

Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Wednesday, 9 May 2018, County Hall, Worcester - 10.00 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 A D Kent, Mr J A D O'Donnell and Ms C M Stalker

Mr A T Amos, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways
Mrs E A Eyre
Mr P A Tuthill

Also attended:

Madeleine Sumner (Community Transport Development Officer), Paul Smith (Transport Commissioning and Logistics Manager), Ian Bamforth (Highways & Public Rights of Way Operations Manager), Sally Everest (Network Control Manager), Lauren Montgomery (Streetworks Inspection Manager), 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 7 March 2018 (previously circulated).

(A copy of documents A will be attached to the signed Minutes).

300 Apologies and Welcome

Apologies had been received from Ms R Vale.

301 Declarations of Interest and of any Party Whip

None.

302 Public Participation

None.

303 Confirmation of the Minutes of the previous meeting

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 7 March 2018 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**304 Community
Transport
Operations in
Worcestershire**

Attending for this Item were:

Worcestershire County Council

Madeleine Sumner, Community Transport Development Officer

Paul Smith, Transport Operations Manager

Worcestershire Community Transport Consortium

David Muggeridge, Chairman

Officers talked through the Agenda Report and Member questions were asked and answered throughout the discussion.

The following main points were raised:

- Nationally, there was a drive to deliver Community Transport (CT) and the Council worked closely with the 18 schemes operating in Worcestershire (14 of which formed part of the Consortium)
- Although some drivers were paid, there was a reliance on volunteers and around 500 were involved across the County, delivering approximately 160,000 journeys each year. Volunteers were reimbursed for their expenses for using their own vehicle and all volunteers and paid drivers were subject to a Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS) Check to ensure they were suitable to work with vulnerable groups
- Through a Council grant, which would end in March 2020, the Council worked with the CT Consortium to ensure a range of transport services was provided. Examples included exploring options with CT providers when a commercial bus service was withdrawn
- In response to a question about the large number of operators in the County, Members were informed that providers wanted to retain their independence and serve their local community, with fundraising and the recruitment of volunteers also being more successful if targeted at a geographical location rather than County wide
- The Panel also learned that each scheme operated differently; however, all fares were based on mileage, despite the rate differing between areas. Example costings were given, with an average fare in Wyre Forest being £4.20 and a return journey from Tenbury to Worcester being £19. It was noted that these were less than taxi fares

- Operating costs, such as rent or telephony, were sometimes taken into account when setting fares. It was noted that some schemes were offered rent free premises
- There was a continuous drive for schemes to work together and an annual development plan was produced with publicity being shared across providers to ensure passengers were provided for. In addition, operators were moving towards having the same booking and scheduling software
- It was recognised that Health Transport was as important as Education or Adult Social Care transportation, with around half of annual journeys going to healthcare appointments. Officers were due to meet healthcare partners to discuss a future operating model which would propose to provide a single point of contact for all healthcare travel needs, signposting and publicity
- Non-emergency patient transport was undertaken by West Midlands Ambulance Service and despite efforts to engage with the service to possibly provide a CT solution, the service was not receptive, despite Gloucestershire operating a very successful scheme
- Members shared Officers' and Consortium concerns over pending changes in operating legislation, whereby if CT operators using 9 - 16 seater minibuses were no longer able to bid for contracts due to challenge by commercial operators, there was a danger that CT schemes would have to close. When asked about the worst case scenario, Members were informed that five schemes and around 14,500 journeys would be affected. The Panel asked to be updated in due course on the outcome of the national consultation about this
- When contacting a CT provider, passengers were asked a number of questions to ascertain whether they were eligible for the service. Although not means tested, residents were asked if they could travel by any other means, such as car, bus, taxi or if they were a wheelchair user, whether they could access a car. It is also made clear that there was a charge to ensure no surprises and if the cost was not affordable, passengers may be directed to social care for support
- Members reported that the Website was not totally accurate and commented that a strong website was required, in addition to good telephony. Officers acknowledged that a website audit was needed

305 Highways IT - Update

- Non Panel Member, Councillor Eyre, reported on a Wychavon District Council scrutiny task group on rural transport and reported that the group had found need continued not to be met and was more than shopping or medical need. Examples of young people, or social occasions, such as visits to the theatre, were cited, although accessing employment was not an issue
- It was clear that commercial operators could not fulfil the gap and minibus journeys also provided a social aspect. There was a need for more local champions and it was suggested that the Council was overly optimistic about the willingness of volunteers. It was suggested that Healthwatch Worcestershire may be able to help in the plans for healthcare transportation
- The potential to publicise schemes via County Councillors and various local organisations was highlighted.

