

Notes of the

Informal Economy and Environment

Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Online only

Monday, 19 July 2021, 2.00 pm

Present:

Cllr Alastair Adams (Chairman), Cllr Karen Hanks (Vice Chairman),
Cllr Bob Brookes, Cllr Beverley Nielsen, Cllr Aled Luckman, Cllr Tony Muir,
Cllr Jack Satterthwaite, Cllr Emma Stokes and Cllr Craig Warhurst

Also attended:

Cllr Alan Amos, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Highways and
Transport
Cllr Tony Miller, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Environment
Cllr Tom Wells, Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board
Cllr Richard Morris, Vice-Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Performance
Board

Paul Smith, Assistant Director for Highways & Transport Operations
Rachel Hill, Assistant Director for Economy, Major Projects and Waste.
Steph Simcox, Deputy Chief Finance Officer (Service Finance)
Adrian Tuck, Section 278 and 38 Development Control Manager
Dave Corbett, Management Information Analyst
Ian Bamforth, Senior Programme Manager
Elliot Pritchard, Head of Highways Operations
Samantha Morris, Scrutiny Co-ordinator
Alison Spall, Overview and Scrutiny Officer

Available Papers

The Members had before them:

- A. The Agenda papers (previously circulated).
- B. Agenda Item 4 – a revised Appendix 1

1 Apologies and Welcome

Apologies were received from Councillors Allah Ditta, Panel Member and Marc Bayliss, Cabinet Member with Responsibility.

2 Declarations of Interest and of any Party Whip

None.

3 Developer Funded Highways Infrastructure - Update Report

In attendance for this item were:

Ian Bamforth, Senior Programme Manager
Adrian Tuck, Section 278 and 38 Development Control Manager
Paul Smith, Assistant Director for Highways and Transport Operations

The Panel considered an update report on the Council's work on developer funded highways infrastructure, in particular the time taken for planning submissions from developers to meet the criteria for approval. A presentation was also given by the Senior Programme Manager.

The Programme Manager advised that a review of key areas of the Council's 278/38 Development Control activity had been started in January 2021. The review was to take account of key issues raised by the Panel as well as issues identified by the Management Team. A working group with developers had now been established and was meeting every 3 months. Areas of discussion, and upon which progress to date had been made, included:

- The review of the streetlighting design process
- Technical approval process and the 4 submissions escalation process
- Early planning engagement
- A protocol for working effectively together.

The Panel was informed that the street lighting technical design process had been reviewed and agreed timescales and performance measures put in place. The Programme Manager highlighted that the average duration for completion of the design process had previously been 193 days, but that the review had concluded that 91 days was an achievable target, provided all timescales were met by the Council and the developer. The process was currently being tested and carefully monitored, with monthly performance figures being produced. Where issues did arise, these were being addressed proactively as the trial progressed. It was noted that this model would be used as the basis for the wider technical approval process.

In terms of the design technical approval process, the Panel was informed that a thorough review was underway and revised elements were being implemented. Key improvements to the process included offering early review meetings to developers, having more focussed milestones for each section of the process, a joint meeting with the developer if a 3rd submission was

required and if the 4th submission stage was reached, instigating the escalation procedure. The latter would ensure that if the process was not progressing at an adequate pace and a 4th submission stage was reached, the matter would be escalated to Senior Managers for them to review with the developer and identify what obstacles were causing the delay.

Alongside the above, the Programme Manager explained that there was a review of the schemes register, currently with around 474 schemes active at this point. This review would be completed within the next 6 to 8 weeks, following which the full list would be made available to the Panel to review.

The Panel was also informed that a resource plan had been agreed to ensure that the Development Control Team had sufficient capacity to deal with the number of developments involving Section 38/278 activity. Additional contractor resource had been brought in as well as additional engineer posts being advertised. A joint Officer post was also being created in partnership with Wychavon and Malvern Hills District Councils.

Engagement by the Development Control Team at an earlier pre-planning stage with developers was seen to be an effective way to take matters forward in a proactive manner. This was already underway in the case of about 12 schemes and with further resources in place, this would be able to be expanded.

The Programme Manager also wanted to highlight was that Officers were in the process of liaising with Midland Highways Alliance + to see how other Highways authorities provided development control services. A report would be prepared to summarise key learning points gained during this process.

The Chairman invited discussion and the following main points were made:

- In response to a query on a scheme where 12 re-submissions had been made, the Development Control Manager explained that this was an unusual case and the figure was misleading. Having originally been a combined scheme it later had to be split owing to ecology issues. The Panel was informed that in this case the development approval had been ready for a while, but the developer had chosen not to sign it yet.
- Further to the above, the Panel was made aware that some of the delays in the system were due to developers seeking not to progress with signing legal agreements until it suited them financially. This meant that customers could be disadvantaged for a longer period, which was out of the control of the Council. Members asked for further written explanation of this process, the actions, and motives of the developers and what the Council's position was.
- In response to a query as to which developers had taken part in the review process, the Panel was informed that this was Taylor Wimpey, Persimmon, Redrow and Bloors. These 4 developers represented over half of the Council's work in this area.
- The impact on residents from delays in the process was a key concern for the Panel. The Development Control Manager explained that S278 works were on Council land so developers couldn't commence works

until the Council was satisfied they had met all the requirements. S38 works on the development site, however, were able to be started as soon as planning consent was granted and therefore residents were able to occupy properties before works were fully completed in a development. New residents were made aware of this during the conveyancing process. The Chairman highlighted that over time when owners sought to sell their homes, purchasers sought evidence of the road being adopted, and the homeowners had to take out indemnity insurance to protect themselves if this had yet to take place.

