

## **Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board**

### **County Hall, Worcester**

**Wednesday, 25 May 2022, 10.00 am**

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#### **Present:**

Cllr Tom Wells (Chairman), Cllr Alastair Adams, Cllr Brandon Clayton, Cllr Matt Dormer, Cllr Steve Mackay, Cllr Emma Stokes, Cllr Shirley Webb and Cllr Richard Udall

#### **Also attended:**

Cllr Mike Rouse, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways and Transport

Cllr Marc Bayliss, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Economy, Infrastructure and Skills

Cllr Mel Allcott, Unity Group Leader

Cllr Laura Gretton

Paul Smith, Assistant Director for Highways & Transport Operations

Emily Barker, Planning Services Manager

Marianne Pomeroy, Team Leader (Minerals & Waste Planning Policy)

Sheena Jones, Democratic Governance and Scrutiny Manager

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 26 April 2022 (previously circulated).

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

### **1251 Apologies and Welcome**

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the Meeting.

Apologies were received from Cllr Alan Amos, Mark Hughes (Parent Governor Representative) and Tim Reid (Church Representative).

The Chairman advised that the Agenda would be re-ordered as follows:

Item 5 – Refresh of the Scrutiny Work Plan would be deferred to the next meeting  
Item 6 – Public Transport Update  
Item 7 – Adoption of the Mineral Local Plan  
Item 8 – Member Update and Cabinet Forward Plan.

## **1252 Declaration of Interest and of any Party Whip**

None.

## **1253 Public Participation**

There were three public participants: John Rudge, Sam Ammar and Andrew Cross. The public participants made comments and asked questions relating to Item 7 Public Transport.

The Chairman thanked the members of the public for their participation and advised that they would receive a written response.

## **1254 Confirmation of the Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 26 April were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

## **1255 Refresh of the Scrutiny Work Programme**

Deferred to the next meeting.

## **1256 Public Transport Update**

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility (CMR) for Highways and Transport introduced the Report and in doing so thanked the members of the public for sharing their views. The CMR acknowledged the difficulties of getting to County Hall via public transport at the current time and the desire for an excellent bus service in Worcestershire.

The CMR explained that Worcestershire County Council (the Council) had submitted its Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) to the Department for Transport (DfT). The bid was for £86 million to improve the Worcestershire Passenger Transport network and to fulfil Worcestershire's vision to develop a long term, sustainable and enhanced public transport network. Unfortunately, on 4 April 2022, the Council received confirmation from the DfT that it was unsuccessful in its BSIP bid. The CMR explained that he was disappointed about Worcestershire not receiving the funding (along with some other shire authorities) but reminded the Board that the BSIP still existed alongside the 2019 Passenger Transport Strategy and that he was very committed to providing excellent bus services in Worcestershire via an enhanced partnership.

The Assistant Director for Highways and Transport Operations added that the Council had requested and was awaiting urgent feedback on the bid from the DfT.

Bus operators were currently reviewing services and either reducing frequency or ceasing services. This was based on current patronage levels which were around 70% of pre-covid levels. This had had an adverse effect on the commerciality of services. The Council was able to provide mitigation for some of the key, well used services, that were scheduled to cease. This arrangement was temporary to enable the review of the network. The Council had been asked to undertake a full review of the commercial network within Worcestershire and submit the findings to the DfT by the deadline of 1 July 2022.

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

- In response to the suggestion that the Worcestershire BSIP bid submitted was unambitious, the Assistant Director believed the BSIP was ambitious and included a growth target of between 10-25% with a number of elements that were achievable.
- A Member expressed concern that the Bus Recovery Grant (BRG) funding would cease in October 2022 and suggested that the situation was already desperate and would get a lot worse as a result of this. In response the Assistant Director explained that bus patronage had reduced and had not returned to pre-Covid levels and that the bus operators needed to operate commercially viable services. The Council wanted to grow demand and would work in partnership with bus operators.
- In response to a question about whether there would be a second opportunity to bid for BSIP funding, the CMR and Assistant Director confirmed that at this point there was no clarity around further opportunities to bid for funding. However, it was important to understand the differences between the Local Authorities that were successful in securing funding in comparison to the Worcestershire bid: an area which Scrutiny maybe interested in exploring.
- The CMR confirmed that he aspired to merge the 2019 Passenger Transport Strategy with the BSIP which would take time.
- Councillor Laura Gretton, representing Harvington Division (and not a Member of OSPB) advised that the number of complaints she received regarding buses was higher than other types of complaints. The themes of the complaints received were around the times of buses, lack of reliability, buses being late or not arriving at all leaving residents stranded, changes to timetables without notice or publication. The Chairman advised that Cllr Gretton would receive a written response to her comments.
- The Assistant Director explained that the Council's relationship was with the bus operators and that the Council did not manage the bus services directly but would highlight the problem to the operators.
- The Transport Network Development & Commissioning Manager explained that there was specific known issue in Inkberrow resulting

