

Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel

Minutes - 4 October 2018

Attendance

Members of the Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Ian Angus
Cllr Mary Bateman
Cllr Philip Bateman MBE
Cllr Greg Brackenridge
Cllr Christopher Haynes (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Keith Inston
Cllr Beverley Momenabadi
Cllr John Rowley
Cllr Martin Waite (Chair)

Employees

Martin Stevens (Scrutiny Officer) (Minutes)
Ross Cook (Service Director – City Environment)
Colin Parr (Head of Business Services)
John Roseblade (Head of Transport)
Richard Welch (Health Business Partner)
Earl Piggott-Smith (Scrutiny Officer)
Nick Broomhall (Service Lead – Traffic and Road Safety)
Shaun Walker (Service Lead – Residential)
Susan White (Service Lead – Residential)

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

- 1 **Apologies**
Apologies for absence was received from Cllr Val Evans and Cllr Arun Photay.

The Portfolio Holder for City Environment, Cllr Steve Evans, also sent his apologies,
- 2 **Minutes of the previous meeting**

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 12 July 2018 be approved as a correct record.

3 Matters arising

A Member asked if there had been any progress in relation to the subject of air quality. The Service Lead for Residential responded that the new information on air quality on the Council's website was about to be available. All the technical issues had now been resolved and air quality data was being uploaded correctly to the website. The Head of Transport stated that the targeted feasibility study had been submitted in draft to DEFRA in the previous week. The Member requested that the findings of the feasibility study be circulated to Members of the Panel in due course.

4 Scrutiny Work Programme

The Chair referred to the meeting scheduled for the 4 December, which included a report on Active Travel. One of the recommendations from the Parking Review was regarding "Park and Stride", which was part of Active Travel.

The December meeting was likely to include an item on the Budget, but the decision would be made by the forthcoming Scrutiny Board. The item on WV Active would be moved to the meeting in February 2019, if the budget was placed on the agenda for the December meeting.

A Member of the Panel suggested the processes for repairing roads, including potholes as a future agenda item.

A Member of the Panel expressed concern of the amount of traffic entering Wolverhampton from neighbouring authority areas and the routes they used. Heavy goods vehicles were sometimes using routes in residential areas. After a debate about transport networks, the Chair suggested that public transport in the City could be a joint meeting with the Stronger City Economy Scrutiny Panel. He would discuss the concept of the idea with Cllr Jaqueline Sweetman.

5 Kingdom - Update Briefing Note

The Service Lead (Residential) introduced a briefing note on Kingdom. At the previous meeting of the Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel in July, Members had asked for further information on several areas. The briefing note provided answers to these questions, which were outlined by the Service Lead.

A Member of the Panel asked for further information on the nature of the training Kingdom employees received on acting appropriately when dealing with vulnerable people. He also remarked that whilst the Briefing Note stated 26 people had their Fixed Penalty notice revoked on the grounds of vulnerability or special needs, he was certain more had been issued a notice and just not appealed. He did not think the Equality and Diversity Training which was given to all Council Staff and Kingdom employees was sufficient training in identifying vulnerable people. He requested further information on the training Kingdom employees received on identifying people with vulnerabilities and in dealing with them. The Service Lead (Residential) responded that he would have a discussion with Kingdom about the points raised by the Councillor. There was however no incentive to Kingdom employees to issue tickets to vulnerable people who would be unlikely to pay the fine, such as a rough sleeper. It was agreed that a written response would be provided to the Councillor which would also be circulated to the other Members of the Panel.

6 Parking Outside Schools - Review Progress of Implementation of Recommendations from the Scrutiny Review

The Service Lead for Traffic and Safety gave a presentation on the progress of the implementation on the recommendations from the Parking Outside Schools Scrutiny Review. Officers had completed a TRO (Traffic Regulation Order) Data Sheet as requested from the recommendations. This had been created to help develop Councillors understanding of the different types of parking restrictions outside schools. Officers had also produced a similar public information sheet which was now available on the Council's website to view. A media release had been issued highlighting that the information sheet was available. Whilst not an explicit recommendation from the review, the Council had implemented Traffic Regulation Orders outside 26 schools, totalling 71 roads in the City, over the last twelve months. There were 37 schools still on their schedule awaiting Traffic Regulation Orders. There were some schools where current Traffic Regulation Orders would be amended.

