

Minutes of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel

County Hall, Worcester

Wednesday, 19 July 2023, 10.00 am

Present:

Cllr Alastair Adams (Chairman), Cllr Dan Boatright-Greene, Cllr Peter Griffiths, Cllr Paul Harrison, Cllr Emma Marshall, Cllr David Ross and Cllr Emma Stokes

Also attended:

Cllr Matt Jenkins, Observer

Rachel Hill, Assistant Director for Economy, Major Projects and Waste
Paul Smith, Assistant Director for Highways & Transport Operations
Glenn Lucitt, Contract Project Manager, Transport Operations
Dave Corbett, Lead Analyst (Performance)
Trevor McGill, Principal Lighting Engineer
Samantha Morris, Interim Democratic Governance and Scrutiny Manager
Alison Spall, 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 26 May 2023 (previously circulated).

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

44 Apologies and Welcome

Apologies were received from Panel Members, Councillors Beverley Nielsen and Tony Muir, from Cabinet Members Richard Morris and Mike Rouse, from John Hobbs (Strategic Director for Economy and Infrastructure) and Gary Woodman (Assistant Director for Economy).

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Dan Boatright-Greene as a new member of the Panel.

45 Declarations of Interest and of any Party Whip

None.

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Date of Issue: 03 August 2023

46 Public Participation

The Panel heard from one public participant, Steve Mullins who made comments and asked questions in relation to Agenda Item 6 - Performance and Budget Monitoring, specifically Definitive Map Modification Orders (DMMO's).

The Chairman thanked Mr Mullins for his questions and confirmed that he would receive a written response.

47 Confirmation of the Minutes of the previous meeting

The Minutes of the meeting held on the 26 May 2023 were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

The Chairman highlighted that there were action points from the previous meeting still outstanding, which needed to be followed up.

48 Update on (i) Street Lighting (ii) Solar Energy and (iii) Electric Vehicle Charging Points

The Assistant Director for Highways and Transport Operations (HTO), the Contract Project Manager for Transport Operations (CPM) and the Principal Lighting Engineer (PLE) attended the meeting to provide the Panel with an update on street lighting, solar energy and electric vehicle charging points.

The CPM highlighted the key aspects of the report. The following discussions took place and responses were provided to Members' questions:

Streetlighting

Parish Initiative

The Panel was informed that there were currently 14 Parishes included in this initiative, and the benefits that they received from their involvement was explained. It was also highlighted that invoicing had recently been switched from annually to quarterly to allow the parishes more control of their finances. The CPM advised that there were approximately 150 parishes within the county, although they didn't all have street lighting. It was confirmed that all parishes had been approached when the initiative was launched in 2008, although they had not been contacted since. The Panel suggested it would be helpful for the other parishes to be contacted again to see whether they were now interested. The Assistant Director (HTO) advised that this could be looked at, but the current position on street assets would need to be gauged first. The CPM added that the joining criteria and costs would also need to be revisited. In response to a question, the CPM advised that the cost of electricity paid by those in the Parish Initiative was likely to be cheaper than the open market, but he would check what some other parishes were currently paying.

Ownership of Streetlights

Members were aware that all lampposts were shown on the GIS map but they were interested in the total number of streetlights in the county and how many of those didn't belong to the County Council (the Council). A Member highlighted that the infrastructure assets list for the county should make it clear which lampposts were owned by the Council. The Panel was informed that ownership of some lampposts was currently unknown due to records being difficult to obtain. Many were also known to be owned by district councils, housing associations, developers etc. The CPM advised that the Council had written to the Parishes to establish which lampposts they owned, with some responses having been received, whilst others were still awaited. The Council was engaging with Parishes and would re-send the link, and any additional information received would be captured on the GIS system.

Concrete Column testing

The Panel received details of the recent survey of concrete columns, which had ranked the condition of all of the Council's concrete assets. It was explained that all those identified as Rank 5 (requires immediate attention) and some of the Rank 4 (replace as soon as practicable) had been replaced straight away. With the LED rapid roll out coming to an end, column replacement would now be the key focus from August onwards. It was planned to replace 1500 columns at a cost of £2.2m during this financial year, to ensure maximum efficiencies were achieved.

In response to a question, the PLE advised that as the testing was carried out every 2 years, the Category 4 columns would not require any further testing in the near future as they were being focused on as a priority.