from a change in operator. Additionally, there was a national driver shortage which was affecting all bus operators.

- In response to a Member query about the reduction in funding for public transport over the 5 years and the role of the Council in supporting people to get to school or work. The CMR confirmed his commitment in enabling people to get to work/school and that Worcestershire had spent just over £4m in 2020/21 (LGA data) in supporting operators. It wasn't true that the more spent on public transport the higher the number of passengers and vice-versa. It was important to note that the market had changed and there were more people using cars and working from home and the demand for buses was different. Demand Responsive Travel (DRT) gave the opportunity to be closer to the demand and the passenger transport offer needed to evolve.
- In order to gain some customer feedback, the Council worked with Transport Focus.
- Rural connectivity in Bromsgrove was highlighted as an issue that needed consideration.
- A member observed that DRT was a good option but was a digital service which not all residents had the means to access.
- It was noted that a temporary solution had been provided to residents for the 144 bus which had been discontinued by the bus operator between Bromsgrove and Birmingham. However, the point was made that it was not a like for like service and residents were struggling to get to work and make essential journeys.
- It wasn't clear when the Council would receive the feedback from the DfT on its failed bid – it was hoped that it would have been received already. The Council would be following up to query when it could expect to receive a response.
- The Bromsgrove on Demand Pilot was due to finish in July 2022 and had been very successful. It was envisaged that this scheme would be extended.
- A Member suggested that Worcestershire should use more community transport options, particularly in the more rural areas. Officers acknowledged that community provision had a part to play in the overall bus services of the future.
- A Member suggested that there should be some clear communication with the public about the role of the Council in delivering bus services.
- The CMR emphasised the need in moving forward for an enhanced partnership in Worcestershire with bus operators' buy-in. The Service could then be branded accordingly and allow service users a place to address queries and complaints and ultimately more control to the Council.
- A Member suggestion that various opportunities for using the Council's £20m transport budget to better effect should be considered, e.g., increasing the use of community transport, was welcomed. Officers advised that where appropriate community transport was considered. Approximately £90,000 funding (to be confirmed after the meeting) was allocated to community transport over a 2-year period.
- It was confirmed that during the Covid-19 lockdown, the Council had continued to provide funding to bus operators to support the businesses to remain economically viable.

- A Member suggested that during the Covid-19 pandemic, the Council could have been more innovative e.g., Redditch Borough Council had put a bid in for funding for E-scooters which had been a big success.
- It was suggested that the feedback from the DfT (when received) should be made public. The CMR suggested that Scrutiny could get involved in the analysis of the feedback and looking at innovations in the transport market.
- With regard to making use of smaller buses to make services more viable, it was noted this was possible if bus operators had them available and they were Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) compliant.
- The CMR thought that it was important for public transport to be responsive, and it was important to find common sense solutions e.g., being able to park and lock a bike before boarding a bus.
- It was confirmed that the Council's statutory responsibility in respect of transport was to provide socially necessary transport which included access to employment, education and health.
- A member (who was not a member of the Board) questioned how the patronage on buses was going to be increased, whether the local MP's were aware of the situation and whether Worcestershire were liaising with any other local authorities who had been awarded BSIP funding. In response the CMR acknowledged all of the points made advising that the MP's were supportive and that Worcestershire were looking to be part of an enhanced partnership with bus operators to provide options for all.
- It was noted that the data included in the bid related to 2019, however Officers pointed out that this was the DfT criteria set out for the bid. Officers were working with the Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership (WLEP) and the Department for Work and Pensions to understand current working patterns in mapping the service requirements for Worcestershire.
- A member suggested that it was important for the County Council to work with District Council colleagues to ensure that there was a joined up provision.
- Further consideration should be given to providing more funding to the community transport provision for example to support some home to school transport. Officers confirmed that community transport did provide some home to school transport as well as adult services contract transport.