The Service Lead for Traffic and Safety remarked that the letter to the Secretary of State, as requested by the Scrutiny review, had been drafted. It was currently awaiting the Leader of the Council's signature. Officers had been asked to review the principle and the findings of traffic exclusion zones at schools. The two which they had conducted research on were in Solihull and Edinburgh. The main issue, when considering implementing a traffic exclusion zone, concerned ensuring there was the support of the school, parents, the local community and the Police. Solihull had found that it was key not to implement an exclusion zone where there was a through route. A further key requirement, they had concluded, was ensuring there was a convenient car park to avoid complete displacement of the traffic to other roads outside the exclusion zone. This requirement clearly limited the number of areas where a traffic exclusion zone could be implemented. Finally, it was important to implement a permit scheme for residents and other road users who had a legitimate reason to access the area at school travel times.

The Service Lead for Traffic and Safety stated that the findings from Solihull and Edinburgh had not surprisingly showed a net reduction of traffic volume in the exclusion zones. There was a reduced level of complaints about parking outside schools in the exclusion zones. In addition, parents and children reported an improved perception in road safety following their implementation.

The Service Lead for Traffic and Safety stated the negative findings included displacement of parking on roads outside of the zone, even where there was a car park. They also recognised that because there was less congestion in the exclusion zone, those people driving in the zone legitimately, had the opportunity to drive at an increased speed. It was therefore worth considering the introduction of traffic calming measures in the exclusion zone to reduce speeding. The exclusion zone relied heavily on Police support to enforce the restrictions. There was also an ongoing revenue cost to the Council to implement a permit scheme required for the residents.

A Member of the Panel asked how many schools met the criteria suggested by Solihull and Edinburgh. The Service Lead for Traffic and Safety responded that after conducting an initial assessment, two schools in the City had been identified as potential areas. The most suitable school was St. Michael's Roman Catholic Primary School in Merry Hill. He gave a description of the site using a visual aid. One main concern was that Trysull Road was a local distribution road, which they wouldn't traffic calm because it was integral to the road network. An exclusion zone would

push traffic out of Trysull Gardens to park on the other side or further along Trysull Road. Trysull Road had approximately 4,500 cars passing every day at 85% percentile speeds of 35MPH. Children and parents would be then walking along a road with significantly more traffic and at high speeds. It was therefore important to think carefully before even considering developing the concept further.

A Member of the Panel asked if the community would be consulted should a proposal be put forward. In response, the Service Lead for Traffic and Safety stated consultation would be essential.

A Member of the Panel asked how much a car parking permit would cost for residents each year. The Service Lead for Traffic and Safety responded that the issuing of parking permits was administered by a different team in the Council and he would liaise with them to find out the cost.

The Service Lead for Traffic and Safety remarked that the second school which they considered for a traffic exclusion zone was Oak Meadow Primary School in Wednesfield. The issue was the exclusion zone would have to cover a wide area, meaning more permits would need to be issued. The car parks were already at full capacity in the vicinity and there was potential for them to be sold in the future. These reasons meant it had not been selected as an appropriate site to put forward to consultation as a traffic exclusion zone.

The Chair stated that with the use of number plate recognition, people could be charged for entering streets where there were schools, during opening and closing times. The idea was an alternative to having to issue specific permits. A list could be kept on the system of residents who needed access to the street, who wouldn't be charged. On the subject of TROs, the Chair stated that he had seen in the media recently that the Police were accepting dashcam footage of reckless drivers. He asked if there was any scope for citizen reporting of people breaching TROs or dangerous car parking. He thought with the widespread use of Smartphones there was potential for such a reporting mechanism. He also asked if Officers had looked at filtered permeability options recently, which was a type of road design that allowed through access for walkers and cyclists, but removed it for motor traffic.

In response to the points raised by the Chair, the Service Lead for Traffic and Safety responded that they had not looked at filtered permeability recently but had in the past. There were some physical difficulties with the method, if the resultant cul-de-sac which was blocked off was longer than 25 metres, a turning head was required. The method had been used in the past when problems had arisen with the use of "rat runs." The Head of Transport stated they could do some analysis of the Citizen reporting concept raised by the Chair. There were some offences that required a Fixed Penalty Notice but there were others which were enforced by their mobile camera enforcement car, which followed the same principle. There were also some issues with citizen reporting, concerning quality of evidence and the potential need to require witness statements. He was aware of people using social media to name and shame people to reduce incidences of dangerous parking.