Rapid LED roll out

Members received details of the energy savings that had been able to be made as a result of the successful LED rapid roll out programme. In this programme of 21,000 streetlights, 98.5% had now been replaced, with an overall total of 54,000 streetlights being converted to LED. It was highlighted that as a result of the energy savings achieved with the LED roll out, a reduction of 14.1% had resulted for the Council's non-metered assets compared to the previous year, which represented the biggest change achieved in a 1-year period. The Chairman also commented that for March alone, 77 tonnes of CO₂ had been saved. The CPM advised that work was also ongoing for other assets where energy savings could be achieved, for instance LEDs in illuminated signs and the replacement of bulbs in traffic light systems.

Current practices and potential savings

With regards to the replacement of lamps, it was explained that there wasn't a policy as to when bat friendly lamps would be used, instead environmental considerations were taken into account on a case-by-case basis, with the Ecology team providing advice on where bats would be most vulnerable. The Panel was informed that there were currently 6 sites within the county where

bat sensors were monitoring the activity of bats to understand their movement patterns. Members suggested that as the difference in cost of bat friendly lamps was marginal, it was worth considering using them going forward, when lamps were being upgraded or replaced.

In respect of lighting solutions for new housing developments, the Assistant Director for Economy, Major Projects and Waste (EMPW) advised that the streetscape design guide for developers, which was currently under review would contain information and guidance on lighting considerations. The Panel suggested that the policy on streetlights for new developments which cross a county border be reviewed, so that no difference in service provision within the same development was permitted.

To enable further savings for streetlights, a question was raised as to whether the wattage of lampposts could be reduced. The Panel was informed that they did not currently have the technical ability to centrally control lampposts, although it might be something for the future. The PLO highlighted that whilst LEDs couldn't be turned on and off in this way, all the new LED lights have an inbuilt mechanism which dimmed the light to 70% of full power at midnight.

A Member asked about lighting at a specific new development in a parish and when the lighting was a parish responsibility rather than a county council matter. The Assistant Director (EMPW) advised that streetlighting within new developments became the Council's responsibility when the development was formally adopted. Further details would be provided to the member after the meeting.

Electric Vehicle (EV) Charging Points

The Panel was informed that there was an evolving picture in the County and nationally on EV charging. A question was raised as to whether some of the new concrete lampposts could possibly be considered for an EV charging point. The Assistant Director (EMPW) advised that a strategy was currently being looked at by the Council and that £96k capital funding had been secured, with further details awaited, but which would enable development work to inform the strategy. From the Council's perspective EV would link to the Local Transport Plan 5, so guidance was awaited in that respect too. There was not yet a clear policy at the moment as to where EV charging points would be located, with a variety of different locations being considered. There were a number of options regarding streetlights, but none were easy, and they would come back at a later stage with an update.

A Member highlighted that the demand from residents for EV charging points was growing, and referred to Hampshire County Council which had provided guidance to their residents as to what was currently advisable for them to do, for instance with using cables when charging their vehicles on the street. The Member asked whether something similar could be provided by this Council and the Panel supported this suggestion. The Assistant Director (EMPW) advised that this wasn't something that the Council was considering at the moment as the focus was on developing the strategy which would then include

policies on the use of cables etc. The Panel was informed that the timescale for the strategy being developed was this year.

Given the significant future demand for EV, Members felt there was an opportunity for private companies to be approached to see what they could offer. The CPM advised there were many issues to take into consideration and highlighted that the majority of concrete replacement columns would not be in locations where EV charging was required. With the Government committed to investing £21m in 300,000 new EV charging points, the Chairman suggested that it would be good to go forward by installing a small number of EV charging points on an initial trial basis.

A Member referred to 3 phase electric being installed in new developments for EV charging and queried whether this might be able to be accessed for street lighting purposes as well. If this was feasible, it could be built into the S278 agreements for the development. The CPM advised that it was an interesting question, but one which would need to be considered in detail outside of the meeting.

The Assistant Director (EMPW) agreed to circulate a link of known EV charging points in the county to the Panel.

Grants available for the installation of Solar Energy

The Assistant Director (HTO) provided a brief overview of the Council's role in this area, including details of the Public Sector Energy efficiency programme which had benefitted a number of schools and colleges by helping them to reduce their demand for energy. The success of the Business Energy Efficiency Programme was also highlighted. This programme had been facilitated effectively by the Council's sustainability team, which had resulted in £3.5m worth of grant funding being awarded to small and medium sized enterprises in the county to help improve their energy usage. With the European Union programmes having ceased in June 2023, the Panel was also informed of the Council's role in allocating funds to district councils from the Government's new UK Shared Prosperity Fund to provide services to businesses. The Chairman invited a member, who had been observing the meeting, to ask a question and he asked how the monies available through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund compared to the levels of funding previously available through the European Union programmes. The Assistant Director (HTO) advised that a written response would be provided following the meeting.

