

Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Thursday, 21 November 2019, 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 and Mrs R Vale

Also attended:

Mr A T Amos, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Highways
Mr A P Miller, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Environment
Mr P A Tuthill, Chairman of Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Mr R M Udall, Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board
Ashley Snookes, Worcester City Council

Ian Bamforth (Highways & Public Rights of Way Operations Manager)
Dave Corbett (Management Information Analyst)
Phil Coulson (Public Rights of Way Operations Manager)
Sarah Gilmour (Intelligent Transport Systems Manager, Economy and Infrastructure Directorate)
Nigel Hudson (Head of Strategy and Infrastructure)
Steph Simcox (Head of Strategic Infrastructure Finance and Financial Recovery)
Gary Williams (Principal Traffic Management Engineer)
Samantha Morris (Scrutiny Co-ordinator) and
Alyson Grice (Overview and Scrutiny Officer)

Available Papers

The Members had before them:

- A. The Agenda papers (previously circulated);
- B. Presentation handouts for Item 6 Countryside Access and Item 7 Performance and In-Year Budget Monitoring (circulated with the Agenda);
- C. Additional PI information on potholes (previously circulated);
- D. Areas of Success and Challenge (previously circulated);
- E. The Minutes of the Meeting held on 11 September 2019 (previously circulated).

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

355 Apologies and Welcome

Apologies had been received from Mr J A D O'Donnell, Ms C M Stalker, Dr K A Pollock (Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Economy and Infrastructure) and Mrs L C Hodgson (Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities).

356 Declarations of Interest and of any Party Whip

None.

357 Public Participation

None.

358 Confirmation of the Minutes of the previous meeting

The Minutes of the meeting held on 11 September 2019 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

359 Residents Zonal Parking Schemes and Additional Carparks

In attendance for this item were:

Worcestershire County Council:

Nigel Hudson, Head of Strategic Infrastructure and Economy

Sarah Gilmour, Intelligent Transport Systems Manager

Gary Williams, Principal Traffic Management Engineer

Alan Amos, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways

Worcester City Council:

Ashley Snookes, responsible for civil parking enforcement

The Head of Strategic Infrastructure and Economy drew the Panel's attention to Appendix 2 of the agenda report which summarised the current situation, emerging schemes, and issues and challenges. During the discussion, the following main points were raised:

- The Intelligent Transport Systems Manager emphasised that the main purpose of the policy was to improve the quality of life of Worcestershire residents.
- She went on to outline the key eligibility criteria for setting up a residents parking scheme as set out in the County Council's current policy.
- It was confirmed that there were currently

schemes in each district council area.

- Members were informed that it was the 'Worcestershire way' to introduce schemes with the intention of benefitting residents. Other Local Authorities had introduced schemes to encourage residents to use public transport. This had not yet been the case in Worcestershire.
- A Member suggested that a main concern for residents close to town and city centres was commuter parking, which restricted residents' ability to park close to their homes. He suggested that if time restrictions could be imposed on non-residents this would be helpful, ie non-residents not being allowed to park between 12 and 1pm. In response, the Principal Traffic Management Engineer confirmed that schemes such as this were in operation in the County and gave the example of St Georges Square, Worcester, a scheme which had been agreed with the local residents.
- It was suggested that the bigger the zone covered by a scheme, the less knock-on effect there would be to surrounding streets. The need for legitimate short-term parking for commuters was acknowledged and it was suggested that the charge for this should be the same as for off-street parking, to avoid incentivising on-street parking. The Head of Strategic Infrastructure and Economy reminded the Panel that to date the County Council had not taken a town/city-wide approach, but instead had reacted to local issues to keep the traffic flowing.
- In response to a question about how other Local Authorities approached residents parking schemes, Members were informed that, at the time that the original policy was devised, officers had written to all Local Authorities in England and Wales to ask how they organised residents parking schemes. The responses had been very diverse, with authorities taking very different approaches.
- Members were reminded that a decision to charge for on-street parking would require investment in new equipment.
- A Member informed the Panel of a situation in his division where commuters were parking in residential streets near the local railway station, resulting in a lack of space for local residents. As a solution, parking restrictions had been put in place for half an hour in the middle of the day to discourage those using the railway from parking in

residential areas. He reported that this scheme had worked well.