- A Member expressed interest in how this Council's current average duration for completion of the street lighting design process compared to other Councils across the country. The Programme Manager commented that a regional comparison would be useful.
- A Member expressed his desire that a real impact was able to be made in this area with tighter contracts, deadlines with penalties attached and much improved communication with residents and those using the road network.

4 Cyclical Drainage - Update on Online Mapping System for Gullies

In attendance for this item were:

Elliot Pritchard, Head of Highways Operations

Paul Smith, Assistant Director for Highways and Transport Operations

The Panel had requested an update on cyclical drainage in respect of the Council's online mapping system for gullies. The Chairman advised the Panel that drainage and gully issues resulted in large numbers of public enquiries and that this new system being developed would provide up to date information helping to make the process more efficient for all concerned.

The Head of Highways Operations had updated his presentation and he led the meeting through the information contained therein. He provided a recap on the development of the online system which would enable users to access up to date information about gullies and drainage systems across the county. There were several stages to the development process and to date work had focussed on ensuring the accuracy of the source data, developing the mapping functionality, and holding an online mapping trial. The latter had resulted in useful feedback from Members being obtained, which had then been used to further enhance the system.

The Panel was informed that work was also ongoing in building a 'Report-It' system, aimed at enabling the process of identifying and reporting drainage issues to be simplified and made freely accessible to the public. Other work was focussed on developing links to the Engineers Advisory database so that issues could be identified where there were frequent problems being raised and in cases where an engineering solution might be required.

The Head of Highways Operations set out a timetable for next steps which included:

- Week commencing 9 August – a live demonstration of GIS Gully Mapping system to members of the Panel
- Week commencing 30 August – all County Councillors to be provided with a link and password for the system
- Mid-September/October – live demonstration of Report-It function to Panel
- December – Live Report-It function to be made available on website

Members welcomed the development of this system and praised the Officers for their work. In response to a question as to whether the new system would have an impact on delivering a better service, the Panel was advised that the system would allow routine queries to reach the relevant Team much more quickly. In the case of non-routine issues, where the gullies required more than emptying, the system would provide accurate information of clusters of defects which needed more detailed investigation. In terms of service levels, the Panel was informed that extra resources had recently been provided allowing for the backlog of works to be looked at and dealt with as effectively as possible. There were currently 4 cleansing vehicles in use for drainage works at this time of year, but this could be increased where necessary whenever there was a significant backlog.

The Chairman thanked the Head of Highways Operations and his colleagues for all their work in developing this system, which he felt would be a huge improvement.

5 Performance and 2020/21 Year-End Budget Monitoring

In attendance for this item were:

Paul Smith, Assistant Director for Highways and Transport Operations
 Rachel Hill, Assistant Director Economy, Major Projects, and Waste
 Steph Simcox, Deputy Chief Finance Officer (Service Finance)
 Dave Corbett, Management Information Analyst

Performance Monitoring – Quarter 4 (January to March 2021)

The Panel was presented with a dashboard of performance information relating to indicators from the Directorate level scorecard, the Corporate scorecard and other management information relating to this Panel's remit for Quarter 4.

A range of queries were raised by Members, as set out below:

- Latest figures on Waste – in response to a query about the date of the latest figures, Officers explained that there was always a lag in getting information through, due to the timing of their production with them being linked to a national system. The figures were expected to be available in the Autumn and published in January.
- Waste Collection – A member commented favourably on the trend of reducing waste from going to landfill and asked how this trend would continue going forward. The Assistant Director advised that as much as

possible would continue to be recycled or categorised so that it was treated differently which meant that overtime there would continue to be further reductions in waste being sent to landfill.

