare cap and expressed hope that it could be maintained beyond the current period, noting its importance in encouraging people to switch from car use to public transport. They also emphasised the value of the TravelSafe programme, commenting that its improved visibility across the Bee Network had strengthened passenger confidence and should continue to be widely promoted. Members further highlighted the potential benefits of providing free or subsidised public transport for school pupils, even if limited to school journeys, suggesting this would significantly reduce school-run traffic, pollution and road danger. The GM Mayor welcomed the positive feedback on the visibility and impact of the TravelSafe Live Chat system, noting that improving real-time safety reassurance, particularly for women and young people,

had been a key priority. He reported that the enhanced visibility of the service across the Bee Network, including QR codes on buses, was intentional and had already led to effective real-time interventions and arrests. He also acknowledged the points raised about extending concessionary or reduced-fare travel. He stated that while he was keen to expand support further, financial constraints required careful prioritisation. He identified two groups as the most immediate priorities:

- **children in temporary accommodation**, who often face long and costly journeys back to their schools; and
- **residents who require a companion to travel**, for whom a carers or companions pass would significantly improve mobility and independence.

He confirmed that work was underway with districts to explore options for supporting these groups, including potential links to wider savings in temporary accommodation costs.

Members welcomed the recent investment in electric buses serving Middleton, noting the introduction of a full fleet of 25-plate vehicles alongside newer 24-plate clean buses. They commented that the improved fleet and the affordability created by the fare structures had made a significant difference for local residents and expressed appreciation for the continued investment. The GM Mayor noted the investment made in fully electrifying the local bus depot, resulting in newer, cleaner and quieter buses serving the community. He highlighted the significant improvement this brought for residents, particularly those living along bus routes, compared with the noise and emissions of older diesel vehicles. He added that this transformation reflected the progress GM had achieved collectively by taking control of its bus network, and he hoped the benefits were now being felt across the area.

Members highlighted the significant progress made within GMFRS, noting the contrast between the delayed response during the 2017 attack and the recent rapid intervention at the synagogue incident. They welcomed the improved capability provided through universal marauding-terrorist-attack training and stated that GM,

alongside London, was now far better equipped to respond to such emergencies and protect the public in future.

Members welcomed the progress made through the Bee Network and highlighted the positive impact it was having on residents, particularly older people who now had more affordable and reliable access to hospitals and other essential services. They reflected on the earlier decline in bus services following privatisation and noted that the reformed system was now delivering meaningful improvements. Members asked whether the Bee Network could continue to be expanded in future so that all communities across GM could benefit. The GM Mayor stated that the next phase of work would focus on ensuring the Bee Network delivered clear benefits for all boroughs. He noted that the approach to network reviews had been revised, as the earlier method, reviewing whole areas sequentially, had proved too slow and inflexible. He explained that a more dynamic process had now been introduced, allowing quicker responses where local issues were raised, such as overcrowded services or unmet demand on particular routes. Officers confirmed that the approach was moving towards a rolling programme of improvements informed locally through Bee Network committees, members, and highways teams. They noted that this had been discussed with local highways officers and would be considered further by the Bee Network Committee. Officers explained that the aim was to make small network adjustments part of business-as-usual, using available precept headroom where possible. They added that a methodology for assessing and prioritising changes had been developed and, subject to feedback, would be progressed.

Members welcomed the continued investment in the A Bed Every Night programme, noting that it was one of GM's most important schemes and provided vital support at a time of significant need. They asked whether the increase in the budget represented additional investment in the programme and whether it also reflected rising demand for the service, given the growing number of people experiencing hardship. The GM Mayor confirmed that the budget continued to support A Bed Every Night at the expanded level of 600 places, as introduced last year. He reiterated his personal commitment to maintaining the scheme and

emphasised its importance as part of a preventative approach to homelessness. He noted concerns about the national freeze on Local Housing Allowance, which was contributing to rising homelessness, and stated that GM would continue pressing Government for change. He added that eliminating rough sleeping reduced pressure on health and emergency services and that he believed A Bed Every Night should ultimately be adopted as a permanent national policy.

Members noted that many older residents were not confident using digital payment methods and asked whether cash payments on buses could continue to be accepted to ensure services remained accessible to all. The GM Mayor confirmed that cash payments would continue to be accepted on buses. He acknowledged that many residents were not comfortable with digital payment methods and said it was important to retain cash options for accessibility. While noting that drivers preferred cashless boarding for speed and safety, he emphasised that there were no plans to move to a cashless system. He added that, over time, society may shift further towards digital payments, but any future change would only be considered if it matched the needs and preferences of GM's residents.