- Members were reminded that, although the County Council was responsible for setting up schemes, the District Councils were responsible for enforcement. Currently, at least one District Council did not undertake any enforcement.
- A Member suggested that investment in technology could be helpful, including sensors to inform drivers where available parking spaces were situated.
- It was suggested that even in one street, some residents could be happy with a scheme, whereas others may object. The Principal Traffic Management Engineer reminded the Panel that it was important to be flexible and remember that the team was delivering a service to members of the public. If the type of housing in a road changed ie from terraced to semi-detached, it was legitimate to change the nature of the parking scheme.
- It was confirmed that garages were no longer counted as off-street parking, although driveways were. Concern was expressed about areas where many families had two cars but would not be eligible for a residents parking scheme if houses had driveways.
- The Enforcement Officer from Worcester City Council informed the Panel that the City Council had recently invested in new equipment to carry out enforcement. The team was made up of 11 officers to cover seven days per week and was currently reviewing shift patterns to facilitate coverage of a broader range of hours, including evenings and weekends. However, Members were reminded that the City Council was subject to budget constraints and Enforcement Officers also covered environmental enforcement.
- In response to a question from a Member of the Panel, it was confirmed that, overall in Worcester City, parking enforcement was self-financing. However, this was not the case for all district councils. For example, Redditch BC did not own any car parks and therefore only benefitted from on-street parking. Sufficient volume of car park users was needed for parking enforcement to pay for itself.
- It was suggested that, if residents were paying for a permit, but were aware that parking restrictions were not being enforced, there was potential for conflict.

- A Member representing a division in Worcester confirmed that he felt parking enforcement in Worcester was good. He went on to suggest that parking could be part of a wider policy covering congestion and air pollution. It may also be helpful to look at the development of multi-storey car parks in the city centre and further restrictions on on-street parking.
- The Intelligent Transport Systems Manager confirmed that challenges included staff resources, enforcement and Consolidation Orders (legal documents which underpinned all on-street restrictions and allowed them to be enforced).
- A Member of the Panel asked whether figures were available for the cost of each residents parking scheme and whether this information was published. In response, Members were told that it was very difficult to confirm a figure. Costs would include advertising and staff time. The cost of implementation was difficult to quantify accurately due to the nature of the County Council's contract with Ringway. A Member of the Panel expressed surprise about this as it was important to know the costs of a scheme in order to assess whether it was viable. Councillors also needed these figures in order to inform their conversations with residents.
- A Member asked whether it would be possible to produce one Consolidation Order covering the whole County rather than separate ones for each District Council. Members were reminded that across the County, each District Council had undertaken the decriminalisation of civil parking at different times. Therefore, bespoke schemes were produced and one Consolidation Order was developed for each District, although based on the same template. A Member suggested that it would be easier if all Local Authorities in the County used the same Order. It was acknowledged that, in an ideal world a standardised Order would be good, but getting to this point would have an impact on available resources.
- A Councillor who was not a Member of the Panel reported that in his 20-year experience of residents parking, there were two major problems which required Local Authorities to be more flexible in their approach. Firstly, the majority of

concerns about parking came from areas where residents had access to off-street parking. Often residents were concerned about non-residents parking in a way which caused issues relating to congestion, road safety and access to properties. Secondly, most schemes restricted the number of permits to spaces. If this was relaxed, a permit would be no guarantee of a space.

- The current policy of requiring 80% of residential properties responding to a consultation to be in favour of any new scheme was supported and should not be changed.
- In response to a question about the potential development of a parking strategy, it was confirmed that this would need to be a collaboration between the County Council and the District Councils as they each had responsibility for different aspects. Members were reminded that a key part of any parking strategy would be enforcement and there was currently a mixed picture in this regard across the County.
- It was confirmed that the Traffic Management Act currently did not allow residents to report illegal parking via smart phones.
- It was confirmed that a Blue Badge holder would also need a parking permit for a residents scheme.
- In response to a question from the Chairman of the Panel, it was confirmed that, in general and based on anecdotal evidence, residents parking schemes were working well.

