

Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Monday, 9 November 2020, Online only - 10.00 am

Present:

Minutes

Mr A A J Adams (Chairman), Mr P Denham (Vice Chairman), Mr B Clayton, Mr M E Jenkins, Mr A D Kent, Mr J A D O'Donnell and Mrs R Vale

Also attended:

Mr A P Miller, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Environment
Dr K A Pollock, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Economy and Infrastructure
Mr P Middlebrough
Mr P A Tuthill

John Hobbs (Director for Economy and Infrastructure), Rachel Hill (Assistant Director for Economy, Major Projects and Waste.), Dave Corbett (Management Information Analyst, Cultural Services/ E & I, Commercial and Change), Steph Simcox (Head of Finance), Sarah Gilmour (Intelligent Transport Systems Manager, Network Control , Economy and Infrastructure Directorate), Ed Dursley (Events and Open Highway Network Manager, Economy and Infrastructure Directorate), Emily Barker (Planning Services Manager, Economy & Infrastructure Directorate), 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. The Minutes of the Meeting held on 4 August and 11 September 2020 (previously circulated).

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

392 Apologies and Welcome

The Chairman confirmed the arrangements for the remote meeting.

Apologies had been received from Cllr Brookes and Cllr Morris.

393 Declarations of Interest and of any Party Whip

None.

394 Public Participation

The Chairman reported that five members of the public had asked to speak and that their submissions had been circulated to the Panel in advance of the Meeting.

A summary of the key points from the participants was as follows:

Chris Cooke

- Mr Cooke referred to a recent Cabinet Meeting, where Cllr Amos, the Cabinet Member with Responsibility (CMR) for Highways, had suggested that tackling traffic congestion was a priority for the Council
- Mr Cooke suggested that building new roads and widening others had not only an environmental impact, but also presented more of a danger to road users
- Reference was made to the LTP4 suggesting that it was a key opportunity to tackle congestion and small shifts from single occupancy car use to walking, cycling and passenger transport could deliver significant improvements to traffic flow and wider benefits. The measures the Council had put in place was questioned.
- In addition, students should be encouraged to walk or cycle to school, however, only when safe to do so. Therefore, widening footways, restricting vehicles near schools at the start and end of the school day and reducing speed limits should be considered.

Danny Brothwell

- Mr Brothwell asked whether Councillors had reviewed the central government Local Transport Note LTN 1/20, which outlined cycle infrastructure design, published in July 2020
- It was questioned what the Council's plan for implementing the design requirements was and whether the Local Transport Plan 4 (LTP4) was to be reviewed in light of the Note
- Was the Council considering 'School Streets'?
- LTP4 made numerous references to 'active travel' and 'modal shift'. What was the Council doing to encourage active travel?
- Would the Council consider introducing a dedicated Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Active Travel?
- There was an increase in active travel during the COVID-19 pandemic and counters show that

during October 2020, rates for walking and cycling at Diglis Bridge (Worcester) remained 33% higher than a usual October. What attempt had there been to maintain this increase?

- Does the Council really want a reduction in car use and an increase in active travel?

Andy Lyon

- Mr Lyon referred to the Council's support of the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) target of a 50% reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 2030
- Would the Council quantify the Worcestershire-wide greenhouse gas emission increases or reductions that would result from its transport policies, including road expansion and active travel?

Clive Prince

- Mr Prince asked whether the Council was aware that Sustrans had declassified the part of National Cycle Route 45 between Stourport High School and Burlish Top Nature Reserve, as under its 'Paths for Everyone' initiative, the road was deemed unsafe for active travel?
- Therefore, a suitable active travel corridor was required to ensure safe passage between Bewdley and Stourport
- Could the County Council work in partnership with Wyre Forest District Council to establish an appropriate multi-user corridor, which would support economic, environmental and public health objectives?

David Whiting

- Mr Whiting referred to a previous Scrutiny Panel meeting, where Members considered the Council's Net Zero Carbon Plan, specifically that the Council would consider the environmental impact of all future Council projects
- The Economy and Infrastructure Directorate Dashboard did not seem to reflect this commitment yet, therefore, was the Council taking the matter seriously and was the Panel being appropriately updated?