In summary, the Panel Members agreed to make the following recommendations to the Cabinet Member:

- Members were fully supportive of the ongoing work in Community Transport and asked what more Members could do to promote CT in their communities
- The Panel was deeply concerned about the pending changes to operating legislation and recommended that if these were introduced, Worcestershire County Council contracts should be changed to enable minibuses with less than 9 seats to be considered
- Members agreed that more joined up thinking would provide stability and improvement in the CT market and hoped that providers would consider further joint working

In addition to being informed about the outcome of the consultation about changes to operating legislation, the Panel requested an overall update was in twelve months.

The Chairman reminded members that one outcome of a visit to see how gulley emptying was carried out was that IT could be used to help manage demand for the service. The potential to access a GIS system available to Parish Councils to report blocked gulleys had specifically been discussed.

The Highways and Public Rights of Way Operations Manager reported that work on developing Geographical Information Systems (GIS) for Drainage was not as

advanced as originally suggested to Members due to the work involved in managing the information available.

In addition, Ringway, the Council's provider of drain management, was updating their own system and it was hoped that following this update, a trial with Panel Members would be achieved within six months, followed by a roll out throughout the County.

The Operations Manager went on to say that this suggested approach would benefit Members, Parish and Town Councils and others as the current system contained a level of detail which could cause confusion to external bodies.

Members were concerned about the extended delay and agreed to recommend to the Cabinet Member with Responsibility that a trial with selected Members take place immediately.

In relation to a Highways App, the Operations Manager reported that discussions had been ongoing over recent years and a number of software packages were available, with some Authorities developing Apps internally.

It was noted that nationally there had been varying levels of success and Members cautioned against bespoke software due to future contract negotiations. Rather, packaged software was the preferred solution.

The Operations Manager agreed that it was timely to review all options available and investigate the use of software in other Authorities. The Panel asked for an update in six months.

306 Co-ordination of Streetworks

The Council's Network Control Manager and Streetworks Inspection Manager talked through the Agenda Report and provided further detail on the co-ordination of works on the public highway.

The Council operated a permit scheme, whereby utility companies, developers, event organisers and skip/scaffold users could electronically advise the Council in advance of any works affecting the highway. Depending on the duration of the work, the notice given varied from 3 months to 3 days. Whilst access could not be denied, a fee may be applied to co-ordinate work on traffic sensitive routes.

Officers received around 300 enquires a day and where

possible, a co-ordinated approach was preferred. However, if works were planned for less than 3 days, only 3 days' notice was required. Works less than 10 days required only 10 days' notice and major works required 3 months' notice.

With these varying notice periods, it was therefore unlikely that a co-ordinated approach could be achieved, especially when requests to work at the same location were not submitted at the same time. The most disruption was often caused by emergency works which required diversion routes.

Officers reported that they always encouraged forward planning and joint working across organisations however it was difficult to achieve. A Co-ordination Register was shared with the utility companies and officers met with them regularly to plan for works.

When asked about best practice from other Local Authorities, Officers agreed that engagement with organisations was key, with five Officers co-ordinating the scheme in Worcestershire.

It was reported that a new code of conduct was being written by the Department of Transport, which was hoped would result in a nationwide permit scheme and Officers were due to present an annual report to Cabinet in the Summer about this.

During Panel questions, the following points were raised:

- Residents of new developments were particularly frustrated as works were not co-ordinated, however the Panel now understood the different timescales involved in permitted work
- Members learned that Officers tried to work with developers to manage work and a 50% fee reduction was offered if they achieved this, however, as fees varied between £230 and £105, the reduction was not a large amount. In addition, there were other benefits in joint working, such as shared costs for traffic management if required
- Work undertaken without permission was subject to a fine, to the sum of either £350 or £500, however no fine had yet to be issued by the Council
- Diversion routes through rural areas were often poorly signed and concern was raised over safety, especially at night. Although routes were shown on the website, it was suggested that Local Members would have more detailed knowledge to

help inform County Engineers

- The Panel Members agreed that they would like to undertake some work looking at the website and identifying areas for improvement
- When asked whether damage to verges was followed up with the contractor, it was reported that verges should be re-instated and if not, it would be followed up. However, only 10% of jobs were physically inspected
- The Panel agreed to recommend to the Cabinet Member that Local Member knowledge was utilised more, especially in relation to signage and diversion routes.

As a result of the discussion, the Panel requested the following information:

- Further detail on the number and type of permits requested
- Information on the loss of revenue in year 2 as a result of deemed consents being given
- Circulation of the Cabinet Report when available.

The meeting ended at 12.50 pm

Chairman