Members asked about the provision of night buses, acknowledging the aspiration for at least one night service in each district but noting this would not meet demand equitably across GM. They raised the possibility of using dynamic pricing to support additional night-bus routes that were not covered by the £2 fare cap but could still be commercially viable and offer a safer, more affordable alternative to taxis.

Members encouraged consideration of this approach, noting that current late-night travel options could be prohibitively expensive. The GM Mayor stated that dynamic pricing for night-bus services had not previously been considered. He explained that when night buses were introduced, a higher fare had been explored but ultimately rejected to maintain consistency for workers travelling at all hours. He acknowledged the challenges faced by residents, particularly hospitality workers, who often relied on expensive taxi or private-hire options late at night. He noted that while the Bee Network could not provide night buses on every route, there might be merit in exploring alternative models, such as slightly higher-fare services or smaller vehicles on routes currently not served. Officers confirmed that the ongoing network

review process was designed to evolve services continually in response to local needs. They explained that the reviews would assess passenger demand and employer requirements while balancing these against financial sustainability and fare-box income. Officers agreed that the challenge raised was valid and noted that if significant demand for additional night-bus services emerged through the network review process, that would be the forum in which those options would be considered. The GM Mayor added that the proposed visitor levy could create opportunities to support additional transport links, particularly in areas with hotels that were not well served by existing routes. He suggested that such funding might allow for pilot services connecting these locations, potentially benefiting both visitors and nearby residential communities. The GM Mayor welcomed the idea and indicated that officers would explore whether a suitable pilot could be developed.

Members raised concerns about rising crime levels and asked how additional policing would be delivered and funded. They queried whether the complex national funding formula adequately reflected the pressures faced in GM, particularly given the demands associated with Manchester's international profile and large-scale events. Members sought clarification on the impact this would have on local policing capacity. The GM Mayor noted that part of the precept increase was intended to strengthen safety and policing on the Bee Network, including support for GMP's response to TravelSafe Live Chat reports. He highlighted that recorded crime across GM had fallen by around 15% over the past year, though he acknowledged that public perception often differed, particularly around transport hubs. He informed members that GMP continued to receive one of the lowest national funding allocations, which the city-region was challenging. He also confirmed that, as part of the police precept, he had asked GMP to establish a permanent, visible policing presence in Piccadilly Gardens, supported by improved technology, to increase public confidence and address ongoing safety concerns. He added that while the Bee Network was improving safety on the system itself, it was equally important that people felt safe once they left public transport.

The Chair reminded members that the budget proposals would be considered at the Combined Authority meeting on Friday 30 January. He noted that while the CA

could not amend the proposals, it could suggest areas the GM Mayor may wish to reconsider. Members were advised that they would have a further opportunity during the February budget cycle to review the final proposals as part of the full budget process.

## **RESOLVED /-**

1. That the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Mayoral General Budget and Precept Proposals be noted and shared with the GMCA at their meeting on 30 January 2026.
2. That the GM Mayor would ask TfGM to consider dynamic pricing to enable more night buses.
3. That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the recommendations which will be considered by the GMCA at its meeting on 30 January 2026 as below. The GMCA is requested:
  1. To consider my proposal to increase the Mayoral General Precept by £25 to £153.95 (for a Band D property), comprising of:
    - i) Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Services - precept of £92.20 (**£6 increase**);
    - ii) Other Mayoral General functions - precept of £61.75 (**£19 increase**).
  2. To note and comment on:
    - i) the overall budget proposed for the Fire and Rescue Service,
    - ii) the use of the reserves to support the revenue and capital budgets, and the assessment by the Treasurer that the reserves as at March 2026 are adequate,
    - iii) the proposed Fire Service capital programme and proposals for funding,
    - iv) the medium-term financial position for the Fire and Rescue Service covered by the Mayoral precept
  3. To note and comment on the detailed budget proposals for other Mayoral general functions.
  4. To note and comment on the use of reserves as set out in Paragraph 3.3 of the report.

5. To consider whether they would wish to submit any written comments to the Mayor in line with the legal process and timetable described in this report.
6. To note that at its meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> February 2026 there will be an updated budget submitted, consistent with the precept proposals, to reflect final tax base and collection fund calculations and the final baseline funding settlement.

**O&SC 60/25**

**OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME &  
FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS**

**RESOLVED /-**

1. That the proposed Overview & Scrutiny Work Programme be noted.
2. That Members use the Forward Plan of Key Decisions to identify any potential areas for further scrutiny.

**O&SC 61/25**

**FUTURE MEETING DATES**

**RESOLVED /-**

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

- Wednesday 11 February 2026
- Wednesday 25 February 2026
- Wednesday 25 March 2026