

Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Wednesday, 14 November 2018, County Hall, Worcester - 10.00 am

Present:

Minutes

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, Ms C M Stalker and Ms R Vale

Also attended:

Mr A T Amos, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways
Dr K A Pollock, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Economy and Infrastructure
Matthew Galley, Openreach
Richard Leeding, Openreach

Steve Ashton (Senior Project Manager), Ian Bamforth (Highways & Public Rights of Way Operations Manager), John Hobbs (Director of Economy and Infrastructure), Dave Corbett (Management Information Analyst), Samantha Morris (Scrutiny Co-ordinator) and Jo Weston (Overview and Scrutiny Officer)

Available Papers

The Members had before them:

- A. The Agenda papers (previously circulated);
- B. Presentation handouts for Items 6 and 8 (circulated at the Meeting)
- C. The Minutes of the Meeting held on 9 May 2018 (previously circulated).

(Copies of documents A and B will be attached to the signed Minutes).

307 Apologies and Welcome

Apologies had been received from Mr J A D O'Donnell.

308 Declarations of Interest and of any Party Whip

None.

309 Public Participation

None.

310 Confirmation of

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 9 May 2018 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**the Minutes of
the previous
meeting**

311 Correspondence

The Chairman referred to the update on matters arising from previous meetings, which had been circulated to the Panel and asked if Members had any questions resulting from this.

It was noted that following the Panel's discussion on Community Transport on 9 May 2018, there was no further update from the Department of Transport on permit legislation for the use of vehicles with over 9 seats.

**312 Superfast
Broadband -
Update**

Attending for this item were:

Openreach

Matthew Galley, Partnership Director (West)
Richard Leeding, Contract Manager

Worcestershire County Council

Ken Pollock, Cabinet Member for Economy and
Infrastructure
Ste Ashton, Senior Project Manager

The Panel received a presentation from the Partnership Director of Openreach and was given an overview of the 3 Contracts undertaken to date:

Contract 1 (July 2014 to June 2016)

- 58,788 premises were provided with access to an improved fibre based broadband service, 46,814 of which were with access to superfast broadband
- Fibre to the Cabinet take up was 58.15%
- Fibre to the Premises take up was 19.03%

Contract 2 (July 2016 to December 2018)

- From a target of 16,971, currently 15,421 premises were provided with access to an improved fibre based broadband service
- From a target of 13,356, currently 10,555 premises were provided with access to superfast (24 Mbps+) speed
- Fibre to the Cabinet take up was 50.86%
- Fibre to the Premises take up was 17.31%

Contract 3 (July 2018 to June 2019)

- 5,313 premises were targeted for a fibre based broadband service, comprising:

- 498 were targeted for a superfast service (>30Mb)
- 4,815 were targeted for an ultrafast service (>100Mb)

Openreach advised that they had a good working relationship with the Council and the Government's national drive to ensure better access to broadband, had resulted in greater County coverage than previously planned for and at no cost to the Council.

There were challenges in very rural areas where there was less flexibility on alternative route options and road management was more complex due to narrow lanes. In addition, there were complicated wayleaves involving multiple landowners.

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

- The strong working relationship between Openreach and the Council was commended
- Members were reminded that Contract 1 was mainly targeted at achieving access to fibre based broadband and superfast speeds, largely via Fibre to the Cabinet technology, whereas in later contracts there was a focus on delivering superfast and ultrafast speeds in harder to reach areas, which was increasingly reliant on using Fibre to the Premises infrastructure
- Demand for increased speed had increased year on year
- The Council's £500,000 Local Body Partnership Grant had already been extended to £1m and was now fully allocated, however, there was a possibility for further extension of the fund, or reallocation, dependent on how current communities proceed
- The offer to small rural communities through community schemes varied depending on their circumstances and therefore the costs involved differed. In all cases, funding sources were investigated to try and find a manageable solution for the community, such as the 'Gigabit Voucher' Scheme which focussed on businesses, but could also be used to support the surrounding residential properties
- A Member suggested that the Gigabit Voucher Scheme was complex and residents needed access to clear information to understand the Scheme. Openreach acknowledged that the Scheme was complex and asked to be advised of

any particular known areas of difficulty, which they would look into

- The CMR confirmed that Airband was still an option available for the hard to reach rural areas and that the contract was in the process of being re-negotiated
- Openreach confirmed that they had fibre aspirations for the whole of the County
- The CMR also highlighted the Local Full Fibre Networks (LFFN) opportunity which was available for public sector parties to bid into from Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS). £200m worth of funding was made available initially and some funding had already been allocated, however the recently announced Budget allocated a further £200m to pilot innovative approaches to deploying full fibre internet in rural locations, starting with primary schools, and with a voucher scheme for homes and businesses nearby
- There was a general agreement that investing in technology would also have unseen benefit, such as the increasing use of assistive technology for adult social care and enabling pupils to complete homework at home
- A Member commented that some residents felt that branding on cabinets could now be removed. Officers reported that marketing, such as wrapping the cabinet, had been a very effective tool and the take up in such areas was significant.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their participation and welcomed the clarity given. It was agreed that:

- Councillors would be provided with a Superfast Worcestershire Broadband Programme Update by individual Divisions; and
- A Guidance Note on the Community Fibre Partnership in Worcestershire in order to inform and keep their communities up to date on progress.