- Ash from Energy to Waste plant – It was confirmed that a lot of the ash and residue from the plant could be recycled. The Cabinet Member advised that much of it went to Hill and Moor where it was processed into 3 different aggregates. A classification was currently awaited from Environment Agency which could lead to a significant increase in recycling.
- Food wastage – The Assistant Director advised that there was currently consultation taking place nationally on this issue. The County Council as disposal authority and the District Councils as collection authorities were all involved. The outcome of the consultation would be known at the end of the year.
- Congestion and speeding – A Member queried why the data didn't currently cover these issues or the impact of them on quality of life. The Chairman advised that these issues hadn't traditionally been looked at by the Panel, but it was suggested they could be considered for the Work Programme.
- Potholes – A Member highlighted that the percentage of potholes fixed on time always showed 100%. He queried whether this suggested the timescales were currently too long? He also asked what category of potholes were included in this data? The Assistant Director advised that that there were 4 timescales (1 hour, 24 hour, 7 days, 28 days) for completion of work depending on the severity of the pothole. The Panel was informed that the timescale of 1 hour was to ensure the situation was made safe and that the actual repair might take longer. The Chairman asked that the data to back up the figures be reported to the Panel in more detail. It was also requested that data on a wider range of potholes be included in the report.
- Greenhouse gas emissions – The delay in having the latest information available was raised. The Panel was informed that some data would be reported to the September Panel, but the Assistant Director agreed to check when the next update on corporate data would be available.
- Working Adults – A Member asked whether there were projected figures for numbers of working adults following the end of the furlough scheme? The Assistant Director advised that such information was not available, although she would circulate the latest report on claimant information which would be of interest. The Management Information Analyst advised that he would also circulate the latest data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) once it was released in August.
- Public Rights of Way (PROW) and Footways – the Panel were pleased to note that additional resources were being invested in improving both of these.
- Streetlighting reduced spend – A query was raised as to how the significant reduction in spend on streetlighting had been achieved? The Assistant Director explained that it would have resulted from a number of initiatives including the continued move to replace bulbs with LED's, the 'switch off' scheme and savings achieved through the procurement process. The Assistant Director agreed to supply further clarification and advise on details of the 'switch off scheme'.

- Rail journeys – In response to a query, the Management Information Analyst advised that cancelled trains were not included in the percentage of train journeys on time figures. He confirmed that he would obtain that data and include it into the dashboard for future reports.
- Economic Growth – Gross Value Added (GVA) – A Member asked a detailed question about the performance and target data. The Management Information Analyst confirmed that there was always a delay on these figures but that for the September Panel meeting, the figures would be updated with the 2018/19 data. He advised that the percentage figure was likely to remain at a similar level of 0.86%.
- Data Champions – Owing to the volume of data received by the Panel, the Chairman suggested that Panel Members may wish to consider specialising in an area of the data that they were particularly interested in.

Budget Monitoring – Year-end financial Outturn for 2020/21

The Deputy Chief Finance Officer provided a summary overview of the information contained in the report. She advised that the year-end position was broadly at break even, after a transfer of £0.9m to a Waste transformation reserve in preparation for the development of the Waste Strategy in the year ahead. She highlighted some areas of underspend including where staff vacancies were difficult to fill and in relation to transport operations, due to reduced use of public transport owing to the pandemic.

In terms of the Capital Programme the Panel was advised that of the £160m Budget, £53.9m had been carried forward to next year. The overall Capital Budget for 2021/22 would be approximately £150m, with Quarter 1 outturn currently on track.

Members raised a number of issues as follows:

- Winter Maintenance Budget – the overspend of £340k was queried and explanation sought. Officers referred to the high demand on gritting services and increased tree removals required following wind events. It was agreed that a more detailed written explanation would be provided for the Panel.
- Strategic Land and Economy – A Member asked for more detailed information as to the services which were incorporated under this heading.
- Waste Transformation reserve – The Deputy Chief Finance Officer advised that as this was a new reserve the figure was zero at the start of the year. The Assistant Director, Economy, Major Projects and Waste explained that the reserve would be used for financial, legal and technical advice in connection with the waste contract which expired in January 2024, whether that was for an extension of the current contract or a re-procurement process.
- Skills and Investment spend – the low level of spend was queried and whether there were comparators with other County Councils on this.

The numbers in employment were also sought. Officers agreed to check and report back to the Panel.

6 Work Programme 2021/22

Members were invited to consider the Panel's current work programme and put forward any amendments, prior to the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board's (OSPB) review of the overall scrutiny work programme on 21 July.

Developer-funded Highways Infrastructure and Section 278 Technical approval Scrutiny Task Group

The Chairman highlighted that in January 2021 the OSPB had approved a Scrutiny proposal for Developer-funded Highways Infrastructure and Section 278 Technical approval, which would be added to the work programme as a legacy for post-election Scrutiny. With the Panel now having received an update report on this issue earlier in the meeting, the Chairman proposed that the OSPB should now be asked to allocate resources for this Task Group so that it could be commenced in October 2021. He felt the delaying of the start date until October was appropriate to allow time for the Officers to progress the outstanding issues. An update report would be sought for the first meeting of the Task Group. The Panel agreed with this course of action which would be recommended to OSPB for approval.

Panel's Work Programme

A wide-ranging discussion took place about potential items for inclusion in the Panel's work programme. The ideas were consolidated into 4 key new areas for the work programme which are shown below and would be submitted to the OSPB on 21 July and on to Council in September:

- How Worcestershire County Council is helping the economy grow
- Road safety and reduction of speeding by use of built highways infrastructure
- Congestion – what actions are being taken to reduce the problem
- Pothole repairs innovation – new ways of repairing

The Panel's potential role and involvement in connection with the renewal of the contract for the Energy to Waste Plant at Hartlebury was raised. The Cabinet Member advised that there would be a clear route for Members' questions to be submitted in advance of the renewal date.

The meeting ended at 4.14 pm

Chairman

