

Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Tuesday, 3 October 2017, County Hall, Worcester - 9.30 am

Minutes

Present:

Mr A A J Adams (Chairman), Mr P Denham (Vice Chairman), Mr G R Brookes, Mr B Clayton, Mr M E Jenkins, Mr J A D O'Donnell and Ms C M Stalker

Also attended:

Mrs E B Tucker, Group Leader 2017 Group

Ian Bamforth (Highways & Public Rights of Way Operations Manager), Andy Baker (Transport Planning & Commissioning Manager), Martin Rowe (Transport Strategy Team Leader), Matthew Fung (Public Health Consultant), Sheena Jones (Democratic Governance and Scrutiny Manager) and Jo Weston (Overview and Scrutiny Officer)

Available Papers

The members had before them:

- A. The Agenda papers (previously circulated);
- B. The Minutes of the Meeting held on 15 September 2017 (previously circulated).

(Copies of document A will be attached to the signed Minutes).

272 Apologies and Welcome

Apologies had been received from Panel Members Mr A D Kent and Ms R Vale. Relevant Cabinet Members with Responsibility had been invited, but also sent Apologies.

273 Declarations of Interest and of any Party Whip

None.

274 Public Participation

None.

275 Confirmation of the Minutes of the Previous Meeting

This Item was deferred until the next meeting.

276 Delivering for Cycling

Attending for this Item were County Council Officers:

Andy Baker, Transport Planning Manager
Martin Rowe, Transport Strategy Team Leader

Matthew Fung, Public Health Consultant

In addition County Cycling Group Representatives had been invited to the meeting to participate in the discussion.

By way of introduction, the Chairman explained that during the previous Administration and as part of the consultation process, the Panel had discussed the Local Transport Plan 4 (LTP4) at its January 2017 meeting. At the time, the Panel had made some comments in relation to cycling.

It was reported that LTP4 was now being finalised and was due to be presented to Cabinet in November 2017.

In the ensuing discussion, the following main points were raised:

- Safety of cyclists on the A46 near Evesham was a particular concern for Panel Members in the previous discussion and Members sought an update. It was explained that this project was jointly managed by Gloucestershire, Warwickshire and Worcestershire County Councils who were jointly seeking extra funding from Central Government to address concerns. There was a risk that cycling might be prohibited along the A46 in future in which case alternative provision would be needed and Officers were working to ensure Worcestershire's needs were met. However, work being undertaken now on a "whole corridor" study would take time to come to fruition
- When a category of road was upgraded, for example to an expressway, the cycleway was completed at the same time, as per current Government guidance
- There had been a lack of consistent funding from Central Government for cycling, however, the 'Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy' published by the Department for Transport was a positive development in policy
- Members queried how proposals in the strategic LTP4 were achieved. It was suggested that some positive initiatives contained in past plans had failed to come to fruition. Officers explained that major funding could be inconsistent and time limited. The Plan was also a positive document as it was committing the Council to progress Active Travel Corridors in and through the County
- It was noted that cycling nationally was worth around £2.9billion to the British economy and in

Worcestershire it boosted the local economy by around £5million

- One Member noted that the County Council did not specifically identify any budget for cycling, however, funding bids were submitted throughout the financial year. One recent example was given for the Bromsgrove area, which was identified by Officers as being the most poorly provided area in Worcestershire
- Feasibility studies were undertaken to ensure that future projects were 'shovel ready' if and when funding bids were successful. There was suggestion that studies did build hopes and everyone agreed that could be case. Officers felt it was beneficial to prepare schemes as funding opportunities often came with tight deadlines and it would be unfortunate to pass over an opportunity
- In response to a query about Section 106 money, Officers agreed that they could be more rigorous in their funding requests
- Members asked for detail on how much funding was currently available through Section 106 for cycling. Officers would follow up after the meeting
- Members suggested that there was a direct link to the take up of cycling and the cost of car parking, whereby if parking rates were high, cycling was a feasible option if there were safe cycling routes
- One Member enquired about safe access to the new development at Worcester Six and the Panel learned that funding had been allocated for a footbridge to link the site to the local housing developments. Members were encouraged by this venture
- When asked, Officers reported that accident rates whilst cycling were actually low, despite it being perceived as a dangerous pursuit
- It was clarified that spend on cycling in 2017/18 was £561,000, which was artificially low due to factors such as Brexit
- One Member asked if the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) was involved, to be informed that they were increasingly so especially with large schemes such as Worcester Parkway Station.