The Chairman thanked all participants for their interest and stated that if during the relevant discussion their questions were not answered then a written response would be provided by Directorate Officers.

<p>395 Confirmation of the Minutes of the previous meeting</p>	<p>The Minutes of the Meetings held on 4 August and 11 September 2020 were agreed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman.</p>
<p>396 Performance, In-Year Budget Monitoring and 2021/22 Budget Scrutiny</p>	<p>Officers in attendance for this Item were:</p> <p>John Hobbs, Strategic Director for Economy and Infrastructure Dave Corbett, Management Information Analyst Steph Simcox, Head of Finance</p> <p><u>Performance Monitoring – Quarter 2 (July to September 2020)</u></p> <p>Members had received the Quarter 2 Information Dashboard as part of the Agenda papers.</p> <p>The Chairman referred to some of the outstanding queries from previous meetings. Although these were being actively progressed, particular reference was drawn to the request for more detail in the reporting of potholes. Officers were working with developers to adjust the mobile workforce app used by Ringway (the Council's contractor). Currently in testing, if approved, future Performance Information Dashboards would include the information the Panel had requested. In relation to Public Rights of Way and the promotion of working with volunteers, there was a commitment to do so and a detailed response would follow. Outstanding queries around Section 278 agreements were in the process of being signed off for circulation to the Panel.</p> <p>The Chairman invited questions and the following main points were made:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In response to a query about the depth of potholes in footways and highways, it was confirmed that there was a code of practice which the Council followed. By acting in accordance with the policy, the Council would then satisfy its duties around inspections and repairs • Members commended the Council for its investment in highway maintenance, in comparison to neighbouring authorities. The Director added that given the size and diversity of the Worcestershire network, it was not possible to offer perfect road or footway surfaces all of the time. Between inspections, the Panel and the public were encouraged to report defects for

- assessment and appropriate intervention
- The Council strived to keep the condition of its highways well above the national average, yet challenges for maintaining this included the intensity of traffic, in particular Heavy Goods Vehicles, flooding events and the weather, in particular winters of repeated freeze followed by thaw
 - When asked what remedial work should be carried out by a contractor, it was clarified that the surface should be restored to the standard it was before. Although a challenge to follow up on every case, there was an Officer team responsible for this and problems should be reported. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility (CMR) for Economy and Infrastructure added that occasionally there had been issues of contractors opening the road up too soon and not allowing the tarmac to properly cure, therefore there had been incidences of subsidence. The Chairman believed that there was a regulation which could be implemented, possibly a Section 58 notice, which the Director agreed to clarify outside of the meeting
 - A Member suggested that the Council's database of highway and footway assets was not wholly accurate as they were aware of local queries over ownership
 - The national objective of food waste collection by the end of 2023 had not yet been discussed with District Councils. The Panel noted that the Environment Bill needed to be passed into law, however, the costs involved would be large taking into account some past District Council experience in this area
 - In response to a query as to why Public Enquires (PEMs) should expect an increase in Quarter 3 (October to December), it was explained that seasonal differences were normal. The Panel was pleased to note the continuing improvement in service, with 83% of September PEMs completed within 28 days. Furthermore, it was clarified that responses were prepared by Council Officers and not external consultants. A Member asked whether responses were routinely checked for quality, to be informed that there was a blend of automated responses and free text. If members of the public were dissatisfied with a response, they should be encouraged to write again referencing the original enquiry. Members were advised to highlight any known

- dissatisfaction to the Officer Team directly
- The Panel was pleased that 96.87% of Worcestershire's homes and business premises were now connected to Superfast Broadband (24 Megabits per second) and encouraged the Council to ensure 100% coverage. The CMR for Economy and Infrastructure agreed with the Panel and referred to the aspiration of having much faster connection through Fibre to the Premises (FTTP). Its rollout would be to support the outstanding 3% of households and premises first
 - In relation to one of the public questions, it was clarified that reporting of CO₂ emissions was at a Corporate level and information would be shared with the Panel
 - There was concern over the steady increase in the number of outstanding Public Rights of Way (PROW) reports. It was unclear as to whether there was any particular reason for the figures, however, discussion took place as to whether additional staffing was required. The Panel welcomed the use of volunteers and Officers had worked with community groups and Parishes to enable remedial works to be undertaken locally, whether by providing tools or appropriate advice and support. Successful examples were given however, it was felt that the Council could do more, especially as residents were using local outside space more readily due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In-year Budget Monitoring – Quarter 2 (July to September 2020) and 2021/2022 Budget Scrutiny

The Head of Finance reported that there had been no dramatic change during Quarter 2, however, the Directorate was now forecasting a small underspend of £23,000 at year end, rather than a small overspend. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was still challenging, especially for services that had to adapt or loss of income for services that had to cease. To compensate, numerous central government grants continued to be received.