A Member of the Panel stated that it was important for the Planning Department of the Council to consider parking issues outside schools when they were building schools in the future.

A Member of the Panel stated enforcement activity was the key to reducing the problem of dangerous parking outside schools. The public could help with enforcement by producing filmed footage.

Scrutiny Officer, Earl Piggott-Smith, asked how many fines had been issued in the last twelve months for parking offences outside schools. The Head of Transport stated the information could be provided after the meeting.

Scrutiny Officer, Earl Piggott-Smith, asked about the walking strategy. The Health Business Partner stated there was a strategy titled “towards an active city” approved by Cabinet last year. The strategy was going to be refreshed to reflect the new vision of the Director of Public Health, which was less about intervention and more about creating a healthy environment. The walking strategy would be part of the physical activity strategy. A report on active travel was scheduled to be received by the Scrutiny Panel in early December. Information on “Park and Stride” had been sent out to schools. He was pleased to report the positive news that 15 sports and health apprenticeships had been established in schools. These apprentices would help to embody the principles of “Park and Stride” within schools. They had also appointed a PSHE (Personal, Social and Health Education) Advisory teacher in the previous week who could go out to schools.

7 **Mechanisms to Control Vacant Sites**

The Head of Business Services gave a presentation on the mechanisms to control vacant sites. He stated that vacant sites could fall into different categories. Orphaned land which were plots of land with no identified owner, was the first of these categories. The most recent survey had identified approximately 350 of these sites across the City. These ranged from significant plots of land to small slithers. Orphaned land could attract fly tipping and anti-social behaviour and were problematic to the Council, due to there being no named owner of the land. There was a duty on the Council to control pests within their area. This had amounted in the past to generally clearing the orphaned land sites, where there were infestations. Due to challenging budgets, there had been discussions of only having pest control in those areas and not clearing the site in the future.

The Head of Business Services described the second category of site as being where the Council could identify the owner. These sites were often property speculation sites.

The Head of Business Services commented that it could sometimes take years to resolve the problems with vacant sites. The Council did have some enforcement powers, such as serving Community Protection Warnings. This was where the Council could request a landowner to take action. If the Community Protection Warning was not complied with, the Council could serve a formal notice requiring the landowner to take action. He considered a better solution to be working with the community, where it was possible.

The Head of Business Service said there was incredible value with working closely with other departments in the Council such as the Planning Team. This would help prevent them suggesting remedial action to landowners which was in breach of the Council’s Planning Policy. They could work with the Planning Team on a strategic level, as the ideal scenario was for the vacant sites to be developed such as for

housing or for general benefit to the community. They often found that the landowners of vacant sites had unrealistic development expectations that would have a very low chance of receiving planning permission.

A Member of the Panel asked if the Council had explored the idea of allowing members of the public to extend their gardens into unused alleyways, thus removing the problem of a problematic vacant site. He suggested a small amount of funding from the Council would be required to help extend the gardens such as for the removal of fencing.

A Member of the Panel gave an example of an Old Victorian building which had been considered for demolition but was brought back into use as an important example of sustaining the City's heritage.

A Member of the Panel stated it was important to manage expectations for vacant sites as there was not the funding available to implement solutions in all areas to a desired outcome.

The Head of Business Services stated they could look at all the suggestions by Members for dealing with vacant sites. His priority was to enforce areas where there was a clear risk to life. Budget challenges made it increasingly difficult to respond to concerns about non-life threatening vacant sites.

The Service Lead for Residential, Susan White presented two case studies and described the action the Council had taken on the sites. The first case study was for the Orchard, Church Lane, Bushbury North. The second was for Lesley Road/Powell Street in Heath Town.

Cllr Brackenridge suggested a long-term solution to the problems at Lesley Road/Powell Street was to allow the residents to extend their gardens into the alleyway. He also suggested some changes to the access points.

There was a discussion about the pros and cons of the use of signs and CCTV to reduce tipping.

Meeting closed at 7:50pm.