Local Transport Plan 5 (LTP5)

A Member highlighted that residents in his locality wanted to ensure that they could have an input into the LTP5. The Assistant Director (EMPW) advised that timescales for LTP5 were not yet available, but assured the Panel that there would be wide engagement and consultation as part of the process with the public being actively encouraged to participate.

Following the discussion, the Panel agreed that:

1. The CMR be recommended to offer all Parishes the opportunity to join the Parish Initiative.
2. The comparative costs of electricity paid by the 14 parishes compared to some other parishes in the county, be obtained.
3. The total number of streetlights in the County, including those whose ownership was unknown be established.
4. Consideration be given to reviewing the Streetlighting Policy to:
 - (i) allow bat friendly lights to be routinely considered when upgrading or replacing lights, as price difference was negligible: and
 - (ii) new developments which crossed a county border had the same service provision within the same development.
5. Consideration be given as to whether streetlights might be able to be centrally controlled.
6. GIS map was updated with information received from parishes and that a reminder be sent to parishes where information was still awaited.
7. The CMR be recommended that when concrete columns were being replaced, to take the opportunity to incorporate an EV charging point as a trial on a small-scale basis.
8. The CMR should be recommended to develop an urgent policy to empower residents to charge electric vehicles on the street.
9. Members of the public be encouraged to get involved when the LTP5 consultation period was active.

49 Performance and 2022/23 Year End Budget Monitoring

Performance Quarter 4 (January to March 2023)

It was noted that revised agenda pages 30-33 on Development Control Submissions and Bond Values had been circulated to the Panel.

The Panel raised a number of queries relating to the data as follows:

Condition of Footways

In terms of utility companies digging up footways, a query was raised about whether the company could be asked to replace the whole pavement rather than just filling in a trench and leaving the pavement in a poor state. Details of a recent example of this in Badsey would be provided to the Directorate. The Assistant Director (HTO) advised it would depend on the programme of works and that the comparative costs of reinstatement works would need to be considered.

A Member recognised that residents' satisfaction with roads was continuing to increase, however, problems relating to footways were a regular source of complaint. It was questioned whether satisfaction with footways could be measured. The Lead Analyst explained that the Worcestershire Viewpoint Survey didn't currently have a specific question covering footways, but it was suggested this could be requested for inclusion going forward, or if a

breakdown of analysis could be done to obtain this feedback. In light of the outcome of the visual inspection which identified that 35% of footways currently required attention, the Panel suggested that the Cabinet Member be asked if the additional investment in footways could be continued for the next financial year, to ensure that improvements were able to be completed.

Gullies

A Member referred to a particular problem of tree root ingress in gullies in their area which caused challenges. The Panel noted the significant increase in PEMs regarding gullies and drainage issues and asked why this was the case. The Assistant Director (HTO) provided background to recent issues including the impact of environmental factors. The Highways Dept had a programme of checking drains with cameras to identify any issues that needed attention. The additional capital investment last year had increased the volume of work able to be completed, including the eradication of certain 'wet spots' in the Winter. It was highlighted that some drains were assets of utility companies rather than the Council. The Panel would consider asking the Cabinet Member if the additional investment for drainage issues could be continued for the next financial year.

A Member raised a further issue regarding the importance of householders understanding their own responsibilities regarding run off from their land. The Assistant Director advised that work was carried out within communities on this type of issue, but that some wider communication to residents could be worthwhile. The Panel agreed to raise this issue with the Cabinet Member.

A further question was raised about contractors working on the roads and whether they were required to clean out the gullies after they had completed their work, to ensure that none of their debris was left in the gullies. A written response would be supplied.

Potholes

Members reviewed the performance data on potholes and a query was raised regarding those defects which were repaired, but then were revisited for a no cost repair due to defective initial work. Members asked for details of timescales involved and whether there was data available on the frequency of this in order to gain reassurance that value for money was being achieved from contractors in these situations. The Lead Analyst agreed to follow this up with the Head of Highways Operations.

PEMs

It was highlighted that there had been a dip in the percentage of PEMs completed on time. The Panel was informed that staff changes, and weather conditions were likely to have been the main factors in this change.

The subject areas of PEMs were reviewed, and it was noted that drainage, potholes and roads, footpaths and cycle tracks represented 80% of all enquiries.

