

# Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel

Minutes - 7 November 2019

## Attendance

### Members of the Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Paul Appleby (Vice-Chair, in the Chair)

Cllr Philip Bateman MBE

Cllr Greg Brackenridge

Cllr Alan Butt

Cllr Jacqui Coogan

Cllr Christopher Haynes

Cllr Keith Inston

Cllr Beverley Momenabadi

Cllr Martin Waite

### In Attendance

Cllr Steve Evans

Cabinet Member for City Environment

### Employees

John Denley, Director of Public Health

Helen McGourlay

Earl Piggott-Smith

John Roseblade

Ross Cook, Director of City Environment

Michele Ross

Finance Business Partner

Scrutiny Officer

Head of City Transport

NHS England - Local Area Team

Senior Planning Officer

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## Part 1 – items open to the press and public

*Item No.*    *Title*

### 1        **Apologies**

Apologies were received from the following members of the panel:

Cllr Bhupinder Gakhal

Cllr Mak Singh

### 2        **Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest recorded.

### 3        **Minutes of the previous meeting**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 7 November 2019 were approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

#### 4 **Matters arising**

##### **Minute 7 – Housing Strategy**

Scrutiny Officer advised the panel that the City Housing Strategy 2019-24 was approved by Cabinet at a meeting on 16 October 2019.

##### **Minute 8 – Housing Allocation Policy**

Scrutiny Officer advised the panel that the report will be presented at the meeting on 5 February 2020 for pre-decision scrutiny.

#### 5 **South Staffordshire Spatial Housing Strategy Consultation**

Michele Ross, Lead Planning Manager, gave a presentation on the main points of the South Staffordshire Spatial Housing Strategy Consultation and the implications for Wolverhampton. The panel were advised about the public consultation led by South Staffordshire Council about future housing options in the new Local Plan. The consultation proposes broad locations for housing and linked infrastructure priorities.

The preferred option would involve the release of green belt land to provide new homes. The Lead Manager gave a summary of the preferred Option G which was expected to provide new homes and supporting infrastructure for South Staffordshire and also new homes for neighbouring authorities in the Black Country, to help them meet their targets for new home building. Option G would include the building of 220 homes in Perton and 570 homes at Codsall/Bilbrook, beyond sites already identified in the existing South Staffordshire Local Plan.

The Lead Manager advised that a Green Belt assessment had been completed and seven spatial options were being considered to meet the housing need. At this stage of the process only broad locations for future development have been identified, depending on final details the housing plans may affect areas such as Fallings Park and Wednesfield North.

The Lead Manager advised the panel that there is a specific criteria against which sites selected for development would be assessed by South Staffordshire Council, for example, impact on the historic environment, landscape character sensitivity and impact on nature conservation. The Lead Manager advised that the proposed developments would have implications for transport and school places in particular. The consultation includes plans for new and improved infrastructure investment to support the housing development. There were concerns about existing traffic congestion and other issues in the north of Wolverhampton which could require extra provision of school places and improved public transport to meet increased levels of demand.

The Lead Manager advised the panel that the deadline for comments was 12 December 2019. Cabinet would be asked to approve the response from Wolverhampton to the proposals in the consultation document at a meeting on 4 December 2019.

The Lead Manager added that the draft plan including proposed development sites is due to be published by South Staffordshire Council in the summer 2020 and final

draft plan is due in early 2021. The plan is due for adoption by South Staffordshire Council in 2022. The panel were invited to comment on the proposal.

The panel reported concerns from the public at recent meetings about the plans for redeveloping green belt areas outlined in the consultation document. The panel highlighted the importance of making strong representations in the response to the consultation about the importance to using brownfield sites where possible to reduce the need to develop land on green belt in South Staffordshire which would impact on Wolverhampton residents along the affected boundary.

The panel commented on the value and importance of the green belt area to the residents. The panel queried the potential for developments in South Staffordshire green belt side which would not directly affect the area in Wolverhampton but would impact negatively by having a large development in the adjoining area. The Lead Manager referred to on-going discussions with South Staffordshire as part of developing the Black Country Plan where cross boundary issues are discussed.