The Chairman highlighted the following points from the discussion:

- The potential for charging non-residents for on street parking should be considered.
- Further consideration should be given to how to link parking schemes to enforcement.
- The use of technology to identify where parking spaces were available should be explored.
- Currently, most zonal parking schemes were specific to one street or a small area. It may be time to look at whether this remained the best approach.
- Should the County Council's Residents Parking Scheme Policy be reviewed?
- When developing a new scheme, a cost forecast should be included.
- It may be appropriate to review the criteria in the

current policy which requires less than 50% of affected residences to have a facility to park off the road.

- Consideration should be given to how to undertake a strategy review, given the different approaches taken in different parts of the County.
- The Council should lobby for a change in legislation to allow innovation in how the public could report illegal parking, eg via mobile phones.

The following further points were made:

- Concern had been expressed to the Chairman by a local Member about the parking situation in residential areas near to Worcestershire Royal Hospital. Members were informed that restricting parking in the middle of the day had been suggested but had received a mixed response from residents. There was a similar situation in St Johns, Worcester with overspill parking from the University of Worcester. A restriction in the middle of the day had alienated some residents. It was suggested that there could be a restriction with an exemption for residents.
- In response to a question about the various costs of residents permits across the County, the Chairman of the Panel requested that a summary sheet be produced.
- Prior to the meeting, comments had been received from a County Councillor who was not a Member of the Panel. In summary, the comments related to concerns expressed by residents of three streets in Kidderminster which were used for parking by non-residents attending popular local amenities. The local Member suggested that residents-only parking schemes should be an option for these residents. It was suggested that there may be a need to look at a wider zone to avoid displacement to surrounding streets.

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways was asked whether he had any comments to add. He suggested that the issues around parking were as important as congestion. He also noted wider issues in relation to the role of District Councils and the need for Local Authorities to work together. He went on to highlight the role of District Council planning colleagues in relation to requiring developers to provide more off-street parking, referring to an application to be considered by Worcester City Council's Planning Committee which may be approved in the knowledge that

**360 Countryside
Access**

it would increase parking problems in the local area. There was a need to be flexible and imaginative. He suggested that it may be too early to consider reviewing the Residents Parking Schemes Policy as the current policy had only been in operation since January 2018.

In attendance for this item were:

Ian Bamforth, Highways and Public Rights of Way
Manager
Phil Coulson, Public Rights of Way Operations Manager

The Panel received a presentation, the slides of which had been included in the agenda papers. In the course of the presentation and discussion, the following main points were raised:

- The Public Rights of Way (PRoW) Team managed 4604km of network across the County. This was the third densest network in the Country. Managing the network was a statutory duty. There were 4.3 FTE staff (with one vacant post) in the PRoW Mapping Team and 7.4 FTE staff in the PRoW Operations Team.
- The routes were used by walkers, cyclists and horse riders and had recreational and health benefits. The network included a number of high-profile routes which attracted tourism into the County, such as the Worcestershire Way.
- The PRoW Mapping Team's duties included processing Definitive Map Modifications Orders (DMMOs) which may result in changes or additions to the definitive map. It was confirmed that instances where the reality on the ground was not reflected on the Definitive Map would be prioritised. The number of planning and other development applications requiring temporary closures was increasing each year.
- It was confirmed that the County Council would be responsible for work in relation to large infrastructure projects whereas smaller developments would be looked after by the District Councils.
- It was confirmed that work in relation to Public Rights of Way was not holding up any developments. Engagement between District Council Planning Officers and the PRoW Team had improved recently leading to a better end result.
- The Chairman of the Panel expressed concern about a particular DMMO in Badsey which had

been on the list since 2012. The Highways and Public Rights of Way Manager reminded the Panel that there was a defined amount of staff and the Team did what it could within available resources. This reflected the national situation. Work was managed and prioritised in an orderly fashion and to best effect. It was suggested by the Chairman of the Panel that the completion of only one DMMO per year meant there would be a 55-year backlog.

