

Minutes of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel

County Hall, Worcester

Monday, 11 July 2022, 2.00 pm

Present:

Cllr Alastair Adams (Chairman), Cllr Tony Muir (Vice Chairman),
Cllr Mel Allcott, Cllr Paul Harrison, Cllr David Ross and Cllr Emma Stokes

Also attended:

Cllr Richard Morris, Cabinet Member with responsibility for the Environment
Cllr Alan Amos, Vice-Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board

John Hobbs, Strategic Director for Economy and Infrastructure
Rachel Hill, Assistant Director for Economy, Major Projects and Waste.
Elliot Pritchard, Head of Highways Operations
Emily Barker, Head of Planning and Transport Planning
Dave Corbett, Management Information Analyst
Samantha Morris, Overview and Scrutiny Manager
Alison Spall, Overview and Scrutiny Officer

Available Papers

The members had before them a copy of the Agenda papers (previously circulated). A copy of the agenda papers will be attached to the signed minutes.)

1 Apologies and Welcome

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel and outlined the remit of the new Panel. The responsibilities of the Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel had been split and two new Panels created – the other Panel being the Economy Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Emma Marshall and Councillor Mike Rouse (Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport).

2 Declarations of Interest and of any Party Whip

None.

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3 Public Participation

None.

4 Performance and 2021/22 Year-End Budget Monitoring

Performance Monitoring

The Management Information Analyst gave a brief overview of the areas of success and challenge as outlined in the report.

Members raised a number of questions, which were responded to as follows:

- With reference to the highways' safety inspections, the Panel would be provided with details of the number of claims which were made against the Council annually and the cost of dealing with these.
- A new graph had been provided on potholes. The Panel was reminded of the timescales for categories of defect repairs. The information was based on the statistics contained in the weekly report received from Ringway. It was noted that timescales were based on when Ringway received the defect report, rather than when the Council was notified of a defect.
- A query was raised as to how the figures on potholes under public enquiries (PEM's) tallied with the overall pothole figures. The Head of Highways Operations explained that the potholes reported via PEM's represented about a quarter of the overall total, with the Highways Inspectors reporting the bulk of the remainder. The Chairman asked that this be confirmed following the meeting and also that information be provided to demonstrate both routes.
- The Panel was informed that defects with manhole covers were usually a Severn Trent matter. The Council's Inspectors would raise the defect directly with Severn Trent and then monitor the situation to ensure the work was completed. If a dangerous situation arose, the Council would close off that section of road until urgent repairs were completed.
- Members were pleased to note that the recent additional investment had contributed to a noticeable improvement in the condition of the county's roads and footways.
- A Member raised a query about waste collection in respect of the kilogram per head of population or household calculations used by the County Council and District Council's to produce their data. The Assistant Director confirmed that clarification would be provided on this matter following the meeting.
- The positive reduction in spend on street lighting had been achievable through the roll-out of LED's. The Council had agreed to an accelerated LED programme which should be completed in the next 18 months.
- Referring to street lighting data which the Panel had been provided with outside of the meeting, concern was expressed at the reduced

percentage of repairs completed on time for certain categories and they were keen to know what action was being taken. A query was also raised regarding the lack of inspections of completed jobs referred to in the data. The Assistant Director advised that these issues would be followed up and responses provided.

- The Panel was pleased to see that the days taken to complete a Section 278 agreement had been significantly reduced, although there was further progress to be made. The Strategic Director commented that an improved working relationship and effective communication with developers had been a key factor in this progress being achieved. This was anticipated to be developed further going forward.
- The Strategic Director advised that there would be a report to Cabinet in the Autumn for handling road closures and the costs which would be applied. A key frustration caused to the public by advance road closures in preparation for utility works was highlighted.
- It was noted that the number of public rights of way (PROW) reports was reducing overall, but a query was raised as to the prioritisation of the reports and the approach to dealing with the backlog. Officers would provide this information following the meeting.
- Members were pleased at the activity of the volunteer groups and the numbers of reports they were able to resolve. The Panel asked for an update on how this successful initiative was looking to be expanded.
- The number of definitive map modification orders (DMMO's) outstanding on the register had previously been raised and discussed by the Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel. The Strategic Director agreed to talk to the Council's Solicitors about how this matter could be taken forward.

In-Year Budget Monitoring

The Deputy Chief Finance Officer advised the Panel that for this year-end financial update, the figures still included details for both economy and environment, but that for the next Panel meeting the data would be split and this Panel would only receive financial information specific to the remit of the Panel.

The Panel was advised that the outturn was just under £0.25m, subject to external audit which was currently taking place. This was a favourable outcome, compared to figures during the year and had resulted from the hard work of the Directorate in focusing on mitigating any overspends and looking at ways of generating additional income whilst still continuing to deliver services.

The Economy and Infrastructure Directorate had a savings target of £1.3m from 2020/21 and capitalisation targets of £3m to deliver this year, both of which had been delivered. The Deputy Finance Officer explained that there had been a detailed review of every budget area and time spent, to ensure that capitalisation of costs was implemented wherever appropriate.

The total capital programme was £150m for 2021/22, and the Panel was informed that £95m had been spent, with £55m being carried forward to the next financial year, with a number of schemes being reprofiled. This carry forward would be added to the £42m already allocated for next year.

During Members question time, the following points were clarified:

- The Deputy Chief Finance Officer advised that the £700k saving on waste management had resulted from significant additional income in the trade waste service, from a reduced demand for the reactive services such as street cleaning due to lock downs and also from reduced overheads in the pollution control service which had led to more effective service delivery.
- The Assistant Director explained the difference between the headings of Major Contracts and Contracts and Structures, with the former being mostly capitalised work relating to large contracts and the latter being the revenue costs of managing large contracts and some overheads associated with that.