The Black Country Plan is due to be published next autumn and the aim is to get a consistent approach to assessing the impact of proposed developments in one authority area which could affect a neighbouring authority. There is a recognition of need for neighbouring authorities to work together positively to meet national targets for new house building. The panel were reassured that South Staffordshire had not yet decided about the final sites to be developed and the implications of any development on the local infrastructure would need to be carefully considered. The panel asked the John Denley, Director of Public Health, if work had been done to undertake health impact assessment of the proposed housing and infrastructure developments. The Director of Public Health advised the panel that work is being done with the RWHT to use local intelligence to assess the impact on local GP services. The work is on the work programme and will be reviewed as plans develop.

The panel discussed the options for using brownfield sites to build new homes and the accuracy of current registers detailing possible sites. John Roseblade, Head of City Transport, commented on the work done to ensure list of potential brownfield sites is accurate but added that even if existing sites were used there would still be a shortfall across the Black Country as the new homes target set by Government is so high and this presents a real challenge to local authorities to meet. The Lead Manager added that there is capacity for the Black Country to build around 47,000 new homes on brownfield land but developing brownfield sites for housing is expensive, estimates range from half to £1 million per hectare to reclaim land. Furthermore, increasing housing building density would still leave a large gap in meeting the target.

The panel queried if the Duty to Cooperate referred to in the consultation document was legally enforceable in a situation where a neighbouring authority objected to a proposed development. The Lead Manager explained that the duty is taken from planning legislation and a Planning Inspector could reject a Local Plan if a local authority was not able to show that it has engaged constructively, actively and on ongoing basis with a neighbouring authority over matters which affect boundaries. If a Local Plan was rejected then the local authority would have to start the process again, which would add delay to plans to meet new housing development targets. The panel discussed the option of using empty homes to reduce the number of homes to be developed on green belt land.

The panel welcomed the presentation and the opportunity to contribute to the consultation.

Resolved:

The panel comments on the preferred Option G in South Staffordshire Spatial Housing Strategy to be included in report to Cabinet meeting on 4 December 2019 where Wolverhampton's response will be considered.

6 **Draft Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2020-2021 to 2023-2024**

The Finance Business Partner, presented the report and explained the changes to the content to whole budget approach. The Finance Business Partner highlighted the specific budget proposals relating to the remit of the Panel and invited Panel members to comment. The Panel's comments would be included in a report to Scrutiny Board and then onto Cabinet.

The Panel queried the rationale for the proposed review of the WV Active Business Model to reducing reliance on agency staff. The Director of Public Health explained that the plan was to offer employees more financial stability, by shifting to employees from sessional work to permanent employment. The change would help to grow the quality of the workforce and offer a career path. The change would also help to improve the quality of the service and respond to increased growth in membership of WV Active from 5,000 to 10,000 during the last few years. The Director of Public Health commented on the importance of getting customer feedback about their experiences and making changes to the offer with the aim of improving the overall quality.

The Director of Public Health commented on the vision for using other settings such as parks and open spaces to respond to increasing public interest in wanting different opportunities and settings to improve their health and fitness.

The Cabinet Member for City Environment, commented on the progress made to improve the fitness and leisure offer and the success of initiatives aimed at increasing the number of WV Active members. The Cabinet Member outlined the vision for the future of the current offer and actively looking for opportunities to host sporting events such as Judo Championships at local venues such as Aldersley Leisure. The ambition was to attract investment that could develop a velodrome in Wolverhampton for hosting national competitions and make it attractive location for countries attending the Commonwealth Games wanting a base for their preparation. The Cabinet Member outlined ideas for developing the offer at local parks.

The Director for City Environment added that work was being done to look for opportunities to promote Wolverhampton as potential location for activities linked to the Commonwealth Games in 2021 and to raise its profile. The Panel discussed the importance of the canal network as part of the improved leisure offer and the benefits of past investment in attracting more interest and suggested that this should also be part of the vision for the future leisure offer in Wolverhampton. The Director of Public Health commented on the analysis done to understand the reasons why people stop attending events and activities. This had been completed through feedback and surveys to better understand the reasons. There was a focus on improving the quality of the offer. The Panel discussed if the proposals would lead to a reduction in

the number of people offering sessions. The Panel were reassured that the aim was to maximise the number of instructors and continue to improve the leisure offer.

