

Minutes of the Economy and Environment Overview and

Scrutiny Panel

County Hall, Worcester

Tuesday, 1 March 2022, 2.00 pm

Present:

Cllr Alastair Adams (Chairman), Cllr Bob Brookes, Cllr Allah Ditta,
Cllr Beverley Nielsen, Cllr Tony Muir, Cllr Emma Stokes and
Cllr Craig Warhurst

Also attended:

Cllr Tony Miller, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Environment

Rachel Hill, Assistant Director for Economy, Major Projects and Waste.
Paul Smith, Assistant Director for Highways & Transport Operations
Steph Simcox, Deputy Chief Finance Officer
Trevor McGill, Lighting Engineer
Dave Corbett, Management Information Analyst
Samantha Morris, Overview and Scrutiny Manager

Available Papers

The members had before them:

- A. The Agenda papers (previously circulated);
- B. The Minutes of the Meeting held on 20 January 2022 (previously circulated).

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

436 Apologies and Welcome

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Councillors Karen Hanks and Jack Satterthwaite.

437 Declarations of Interest and of any Party Whip

None.

438 Public Participation

None.

439 Confirmation of the Minutes of the previous meeting

The Minutes of the meeting on 20 January 2022 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

440 Street Lighting Update

The Assistant Director for Highways and Transport Operations introduced the Update on Street Lighting Report, which included the progress made with the light emitting diode (LED) roll-out programme and the outcomes so far from the concrete column survey. The Panel last received an update in August 2020.

Members were reminded that during the Council's recent Budget setting process, an extra £6m had been allocated to complete the LED conversion and that the Council's street lighting services were delivered by the Lighting Maintenance Contractor, Prysmian.

From August 2020 – March 2021, there had been 4,547 LED conversions and 324 concrete replacements and by the end of March 2022, it was estimated that there would be at total of 10,323 LED conversions and 825 concrete replacements completed.

At the end of March 2022, it was anticipated there would be 20,573 (37%) non-LED streetlights left to convert. Noting that the current contract for the unmetered supply was due to expire in April 2022 and the new rate had been confirmed at an increase of 88.6% (from 13.455p per kwh to 23.38p per kwh) it had been agreed that the conversion of the remaining non-LED streetlighting would be accelerated using the £6m allocation. It was anticipated that this would be delivered within 12-18 months.

During the opportunity for discussion, the following main points were made:

- In response to a member question about whether the Contractor would be able to complete the accelerated roll-out of LED conversions within 12-18 months, the Panel was advised that discussions had taken place with the Contractor to confirm this, although realistically the roll-out conversion may slip to completion in 2023/24.
- It was explained that the actual charge for the UMS was calculated by using industry codes and regulations.
- The weblink to the Geographic Information System (GIS) Maps for streetlights would be circulated to all Councillors as a reminder of street light locations.
- In 2019, £2m had been approved from the Highways Infrastructure Investment Fund allocation for the roll-out of the replacement of ageing concrete columns and to fit LEDs as they were replaced in addition to

the replacement of existing (relatively) low efficiency lanterns with new LED stock on existing steel columns. The intention was to spend this allocation on the improvements within 2 years, however due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the resultant delays (in both supplies and Contractor resources) it will have been successfully completed by end of March 2022. It was agreed that the Panel would be provided with the details of the total number of LED conversions to date.

- There were areas in the County where specialist lamps (red lights) had been fitted for the protection of ecology, the examples give were Warndon Villages and Fernhill Health (for bat colonies).
- Heritage lamps were currently being sourced and would be retro fitted where appropriate.
- In terms of solar options, it was confirmed that some solar units were currently being trialled.
- The main supplier of LED lamps for the conversion process was a local company based in Redditch.
- The life expectancy of a LED lamp was 15-20 years (with a 10 year guarantee) compared to 4 years for a sodium lamp.
- It was explained that in the case of a faulty batch of lamps, the supplier had replaced them free of charge and also covered the re-fitting costs too.
- The Panel would be provided with details of the key performance indicators and monitoring arrangements for the LED conversion programme.
- Hard to reach concrete columns were very successfully reached by a mini-crane.
- In response to a question about the progress of LED conversions in Redditch, the Panel was advised that all concrete columns had been assessed and a few still needed to be replaced.

The Chairman thanked officers for the Report and the progress made with the Programme.

441 Performance and In-Year Budget Monitoring

In-Year Budget Monitoring

The Head of Finance advised the Panel that as at the end of Quarter 3 (October- December 2021) there was an improving financial position with a £52k underspend compared with £183k overspend at the end of Quarter 2.

