



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

James Blythe
*Deputy Director, Local
Government Stewardship &
Interventions*

**Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government**
4th Floor, Fry Building
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF

www.gov.uk/mhclg

Stephen Peacock
Chief Executive
West of England Combined Authority

5 March 2025

West of England Combined Authority Best Value Notice expiring 5 March 2025

Dear Stephen,

The department issued a Best Value Notice (“Notice”) to the West of England Combined Authority on 5 March 2024. This was a formal notification that the department had ongoing concerns regarding poor professional relationships between the mayor and constituent members of the Authority, an unfit constitution, a lack of collective understanding around the function and purpose of the Authority, and a lack of clear, shared narrative regarding the West of England. The Notice requested that the Authority establish an independent improvement panel to support them in resetting culture and relationships, developing and agreeing strategic priorities for the West of England, and reviewing and updating the Authority’s constitution to enable more effective decision-making and scrutiny processes. The Notice requested that the Authority engage with the department to provide assurance of its progress and ability to manage these risks. We thank you for the constructive engagement the West of England Combined Authority has had with the department since the Notice was issued.

The West of England Combined Authority has engaged proactively with the department and has gained external scrutiny and challenge throughout the period, including setting up an independent improvement panel to support their improvement journey and oversee progress. The panel has agreed to renewed values and principles with the aim of improving decision-making processes and increasing co-collaboration and co-creation. The Department will continue to monitor the Authority’s implementation of these principles, to ensure they are being followed. The commitment to working with the independent panel for a further six months following the mayoral election is also a necessary step towards continuous improvement and ensuring that progress is fully embedded and sustained. The Mayor and representatives of the constituent members of the Authority have shown progress against improved relationships and ways of working. These renewed commitments have led to more opportunities for the local residents of the West of England, including convening an agreement between constituent authorities, neighbouring authority

North Somerset, and DfT to utilise devolved CRSTS funding to support the re-opening the Portishead railway line – subject to final Ministerial approval. I look forward to seeing further benefits of the improved partnership working going forwards.

In light of the above and based on the available evidence, ministers are reassured as to the West of England Combined Authority's capacity to comply with its Best Value Duty under the Local Government Act 1999 and the Notice will not be reissued at this time.

Whilst we will not be renewing the Notice, we expect to see the progress made by the combined authority and all constituent members fully embedded and sustained. The renewed values and principles unanimously agreed with the support of the independent improvement panel are a positive step towards this, and continued engagement with the panel after the mayoral election will be seen as evidence of necessary progress. We must now see this in practice over a sustained period of time, as part of a positive and comprehensive reset of relationships and culture in the Authority. We request that the Authority and the panel continue engaging regularly with the department to provide assurance of the steps being taken to continue this progress.

If the department finds it necessary to seek further assurance through a Best Value Notice, we will issue one based on the evidence. The Secretary of State has the authority to inspect or intervene in local authorities under the Local Government Act 1999 and to request information under section 230 of the Local Government Act 1972. Continuous improvement is essential, and the Secretary of State may use these powers if deemed necessary.

I look forward to receiving updates on your continued progress and would be keen to meet with you in due course to discuss ongoing plans for improvement.

Yours sincerely,

James Blythe
Deputy Director, Local Government Stewardship & Interventions