**Resolved:** The Panel agreed to note the report.

## 7 **Feedback on West Side Link Transport Related Questions**

Ross Cook, Director for City Environment, introduced the briefing note to update panel members on outcomes arising from the joint scrutiny meeting on 16 July 2019 with members of the Stronger City Economy Scrutiny Panel. The panel were asked to note the progress and specifically the work of the member reference group.

The Director for City Environment confirmed that the questions from members of Stronger City Panel had been responded to.

The members of the member reference group were given the opportunity to feedback their views on the response received to issues and questions raised about the proposed transport links. Cllr Bateman commented that all his questions and issues had been addressed and welcomed the opportunity to discuss it in detail. Cllr Phil Bateman welcomed the progress made in responding the issues about the Westside Link scheme. Cllr Waite commented that his view there were no off limit questions in meeting to discuss the plans for the scheme and was happy with the positive response and the progress made.

**Resolved:**

The panel agreed to note the report.

## 8 **Potholes in Wolverhampton**

John Roseblade, Head of City Transport, gave a short PowerPoint presentation on the work done to maintain the highway network and the treatment of potholes and defects. The Head of City Transport advised the panel that the Council maintains highway network of 450 miles and referred to findings of an independent annual survey. The survey reported that to bring roads up to a 'reasonable' standard would take 10 years and cost £9.8 billion. Based on this estimate this would require a budget of £24 million - the current annual resurfacing budget is approximately £3 million. The Head of City Transport advised that despite the budget shortfall the overall condition of the road network is considered to be good compared to other local authorities in the region. The Council benefited from extra Government funding awarded a few years ago to do large scale road maintenance work, which has helped.

The Head of City Transport explained the current inspection regime and the criteria used to assess the degree of risk that a road defect represents, and the different repair methods used. The Head of City Transport explained the statutory responsibilities of the Council to maintain the highway. The Head of City Transport explained that a new method of repairing road defects is being trialled and early results are very promising when doing temporary or larger scale maintenance work. The method provides a rapid pothole repair service which has greatly improved response times and reduced disruption to traffic due to the speed it can be done at much lower cost.

The panel queried current research into new methods of highway maintenance and repair. The Head of City Highway advised that methods using recycled rubber and

plastic are being tested to see if they can cope – a particular challenge is how such material copes with periods of prolonged rain which damages the surface. The Council is constantly looking for improve methods for repairing highways and also seeking funding opportunities.

The panel queried the work done to respond to resident complaints about the lack of co-ordination between different organisations which lead to recently resurfaced highways being damaged to enable other maintenance work to be done. The Head of City Transport explained the work done to share details of planned maintenance with other utility organisations. The Council can put a legal restriction to prevent road maintenance work being done for up to five years; unless there an emergency gas or water repairs required. The aim is to protect the condition of the road.

Steve Evans, Cabinet Member for City Environment, commented on the issues caused when planned maintenance work overruns and the benefits of using the velocity patchwork method. The panel were shown a video clip of the method being used and the speed at which it can repair damaged highways. The system can complete 100s of road repairs within a short time which reduces traffic disruption.

The panel discussed the use of alternative materials to repair the highway. The Head of City Transport advised the panel that there is a focus on finding low energy alternative materials which will reduce the carbon footprint.

Further plans will be included in the service response to Council's response to the climate change emergency declaration.

The panel discussed the issue about how to communicate to the public when a repair to the highway is intended to be a temporary fix.

The panel queried the number of claims against the Council for compensation as a result of personal injury, loss and damage. The Head of City Transport responded that the Council had received 206 claims in total to date for compensation during 2018/19. The authority had accepted 20 claims for damage due to potholes and the total amount paid was £5,000. This performance compares well with other neighbouring authorities. The Council had settled 8 separate claims for personal injury totalling £38,000.

Resolved:

The panel agreed to note the report.