It was suggested that a Member Advisory Group should be set up to support the Cabinet Member with exploring and developing the transport options available in Worcestershire. The Democratic Governance and Scrutiny Manager advised the membership of Group needed to be considered carefully as a Scrutiny Member could not scrutinise a policy that they had been involved in developing.

## **1257 Adoption of Worcestershire Minerals Local Plan**

The Cabinet Member for Economy, Infrastructure and Skills introduced the Council's new Worcestershire Minerals Local Plan which was due to be considered by Cabinet and Council for adoption. The governance process

required Overview and Scrutiny to consider the proposals prior to the Council meeting. This Plan would replace the “saved” policies which remained in the last County of Hereford and Worcester Minerals Local (1997).

A new Minerals Local Plan for Worcestershire for the period 2018-2036 had been developed under the provisions set out in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) and in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended).

Once adopted, the new Worcestershire Minerals Local Plan would sit alongside the district Local Plans and the Waste Core Strategy and must be used to determine any minerals-related planning matters in the county. The Minerals Local Plan would be used by Worcestershire County Council’s planning officers and Planning and Regulatory Committee to make decisions about planning applications for mineral extraction, processing and restoration. It would also be used by the City, Borough and District Councils to ensure other types of development avoid sterilising mineral resources or negatively impacting on the operation of mineral sites or supporting infrastructure.

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

- It was confirmed that the final version of the Plan would be a tidy version (free from amendments).
- The Policy included an energy minerals section which covered coal extraction.
- A Member queried the text which was shown in Main Modification MM d5 for deletion, and in particular the text highlighted and was advised that a reply would be given outside of the meeting.
- The Head of Planning and Transport Planning confirmed that there were no major issues highlighted by the Inspectors concerning this Plan. The changes requested were routine and were around interpretation. Some changes were made to safeguarding policies to make them wider which had a knock-on effect for the district councils in terms of their local plan. It was also noted that Air Quality was pulled out as separate policy.
- It was confirmed that the Plan would enable the development of the Brine Baths in Droitwich safely.
- There would be 5 yearly updates of the Plan.

## **1258 Member Update and Cabinet Forward Plan**

### Member Update

#### Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Cllr Emma Stokes)

At its May meeting, the Panel had looked at Council Compliance with Freedom of Information and Data Protection Legislation, the Council’s Implementation of Microsoft Intune (mobile device management) and the Council’s Policy on Support for Refugees.

Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Cllr Steve Mackay)

Cllr Mackay provided the Board with an update on the recent Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel which had looked at Get Safe and Get There and the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report 2020-2021.

Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Cllr Alastair Adams)

The Panel had recently looked at an Update on Walking and Cycling In Worcestershire.

In response to the suggestion that 20mph speed limits should be added to the Work Programme, Cllr Adams explained the Council's stance with regard to 20mph speed limits and confirmed that it was an issue already on the Work Programme.

Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Cllr Brandon Clayton)

Cllr Clayton advised that due to the heavy workload of HOSC, for the foreseeable future it would be meeting monthly (rather than bi-monthly).

At its May meeting, the Committee looked at a Progress Update against Recommendations from the Scrutiny Task Group Report on Ambulance Hospital Handover Delays, Patient Flow, Maternity Services and Dementia Services in Worcestershire. The Committee's next meeting was 9 June.

Task Groups

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP)

At its meeting on 19 May, Council approved some constitutional changes which affected Scrutiny. Cllr Daisley who was the Lead Member of the CAMHS and EHCP Task Groups was appointed as Vice-Chairman of the Council. The Constitution stated that the Vice-Chairman should not also Chair another body, and it was agreed that Cllr Steve Mackay (the new Chairman of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel) would become the Lead Member for both Task Groups and Cllr Daisley would remain as member of the Task Groups to provide continuity.

Developer-funded Highways Infrastructure & Section 278 Technical Approval

Cllr Adams provided the Board with an update on the progress of this Task Group.

The meeting ended at 12.45 pm

Chairman .....

