

Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel

Minutes - 26 April 2018

Attendance

Members of the Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Ian Angus (Chair)
Cllr Mary Bateman
Cllr Philip Bateman MBE
Cllr Greg Brackenridge
Cllr Keith Inston
Cllr John Rowley

In Attendance

Cllr Peter Bilson (Cabinet Member for City Assets and Housing)

Employees

Martin Stevens (Scrutiny Officer) (Minutes)
Kate Martin (Service Director of Housing)
Anthony Walker (Homelessness Strategy and External Relations Manager)
John Roseblade (Head of City Transport)

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

- 1 **Apologies**
Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Christopher Haynes, Cllr Bhupinder Gakhal and Cllr Mak Singh.

- 2 **Declarations of interest**
Cllr Ian Angus declared a non-pecuniary interest on item 5 – Private Housing Sector as he was the landlord of a property in the Wolverhampton area.

- 3 **Minutes of the previous meeting**
The minutes of the previous meeting held on 21 March 2018 were confirmed as a correct record.

- 4 **Matters arising**
The Chair requested that Officers provide a written update for the next meeting on the progress of the recommendations made at the last meeting on Dog Control.

A Councillor in reference to the car parking outside school's review, referred to an article he had read in The Telegraph regarding strict enforcement of parking policy

with heavy penalties in a London Borough. This had been very effective enforcing change in parking behaviour outside schools.

5 **Private Sector Housing**

The Panel watched a short video from YouTube created by ITV Central News on the private housing sector within the Wolverhampton area. The Chair referred to the video as being excellent and demonstrated the good enforcement work which was taking place within the City.

The Service Director of Housing introduced the report on private sector housing. The report provided an update on the progress of the recommendations which the Panel had previously given on private housing and a general update on the private housing sector. The report considered a number of areas including houses in multiple occupation (HMOs), fuel poverty, enforcement, rent with confidence and homelessness.

Several Panel Members raised the point that houses in multiple occupancy were becoming more common within Wolverhampton. This was starting to cause some concern. The Homelessness Strategy and External Relations Manager commented that there was a working group on the issue, which included representatives from the Police and Fire Service and Public Health. It was important to make sure HMOs were of good quality and properly managed. Part of the working group's remit was to consider what made a good HMO. There were common issues with HMOs such as car parking. Changes to legislation meant that from 1 October 2018, all HMOs containing 5 or more unrelated people who were sharing amenities would require a license and the requirement for 3 or more storeys had been removed. Consequently, an additional 500 properties in the Wolverhampton area would fall within the definition.

The Cabinet Member for City Assets and Housing remarked that the Private Housing Sector Forum meetings held to date had been successful and well attended. The initiative had improved communication with landlords. At the last meeting landlords had been updated on the changes in the law and had been consulted about the new private housing and health strategy. There was still room for improvement but overall he was pleased with the relationships the Council had with Landlords.

A Member of the Panel stated HMOs in their experience had a poor fire safety record. When the final report on the Grenfell Tower disaster was released the current law of a landlord only needing to supply a letter to show they were meeting fire regulations could well change. He recommended a report after June be brought back to the Panel and that the Service Director of Housing be invited to a future meeting of the Council's Fire Safety Review Group. Members agreed to be updated biannually on the private sector housing service.

Resolved:

- A) That the Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel receive an update on the private housing service biannually.
- B) That the Service Director of Housing be invited to a future meeting of the Council's Fire Safety Review Group.

6 **Work Plan**

The Chair stated the new private sector housing and health strategy should be added to the Work Programme. He also requested WV Active be added to the future Work Programme to determine if they were meeting the high targets they had set for revenue and driving up membership.

The Vice-Chair of the Panel had requested prior to the meeting, via the Scrutiny Officer, that potholes and the general condition of the roads within Wolverhampton be added as a potential item for the future Work Programme.

A Panel Member asked for an item on improving transport be included on the future Work Programme. There were the proposals for the metro and ongoing air quality issues. It was important to ensure there was investment in the Wolverhampton area and not just in Birmingham and Coventry. It was therefore important to set the agenda quickly and have well-formed plans to encourage investment.

The Chair asked for any further suggestions for items for the Work Programme to be emailed to the Scrutiny Officer. The Scrutiny Annual Work Programme Event was planned for the 28 June at 5pm.