- A potential future challenge was the implementation of the Deregulation Act. It was not yet clear when this would be put in place but the Service was watching to assess the possible impact.
- A Member of the Panel expressed concern about the reduction in the useable bridleway network as a result of erosion and other damage. Some riders had experienced following a route only to find some of the bridleway was unusable. The Public Rights of Way Operations Manager reminded Members that, if riders were aware of an issue with the network, they should raise it with the team and it would be dealt with in a prioritised way. Issues with the network could also be reported on the County Council's website. Members were reminded that not wanting to ride on a damaged bridleway was a matter of safety rather than rider competence. The Panel was informed that the PRow Team also took advice from the British Horse Society when assessing bridleways.
- The PRow Operations Team resolved around 2000 reported defects and obstructions per year. There was currently a backlog of 5400 defects reported. These were detailed on the PRow interactive map on the WCC webpage.
- Repairs to the PRow network were carried out by either:
 - PRow approved small-scale local contractors;
 - Community Payback, typically working with six offenders on litter picking or clearance work;
 - PRow Volunteers, currently around 250 volunteers who carried out 25% of all practical work including the majority of new gates or stiles and a good amount of waymarking. There were different volunteers, as follows:
 - Countryside Access Volunteer

Groups (currently around 19 groups)

- Recreational Route Wardens (currently 20 volunteers)
 - Parish Path Wardens (currently 125 volunteers).
- The Service had a budget of £420k. All reports of defects from members of the public were inspected within a month and some more quickly.
 - The Chairman referred the Panel to the Pebworth Countryside Access Volunteer Group which he had been involved with to improve footpaths around the village. Just over 20 months ago there had been 75 defects to the PRoW around Pebworth and some of these reported defects had been outstanding for years. In Feb 2018 the Group was set up involving up to 16 local residents. They had replaced several broken PRoW bridges, replaced stiles, fitted new gates, improved way marking and cleared overgrown vegetation. They were proud of their work and had a great community spirit. The number of defects around Pebworth was now much reduced to less than a third of what it was 20 months ago. He felt that the use of volunteer groups was a fantastic scheme which should be further promoted by the County Council. It was suggested that it would be helpful for Members to have access to an information leaflet that they could distribute to members of the public who may be interested in setting up a volunteer group.
 - Members were reminded that, although volunteer groups were a great way to get things done, they still needed some officer support in the form of a vehicle or supervision in the initial phases. Volunteer groups also needed 'drivers'/local champions – those people who would push the group forward. The Chairman of the Panel agreed but noted that there were many projects that volunteers could undertake without the need for officer support such as signage, strimming and vegetation clearance. The Panel was reminded by the officers that staffing within the Service was very lean.
 - The Service often relied on the good will of landowners when completing work. A Member suggested that it was sometimes the case that landowners would undertake the work themselves and asked whether there was some way of recognising this. It was confirmed that, broadly speaking, the Service had very good relations with

local landowners.

- Although one Member reported that local landowners were looking to open up their land by creating clear paths across, another Member suggested this had not been his experience, having witnessed landowners deliberately making footpaths impossible to use. The Public Rights of Way Operations Manager reported that the number of issues with landowners was small.
- In response to a question from a Member of the Panel, it was confirmed that in terms of accessibility, the Service conformed to British Standard for gates and stiles being one of the first counties to work within this. If a stile was in disrepair, accessibility would be considered when it was repaired, taking into account the individual location. The Service also took advice from the Chair of the Disabled Ramblers Association who lived locally.
- There had been an increase in the number of volunteers in recent years. Volunteers were provided with training in, for example, practical work, safety and Rights of Way legislation.