The Health and Well-being Strategy 2016-2021 had three overarching priorities:

- Improving mental health and well-being
- Increasing physical activity
- Reducing the harm caused by alcohol.

It was felt that active travel led to healthy lifestyles and it was reported that around two-thirds of Worcestershire residents were physically active. This figure was good in comparison to other parts of the West Midlands and similar to the England average. It was believed that a behaviour change was required, however Public Health welcomed the support which was being provided

Cycling Representatives were invited to comment on the discussion and made the following key points:

- It was suggested that there was a lot of 'quick wins' with which the Council would benefit, such as pathway improvements. Simple maintenance and moss removal would enable new riders, or those lacking in confidence, to ride more safely
- Cycle tourism would generate more income, especially as links to neighbouring areas, such as Oxford or Stratford were in easy reach
- A closer working relationship between cycling representatives and the County Council was suggested. It was felt that better communication could improve the condition of cycleways longer term as issues could be reported directly and potentially acted upon in a more timely manner. In addition, a forum could assist with any upcoming consultations
- It was reported that a minimum of £10 per head was acknowledged as the best amount to promote and sustain cycling in accordance with best practice. In Worcestershire, the figure spent was much lower than this.

The Panel was surprised that currently there was no specific budget for cycling in the Council plan. It was agreed to recommend to the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board that it should request that a specific amount should be included in the 2017/18 financial year for cycling and that a budget for cycleway improvements be ring fenced for future years to ensure continued focus on this.

277 Footways

Ian Bamforth, the Council's Highways Operations and Public Rights of Way Manager was asked to provide an update following the recommendations made by the Footways Scrutiny Task Group in early 2017.

In the discussion, Members highlighted the following main points:

- Core funding for improving footways had increased by £6m

- Recommendations in relation to the involvement of County Councillors in improvement works was highlighted as working very well, to the extent that £104,000 was available in each Division, with half of that sum being available for earmarking by the Councillor themselves
- Questions arose around the differing geographical size of each Division and the length of damaged footways in each. It was suggested that Members could obtain Division specific information if required
- Preventative maintenance was vital to longevity, such as siding out footways which had become overgrown
- As budgets had previously been targeted at Highways works, it was likely that many Footways would need full depth reconstruction, due to their degradation. Engineers continued to assess each project individually and as the general standard of footways improved over time it was likely that the work would move more towards preventative maintenance
- Concern was raised over the number of once new Housing Estates and the likelihood that all footways would need treatment at the same time
- One Member highlighted the success of a honeycomb structure in a grass verge and the benefits of that to their local community greenspace. It was suggested that that approach was not always feasible, but could be achieved if practical
- Another Member expressed the view that achieving a level of below 25% of footways requiring treatment was not true, to be informed that the figure was Countywide, not specifically in each Division. To achieve this figure, the number of crews would need to be increased
- Members asked about progress with the Guidance on Well Managed Highways Infrastructure referred to under recommendation 2 of the Review recommendations. Officers responded that they were working with regional colleagues on this to meet the October 2018 deadline. Panel members asked that they receive a further report about this prior to implementation
- In response to a query from a Member about the approach to retaining urban trees when work was carried out on the footway, it was reported that each case was managed on its merits and trees were retained where possible

- Fines were imposed on Utility companies who damaged footways and did not undertake repairs. However, Officers did work closely with companies to try and ensure least disruption. Recent examples included Fibre Broadband rollout
- Weed spraying, undertaken by District Councils, had changed over time due to the regulations surrounding the use of ingredients
- When asked whether the Council achieved good value for money, it was reported that it did, but there were also other ways of working. Members expressed the view that the £6m core funding was welcome but should be used most effectively
- Members felt that the £104,000 Division allocation was used very quickly if surfaces were degraded and many residents continued to live on roads where the situation was poor
- One Member commented that communication was good between the Officers and Councillors
- The Public Health Consultant added that there was a known health benefit to walking, yet the infrastructure was not always suitable. It was suggested that more affluent areas were engaged and able to report concerns, yet those areas were not always in need of footway repair
- The Panel agreed that even with the extra £6m investment, it was not necessarily going to solve the problem. It was suggested that further work could be done to assess whether the County Council was obtaining best value for money in its current arrangements for footway repairs and construction. It was also suggested that unless protecting footways over highways was a Council priority, the issue would not be solved.

278 Work Plan

No further Items were added to the Work Plan.

The meeting ended at 11.40 am

Chairman