The Chairman invited questions and the following points were raised:

- A Member queried whether the £637,000 draft variance in Planning and Regulation was due to the need to cover vacant posts with consultants, a

point which the Director agreed to clarify after the meeting

- The Panel discussed whether there was a wider concern about difficulties in recruiting to specialised positions and asked whether there was scope for the Council to appoint apprentices to build a professional team over time. In response, the Director explained that the Council often engaged with Consultants for time limited work and had recruited recent graduates. However, it would not be viable for the Council to have such an in-house team due to the lack of professional development opportunities. In relation to current vacancies, the Director was not aware of any particular issues
- Reviewing the waste management service was a key area of work for 2021/22, with the Energy from Waste contract due to end in 2023. The 25-year contract did have an option to extend for a further 5 years, however, the Council would need to determine whether it wished to renew or procure a new contract
- A Member referred to the challenges of flooding events and expressed disappointment about the lack of Member communication, suggesting that other stakeholders were more informed. Officers had previously agreed to provide regular Member updates on individual schemes
- In relation to recycling, there was general support for the active encouragement already in place for residents, however, it was felt that more could be done corporately, especially for any future contracts awarded. The Panel was very concerned about the impact on District Councils of the proposed food waste collection scheme, especially the associated costs and health and safety aspects. It was felt that increased composting could compensate if the scheme was introduced
- The CMR for Environment reassured the Panel that resident communication on recycling was consistent across the County, with the Council co-ordinating the production of literature. The 'Let's Waste Less' Team and Education specialists had not been operating through the COVID-19 pandemic; however, their work would continue when safe to do so. Furthermore, the CMR recognised that if the Environment Bill was passed, it could take District Councils until 2027 to fully comply as changes to the vehicle fleet would also be required

- In relation to organisational redesign, the Director reported that work on the 2020/21 savings and efficiencies was in progress, however, a new Directorate management structure had been implemented. Further work on improving processes would be carried forward and although as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, remote working was likely to become part of usual working practice over time due to the savings achieved
- The key area of implementing a single 'front door' for access to Council services was a corporate development, however, the Director believed that there was a need for specialised information, advice and guidance for certain services within his Directorate. Furthermore, the development of a strong digital offer was more suited to processes, such as reporting an issue, rather than offering tailored support
- For clarity, market availability and the ability to provide services was, in part, reference to the demand for professionals, for example in the engineering sector, but also in areas such as the sustainability of transport operators. In addition, the difficulties caused with Teams, when a team member being absent due to COVID-19 enforces the remaining team members to self-isolate
- A Member suggested that the different ways of working due to the pandemic had highlighted the value of a digital offer, however, it was important to share learning and upskill staff to utilise the software available.

In summing up, the Chairman highlighted to the Director and Cabinet Members three areas which the Panel had been monitoring throughout the year and felt were under-performing:

- s278 agreements – it was taking too long to get technical drawings approved, causing delays to infrastructure being built
- Public Rights of Way – there was an increasing number of issues (as discussed earlier in the meeting) which it was important to look at ways of reducing
- Data Collection – the Panel had commended the Council on its high quality highway maintenance and was pleased to hear that the new Ringway app would hopefully provide the data to support this

397 Identification and Review of Diversionary Routes

The meeting was adjourned between 12:05 and 12:10pm

Officers talked through the presentation slides which were provided as part of the Agenda. Key points included:

- Diversions took place for planned works or events and emergencies
- The greatest disruption for Worcestershire was for Motorway closures, either in an emergency or for planned overnight works and there were fixed diversion routes based on the best classification of road available
- 'one.network' was a publicly available portal which the Council used to show all types of road closures, planned or emergency, and highlighted the appropriate diversionary route. The system was also able to update the satellite navigation (sat nav) systems TomTom and Google Maps, which in turn would re-route traffic. Discussions had taken place with West Mercia Police to investigate whether they could update the portal when responding to incidents
- Communication around planned road closures included social media, local newspapers, radio, signage on the road and one.network
- A further online resource, Street Manager, was also available throughout England and provided live mobile technology.