In summary, the Chairman highlighted the following points from the discussion:

- The Countryside Access Volunteer Group schemes were a Worcestershire County Council success story.
- Promotion of Countryside Access Volunteer Groups should be encouraged, including the production of a one-page information sheet for Councillors to give to interested members of the public.
- The rate of completion of DMMOs (at one per year with 55 outstanding) was considered poor performance and at the current rate meant the Council had a backlog of 55 years. Cabinet Member, Alan Amos, agreed to look into this area.
- The Panel would like to receive the following Performance Information as part of its quarterly updates:
 - Number of outstanding PRow defects
 - Number of new defects received in the month
 - Number of defects completed in the month
 - Number of new Countryside Access Volunteer Groups set up in the quarter.

361 Performance and In-Year Budget Monitoring

In attendance for this item were:

Nigel Hudson, Head of Strategic Infrastructure and Economy

Steph Simcox, Head of Finance

Dave Corbett, Management Information Analyst

In the course of the discussion, the following main points were made:

- At the Chairman's request, the Panel had received additional information on the completion of pothole repairs. However, the figures did not provide the necessary transparency and further detail was needed with reference to how long it had taken to carry out repairs and when they had been fixed.
- Members suggested that residents should be able to report potholes by uploading a photo from their smartphones, potentially removing the need for an engineer's inspection. It was reported that this was already done by Severn Trent in relation to leaks.

Q2 2019/20 Budget Monitoring

- The Head of Finance advised that the financial situation was slightly improved from the end of Q1 and this was a positive position for the Directorate to be in. The majority of budgets were showing underspends with only street lighting showing an overspend.
- In relation to this overspend, Members were reminded that work was ongoing to reduce the energy kw usage and a further detailed report on the corporate energy contract was to be discussed at the Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel in December. A Panel Member suggested that it may be necessary to undertake a 'deep dive' on street lighting so that scrutiny Members could understand why savings were not being achieved. It was suggested that the Chairman of the Economy and Environment O&S Panel should be invited to attend Corporate and Communities O&S Panel on 10 December when the corporate energy contract was being discussed.
- In response a question from the Chairman of the Panel, it was confirmed that the £673k proposed withdrawal from reserves/grants in relation to Strategic Infrastructure and Economy covered a number of small projects.

- It was confirmed that waste contract negotiations were ongoing.
- The Head of Finance confirmed that the figures for end of P7 were showing a slightly improved position.
- In response to a question about the financial impact of the recent floods in the County, Members were informed that an element of reserves was available for winter pressures. It was still too early to know the financial impact and this would be seen in the P8 report.

Areas of Success and Challenge

- The Panel had received a summary highlighting the Directorate's areas of success and challenge.
- A Member of the Panel asked whether EnviroSort were looking at new technologies to improve recycling rates. A further question was asked about the level of contamination in recycling bins. The Head of Strategic Infrastructure and Economy agreed to look into this and bring further information back to the Panel.
- The Panel noted an improvement in the number of days taken to approve Section 278 technical submissions. The average number of days had reduced from 279 days in 2018/19 to 219 days in 2019/20 Q2. However, it appeared that the number of submissions by developers was still too high with the majority having to submit 5 times or more before getting approval. The Head of Strategic Infrastructure and Economy agreed to provide some more information on the ways to improve the performance of this department, and what steps had been taken with regard to the consultants 'Jacobs' to assess developers' drawings.
- A Member suggested that the countywide transport assessment model should be considered by the Economy and Environment O&S Panel at a future meeting. This had been raised as an issue in District Councils. The Head of Strategic Infrastructure and Economy agreed to discuss this further with the Chairman of the Panel following the meeting.

Members of the Panel were asked to contact the Chairman following the meeting with details of any issues they would like to raise with Ringway at the Panel's January meeting.

Members discussed how they would wish to carry out scrutiny of the 2020/2021 budget. It was agreed that, once the Cabinet Budget report was available in December, the figures relevant to the Panel would be circulated to Members.

The meeting ended at 12.57 pm

Chairman