Street Works licences and Permits

A Member raised an issue whereby planned roadworks were not being completed effectively due to parked cars causing an obstruction. The Assistant Director (HTO) thanked the Member for the feedback and advised that the notification process would be reviewed both in advance and on the day, to see if any improvements could be made.

Development Control Technical Submissions

It was requested that the total number of S278s and S38s be included in the performance information in future reports.

Municipal waste sent to Landfill

The Chairman queried why the percentage of waste going to landfill had increased slightly for 2021/22. The Assistant Director (EMPW) advised it wasn't significant but would check if any further information was available.

DMMOs

Following on from the questions raised under public participation, the Assistant Director (HTO) commented that unfortunately the Council was not in a unique situation regarding the numbers of DMMOs outstanding and that the situation needed to be evaluated to establish a way forward.

The Panel requested that going forward the Performance information should include the numbers on the 'expression of interest' list as well as those on the register. The Panel also asked whether developers had priority over local residents in getting their DMMO dealt with. The Assistant Director would provide clarification on this query following the meeting.

The Panel agreed that the Cabinet Member should be recommended to review this area to establish a policy to resolve the current long backlog of outstanding DMMO requests.

In-Year Budget monitoring

The Panel received the year-end outturn for 2022/23. The Deputy Chief Finance Officer (DCFO) advised that as had been previously agreed, this Panel and the Economy Overview and Scrutiny Panel would receive the same slides covering the Economy and Infrastructure (E&I) Directorate.

The Panel was informed that Cabinet on 29 June 2023 had been presented with the Council's provisional financial results for the Council which showed a net overspend of £7.3m in the demand led areas of Adult Social Care, Children's Social Care and Home to School Transport. The overspend would be mitigated by underspends in other service areas and central budgets and by a planned transfer from specific reserves.

The DCFO advised that there was a £0.7m underspend for E&I and a £0.1m in Skills. Key variances included a £0.5m overspend in Transport Planning and Strategic Planning, a £0.9m surplus for Network Management due to an increase in fees and charges; a surplus of £0.5m from Passenger Transport Operations due to savings within concessionary fares and increased income from driver training and £0.4m additional contractor costs relating to s278 activity in development management. A deep dive would be carried out on the accounting procedures for s278 to ensure that the most appropriate accounting procedure was being used.

Members were invited to ask questions and the following issues were raised:

- A Member referred to the overspend relating to S278 and asked if the overspend was due to the use of consultants. In response, the Assistant Director (EMPW) clarified that the additional costs relating to s278 did not relate to extra consultants' fees, but instead was to do with how things were accounted for throughout the year. In respect of Planning and Regulation, there were capital targets in P&R which were no longer appropriate because they couldn't be capitalised, so this was also being reviewed. The Chairman asked for a breakdown of the variances for both these areas.
- The DCFO highlighted that the waste contract extension had been confirmed with a reduction in contract price, which mitigated the savings targets that the Directorate had been holding for the last 3 years. The current economic climate continued to be monitored and evaluated closely as the cost-of-living budgetary pressures would have significant impact on the Council.
- Overall, the DCFO felt it had been a successful year for the Directorate, with the underspend referred to above as well as the Directorate having contributed £435k towards the £5.1m corporate savings target. In total this represented approximately £1.3m savings to support the Council's position, without any detriment to service delivery.
- Given that the pay awards were funded from the reserves, a Member asked how healthy the current levels of reserves were. In response, the DCFO explained that the Chief Financial Officer had to take a view on this, which was outlined in the February Cabinet report. The reserves would continue to be carefully managed, monitored and controlled, and it was highlighted that the pay award for 2023/24 was already built into the plans for next year's use of reserves.

Following the discussion, the Panel agreed:

1. That with PEMs continuing to show that this was a major area of reporting for the public, the Cabinet Members be recommended to continue to provide additional funding for drainage for the next financial year.
2. That the Cabinet Member be recommended to communicate with the public to increase their understanding as to how they can mitigate the circumstances of run-off from their private land, which would help to reduce flash flooding overall.

3. That Officers make enquiries about whether the Worcestershire Viewpoint Survey could incorporate a question about feedback from the public specifically on footways.
4. With the visual inspection identifying that 35% of footways required attention, the Cabinet Member be recommended to continue to provide extra investment for repairs to footways in the next financial year.
5. That the Cabinet Member be recommended to review the DMMO situation and establish a policy to resolve the current backlog situation.
6. That Officers be asked to clarify whether developers are given priority over residents in terms of their DMMO being dealt with.

50 Work Programme

The Panel considered its current work programme, and no changes were required.

The meeting ended at 12.19 pm

Chairman