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

- In response to how quickly the portals could be updated, it was reported that one.network could be updated in less than 5 minutes, whereas Street Manager could encounter a delay of up to one hour. Furthermore, the Panel heard that Highways England was very good at reporting incidents. Extra information could also be added, such as bridges with weight limits
- The Panel recognised that the use of sat nav was increasing, and therefore drivers were more likely to re-route than follow signage. It was suggested that two types of sat nav would be helpful, one for cars and one for heavy goods vehicles (HGVs), a point which a Member believed was already in place. However, it was important to continue with signage, especially on local routes or where roads were not suitable for certain traffic, such as HGVs, given that not every road user had sat

**398 Update on
Active Travel in
Worcestershire**

nav

- Clarification on the legal position of road users ignoring closed signs was sought, however, it was highlighted that signage was part of the Highway Code and if evidence, such as photographs showing number plates, was available to prove damage to the highway, the Council would take appropriate action
- A Member not on the Panel asked whether signage could indicate exactly where a closure was planned, which would help rural road users. In response, if requested, this could occur and one.network always mapped the exact position
- Another Member not on the Panel asked whether there was an opportunity for residents who lived on diversionary routes to be notified if the route was to be used or in use. In response, one.network was able to provide alerts and also provide live traffic reports. Officers agreed to provide further information on one.network to Members, which in turn could be shared with residents
- Classification of a particular road, and therefore their suitability for the diversionary route, could be investigated by Officers.

The Planning Services Manager talked through the Agenda report and drew attention to the following points:

- Although quite dated, 2011 census data had identified that 2% of journeys to work were made by bicycle and no data was available for leisure cycling
- There were three counters in Worcestershire, which all showed that during 2020, there had been a consistent increase in cycling compared to 2019, with expected drops for weather events and shorter days for example
- In July 2020, central government produced new advice and guidance, including LTN 1/20 referred to by one of the Public Participants. The aspiration was to encourage people to be more active, contributing to health and well-being, and for cycle networks to be convenient and as safe as possible
- LTP4, adopted in 2017 included proposals for the period up to 2030 for active travel
- A number of funding bids had been submitted to central government, with some already secured. Further funding opportunities were expected and

in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, additional funding had been released by the government.

The Chairman invited questions and the following key points were made:

- To answer the public question as to whether the Council had considered LTN 1/20, the Panel learned that it had and would continue to do so
- Some Members asked about specific local schemes in their Divisions, which were encountering issues. It was agreed that Officers would provide further information outside of the meeting, however, in all cases, it was felt that Member engagement was lacking and that each Member should be regularly updated on schemes in their area
- The Panel learned that new housing developments were considered for active travel and personalised travel planning was always available
- In response to a query as to what progress had been made with Phase 1 of the Emergency Active Travel Fund, it was reported that mapping had been undertaken, cycle parking had been commissioned and companies would be invited to apply for parking and two surface improvement schemes were in the contractor's (Ringway) programme of works
- A Member expressed concern that the government's shift away from shared use was not reflected in Council proposals, however, it was clarified that schemes may need to be modified in light of new guidance. In relation to Canal Towpaths, lighting would not be considered, however, passing places may be
- Although there was not a Council target to increase active travel, it was hoped that residents could be further encouraged to make shorter journeys by walking or cycling. In addition, funding had been sought to increase the number of counters, which would provide more data collection
- A Member asked how a new footway or cycle path could be installed if not already in a programme, to be informed that Officers were open to conversation
- Overall, the Panel was pleased with the progress made in relation to active travel and looked forward to an annual update.

399

**Work
Programme**

No additional Items were added, however the Chairman referred to the upcoming Budget Scrutiny Task Group and Member Briefing to look at real time reporting, both of which were on the Work Programme.

The meeting ended at 1.30 pm

Chairman