There were a number of key variances which were due to a forecast:

- Overspend in Transport Planning and Strategic Planning (part of Planning and Regulation) due to a reduction in expected levels of capitalisation and impact of contractor staff costs to cover hard to recruit vacancies
- Underspend in Street Lighting due to reduction in energy costs following conversion to LED lighting
- Underspend on Business Management due to holding vacant posts..

The Economy and Infrastructure Directorate had a savings target of £1.3m from 2020/21 and capitalisation targets of £2m to deliver this year. It was currently forecast that the majority of this would be delivered and where there were risks to delivery, alternative compensatory efficiencies and income generation had been identified.

There was a total capital programme of c£150m this financial year.

The Chairman commented that he was very pleased with the budgetary position.

During the opportunity for questions, the following main points were made:

- It was noted that the 2022/23 Budget Book should be available in summary format within 2 weeks.
- The Assistant Director reassured the Panel that the staff vacancies held over during the Covid-19 pandemic would be filled as services were now starting to return to normal levels.
- It was confirmed that Infrastructure Asset Management was now part of Major Projects.
- The Head of Finance was content with the capitalisation of the Major Projects Staffing Budget and advised the Panel that each position was rigorously scrutinised and that there were checks and balances in place.

Performance Monitoring

The Management Information Analyst introduced the report drawing the Panel's attention to the areas of success and challenges.

During the opportunity for questions, the following main points were made:

- In response to a Member query, it was agreed that the Panel would be provided with a graph that detailed the % of each category of domestic waste to make-up 100%.
- In terms of reducing the amount of waste per head, it was confirmed that the Council had good working relationships with all of its district councils and collaborated on initiatives and campaigns relating to waste reduction, but there was always more that could be done.
- A Member expressed concern about residents being turned away from the household recycling centres if making repeated trips to dispose of waste as staff may be suspicious that they were disposing of commercial rather than domestic waste, which in turn would lead to increased fly-tipping. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for the Environment agreed to look into this matter.
- A Member suggested that consideration should be given to providing incentives to residents to encourage appropriate recycling. The Assistant Director for Economy, Major Projects and Waste suggested that through school children was often a good method for passing on messages. The Panel comments would be fed back.

- In December 2021, Worcestershire's employment rate was 79.10% (England 74.9%), a Member queried how this rate could be improved. The Assistant Director for Economy, Major Projects and Waste explained that the Council was working on a number of initiatives with local businesses and schools to promote apprenticeships but progress would take time.
- As at December 2021, 97.83% of residents were connected to superfast broadband, although this rate was good, a Member was concerned about the number of residents who did not have the connectivity. Councillors were advised that if there were cases in their areas to contact the Broadband Team.
- Members of the Panel had an ongoing concern about the accuracy of the data provided in respect of the % of potholes fixed on time which was always reported to be 100%. The Assistant Director for Highways and Transport Operations advised that when the Panel carried out a site visit to Lydiate Ash, a detailed explanation would be provided which would hopefully allay concerns.
- A Member suggested that the economic growth data relating to working-age adults in employment would be more meaningful if it was split down into categories. It was agreed that Councillors Muir and Nielson would work with the Management Information Analyst to identify the quality of jobs in Worcestershire and trends for eg for SME, PAYE, self-employed etc.
- A Member highlighted that councillors were often unaware of the progress or closure of outstanding public rights of way (PROWS) and public enquiries (PEMS) reports without driving around to check and it would be helpful if updates could be made easily accessible to councillors. The Assistant Director for Highways and Transport Operations suggested that a number of the reports were business as usual and would automatically be dealt with but acknowledged that it would be helpful to councillors to be able to check on progress for example through the Member Portal and would consider how best to achieve this.
- It was noted that 69.9% of rail journeys from Worcester were on time and although the Council didn't have a specific responsibility for this, feedback to West Midlands Rail Services was provided to improve this.
- In response to a Member suggestion that unclassified roads on the 'Conditions of Roads and Footways (CVI)' data chart were deteriorating, it was agreed that the 2021/22 data would be provided to the May Panel meeting.

442 Work Programme

The Work Programme was discussed and the following amendments noted:

- The Waste Contract and the Council's work and role in tackling Climate Change would be discussed at the July meeting.
- The Broadband Annual Update would be discussed at the September meeting.

- A date for the Panel Awayday would be confirmed (possibly 9 June at 10am).
- The visit to Lydiate Ash would be rearranged.

The meeting ended at 4.10 pm

Chairman