5 Update on Footways

The Head of Highways Operations presented an update on the countywide footways programme. The total available budget for 2022/23 Budget was £6.8m which was made up of 3 categories:

- the £2.4m asset-based core budget
- the additional £4m strategic funding for this financial year
- the Members' Highways Fund of which £400k was committed to date.

Members asked a number of questions which were responded to as follows:

- A query was raised about whether the funding of schemes that were not completed last year due to covid had been rolled over into this financial year. The Panel was informed that this was the case and that some of the £400k referred to above would relate to funding of schemes which had been rolled over. The Assistant Director added that any capital money rolled over might not be reflected in these figures. The Chairman asked that this situation be looked into, with confirmation and clarification then being provided.
- In relation to the £4m additional footways fund, Members expressed their disappointment that Members had not yet been given the opportunity to have input into the works planned, although it was evident that by Q1 the majority of the budget had already been allocated. They explained that previously Members had been able to provide local knowledge as to what were key priorities in their division. The Panel was informed that the Highways Liaison Officers had been carrying out their role and that a letter would be going out to all Members confirming the works that were completed or planned and highlighting that there were still divisions where some monies were to be allocated. The Panel requested that for the next financial

year, Members should be given an early input into how the £4m was allocated. The Strategic Director agreed to follow up this matter and clarify the timeline for consultation with Members.

- The Panel was advised that Members were entitled to spend their highways fund allocation on any capital highways that they chose, on works to do with carriageways or footways.

6 Cabinet Members' Priorities for the Next Year and Beyond

The Chairman welcomed the Cabinet Member with Responsibility (CMR) for the Environment and also the Head of Planning and Transport Planning. The CMR had accepted an invite to share the priorities for the year ahead and beyond with the Panel.

The CMR advised that whilst it was very early days, he was excited to have taken on this new role and he was looking forward to building on the momentum that his predecessor Councillor Miller had established with the work that he had carried out. There were a lot of threads to the Environment portfolio which interlinked with a number of the other Cabinet positions.

In terms of priorities, which were linked to the Corporate Plan, there were 4 key areas of focus:

- Net Zero Challenge (including biodiversity)
- Waste
- Flooding
- Partnership Approach

Net Zero Challenge – it had been a year since a Climate emergency was declared in Worcestershire, and to mark that date the CMR was chairing his first meeting of Carbon Reduction Advisory Group session which had been established last year to move matters forward. The target of net zero by 2050 was a great challenge which would involve a lot of work for the Council working with partners, but it was vitally important that it was achieved.

The Environment Act 2021 underpinned much of the Council's work in this area, with its key aims to improve air and water quality, tackle waste and improve biodiversity. There had already been significant achievements towards the net zero challenge, for instance with emissions being halved in the last decade, and there were a number of plans to support and guide the Council in this work. Further areas of focus included waste disposal, street lighting and biodiversity. One requirement of the Act was that applicants were now required to demonstrate biodiversity net gains on planning applications. There was also now a Local Nature Recovery Strategy with a tree planting goal, of 150,000 trees in 5 years, which was included in the Corporate Plan.

Waste – the details of the key legislation and national strategy changes relevant to this area were set out, including the requirement for weekly food waste collections to be set up by 2025, which therefore meant as a Waste Disposal Authority, the requirement for the Council to set up infrastructure to treat this waste. Other key changes included from 2024 food producers would

be responsible for their packaging waste, which would hopefully encourage them to reduce waste or become carbon neutral. The introduction of a deposit return scheme for plastic and cans was also a new initiative arising from the 2021 Act. The CMR highlighted that part of this role was that of Chairman of the Strategic Waste Management Board, working with a variety of partners and building those relationships in that capacity.

Flooding – The Panel was reminded of the flood alleviation schemes which were in the pipeline. The work on surface water drainage plans on new developments was also referred to. The CMR advised that he was now a member of the Regional Flood and Coastal Committee and the River Severn partnership, which looked at strategies for the future and worked in liaison with DEFRA.

Partnership Approach – The CMR explained the wide-ranging, pragmatic approach he would be adopting to taking forward his environment portfolio. This would include working closely with Cabinet colleagues, the Member Advisory Group, and this Panel. Partnership working was key and the CMR would be working with a variety of external partners including statutory bodies and was keen to set up a regular dialogue with the District Council portfolio holders as part of One Worcestershire. He intended to engage with schools and link in with their initiatives and ideas in the environment field. He was also keen to develop a stakeholder map of key people across the county who had influence over environmental issues and seek to harness their activity and identify best practice to be shared for the good of the county as a whole.

In response to a Members request, it was agreed that some additional Performance Indicators on environmental issues would be added to the Panel's quarterly monitoring information. This would enable the Panel to be more aware of the activity being carried out and to scrutinise that activity, as well as promoting it to a wider audience.

7 Work Programme

The Chairman advised that the Panel's Work Programme had been included as part of the overall Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme which had been considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board, the latter which would now go forward to Council for approval.

The Chairman highlighted that Community Transport had been added to the September Panel meeting, as it was an opportunity for the Panel to shine a light on the proposed funding levels for the year ahead, in advance of the November Cabinet meeting where funding levels would be considered.

It was agreed that the Chairman and Vice Chairman would discuss the Panel's Work Programme suggestions at the next agenda planning meeting.

The meeting ended at 4.08 pm

Chairman