7 **Air Quality**

The Head of City Transport introduced a briefing note on air quality. The latest statistics showed that 20,000 - 40,000 premature deaths nationally were linked to poor air quality, predominately caused by transport. Wolverhampton was a densely populated city with a road network dating back hundreds of years.

The Head of City Transport stated that in the Summer of last year DEFRA (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) had produced an Air Quality Action Plan mandating certain Councils with the worst air pollution problems to formally report on how they proposed to meet EU Air Quality objectives. At that point the marginal authorities had not been included in the plan but following a challenge from Client Earth the High Court had issued a judgement stating the Government needed to take a stronger approach with the marginal authorities. The four Black Country Authorities were included in the definition. In March 2018 the Government issued a Ministerial Direction on the City of Wolverhampton Council requiring the consideration of measures to bring forward compliance with the EU directives in the shortest possible time.

The Head of City Transport stated that the Council were having to complete a feasibility study on the roads identified as being the worst offenders for poor air quality within Wolverhampton. It was also key that DEFRA realised some of the good work the Council had recently undertaken, including funding £1 million on cycle routes, the new metro extension and the potential for a new Wolverhampton to Walsall train line. The new train line would relieve some of the vehicle stress on Black Country routes.

The Head of City Transport commented that the Council were currently consulting on a Bus Quality Partnership for Wolverhampton which was going live in September. Within this was included an emissions standard for buses entering the Wolverhampton Ring Road. The Bus Quality Partnership being consulted on included meeting Euro 6, the highest standard, by 2020/2021. There had been some complaints from the bus companies regarding having to meet this standard. Money from Central Government was being made available nationally to retro fit certain buses to have a higher standard of emissions. The cost was approximately £15,000 to £20,000 per bus. The Government needed to complete the work on 450 buses by next year, but there were only five companies in the country with the accreditation to complete the work. Each bus took one day to complete, consequently it would be unrealistic for the Council to try and meet Euro 6 targets before 2020/2021. National Express had confirmed they could meet the date stated within the Bus Quality Partnership but did not believe they could do it any earlier.

The Head of City Transport stated there were several other initiatives the Council were undertaking which would improve air quality. These included, the new metro extension and significant signal improvements which would reduce queues at traffic lights and the possible changing of speed restrictions. One idea was to reduce the 40mph speed limit to 30mph on part of the St. David's Section of the Ring Road, this was the road which went underneath the connection to the train station and up to the Bilston island. Work was also ongoing to improve traffic flows and increase capacity on the A454. Members commented that any new speed limits would need to be enforced. The Head of Transport stated that average speed cameras were generally effective and were being trialled in the Birmingham area. An average speed cameras provision had been included as part of the Transportation Capital Programme which had been approved by Cabinet the previous evening. It was important the Council understood the revenue risk of speed cameras as the Police were reluctant to meet any costs.

A Member commented that there was significant air pollution from the numerous waste transfer units. The Head of City Transport stated there was a legal process in place for the Environment Agency to regulate the waste transfer units. The standards were getting higher. The units were supposed to have equipment which continuously monitored the pollutants giving an ongoing data record. The Council were able to approach the Environment Agency, if it was believed pollutant limits were being exceeded. The Local Authority regulated some of the lesser polluting processes.

A Member of the Panel stated he did not believe the Council had the air monitoring equipment located in the correct places. He wanted to see the City of Wolverhampton going above and beyond what was required for air quality rather than doing the minimum. The Head of Transport was in agreement that some of the air quality monitoring equipment needed to be updated and re-located. DEFRA had offered to give a grant of £50,000 for works associated with improving air quality in the City. Members asked for pressure to be applied on DEFRA to allow some of this money to be used on updating the air monitoring equipment. The Head of City Transport commented that real world tests were more beneficial than lab tests.

The Chair stated that it was important for the Council's website to contain up to date information on air quality, so residents could be correctly informed. It was also important for the website to explain what the Council's duties were in relation to air quality and the steps the Council were taking to address the problem. He

recommended that the website information be reviewed and updated. He also asked for the Council to be as transparent as possible in their dealings with DEFRA.

Resolved:

- A) That the Council's website air quality pages be reviewed and updated.
- B) That DEFRA be asked if some grant money could be awarded to the Council to update and re-locate the Council's air monitoring equipment.

Members complimented the Chair of the Panel for his work in the role, as he was stepping down as Chair, after the Local Government elections in May.

The meeting closed at 7:10pm.