313 Footways - Update

The Highways and Public Rights of Way Operations Manager had been invited to the Meeting to update the Panel on footways and in particular the additional £6m funding allocation for footway improvements.

For 2018/19 the Core Footways Maintenance Budget (asset based) was £2.43m covering 54 schemes totalling 33,500 sqm. As of 31 October, 29 schemes or 18,000 sqm had been completed. It was confirmed that if the

remaining schemes were not completed by 31 March 2019, the funds could be rolled over as it was capital funding.

The additional £6m budget, which was agreed by Council in 2017, to make further improvements to footways, had proved extremely successful. Each of the 57 Members had been consulted about possible work in their Divisions and been provided with a detailed breakdown of programmed and completed works.

By the end of the current financial year, the £6m budget was set to maintain 90 schemes, totalling 45,500 sqm. At present, 53 had been completed.

The Panel was complementary about the inclusive process and Members believed the scheme worked very well. It was a new way of working which they hoped would continue.

In addition, other footway works had included 18 asset based Micro-Asphalt Schemes completed totalling 25,000 sqm and it was envisaged that 12 Siding Out Schemes (restoring a footway to its original width) would be completed by the end of the financial year totalling 11.6km.

In the ensuing discussion, the key points included:

- There was a balance between using micro-asphalt to patch a surface and restoring a footway. It was much more economical to use micro-asphalt and it was seen as a logical way forward to maintain footways for a longer period of time
- In response to a question about the recently announced additional £6m of Government funding allocated to Worcestershire to fix potholes, the Panel noted that no criteria had yet been received on its use, but would be interested in learning more when possible
- The Panel hoped that the Core Maintenance Footways Budget for 2019/20 would be in line with the £2.43m for 2018/19
- A Member commented that footway maintenance was a good news story and asked Officers to consider some positive publicity on the subject.

It was agreed that the Panel would be provided with details of the 12 Siding Out Schemes and the 18 Micro-Asphalt Schemes.

reducing weeds and grass growing along carriageway kerbs

reducing weeds and grass growing along carriageway kerbs, particularly in rural areas.

The Highways and Public Rights of Way Operations Manager reported that the County Council carried out some grass cutting and that some money was passed to the District Councils to do it.

In the general discussion, the key points included:

- That the District and Parish Councils could top up on the County Council's core service if demand required that further cutting was desired and fund this themselves
- Parish Councils could equally commission an individual enhanced service but it was important to consider economies of scale in doing so
- Dual carriageway works required traffic management, which was at a cost
- The pattern of weather in 2018 had resulted in a number of second cuts of grass being ordered for safety reasons. Safety was a core duty of the Highways Act
- The Panel felt that closer working with the District Councils was needed to co-ordinate works, as there was a requirement to do more with less
- There was general agreement that urban areas fared better than rural areas
- Hedge trimming was the responsibility of the land owner.

315 Highways IT - Update

Following the 9 May 2018 Panel Meeting, the Highways and Public Rights of Way Operations Manager was invited to the Meeting to update the Panel on aspects of IT relating to Highways, in particular the Geographical Information Systems (GIS) for drainage and trial access for Parish Council clerks/members and also progress on the development of a Highways.

In summary, the Panel was advised that Officers had spoken to other Councils on their use of Highways Apps and Ringway and about Geographical Information Systems (GIS) for drainage, but there was still more work to do.

Some Members felt that it was important to focus on those IT matters, which in the long term they believed would make savings. However, the Director reported that it wasn't a subject which he was aware was causing concern for residents and believed there were other areas of work for his Officers to focus on.

316 Performance Monitoring

Members commented that since the last meeting the reporting website had improved, however, it could be improved further, especially on mapping and communicating with residents when an issue had been reported.

The Director welcomed residents reporting issues and suggested that with faster broadband around the County it could only help, yet asked for caution as it was based on an individual's viewpoint. A helpful follow on was given whereby respondents were asked for the size of hole by comparing with sizes of ball – golf ball, tennis ball or football for example.

The Director advised that he didn't think that the current system was unworkable but would be looking to carry out a whole system review and would update the Panel in due course.

The Director of Economy and Infrastructure and the Management Information Analyst were invited to attend the meeting to discuss performance information relating to the Economy and Environmental Services Directorate for Quarter 4 2017/18.

Following the discussion the Panel was asked to determine what performance information it would wish to monitor at future meetings.

The Panel looked at some examples of the type of performance information available and discussed with the Director, Management Information Analyst and Members the information provided.

It was agreed that the Panel needed to provide further clarity to the Directorate around which performance indicators it would wish to monitor and in order to do so, a briefing would be arranged for the Panel to further understand the information available and agree with PI's it would wish to monitor.

317 Work Plan

The Panel noted that the Work Plan was approved by Council on 8 November 2018.

The meeting ended at 1.00 pm

Chairman