CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COUNCIL

Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel

Minutes - 28 January 2021

Attendance

Members of the Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Paul Appleby (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Mary Bateman
Cllr Philip Bateman MBE
Cllr Greg Brackenridge
Cllr Alan Butt
Cllr Jacqui Coogan
Cllr Bhupinder Gakhal
Cllr Keith Inston
Cllr Beverley Momenabadi
Cllr Mak Singh (Chair)
Cllr Martin Waite

In Attendance
Cllr Steve Evans (Cabinet Member for City Environment)
Cllr Paul Birch J.P

Employees
Martin Stevens (Scrutiny Officer) (Minutes)
Ross Cook (Director for City Environment)
John Roseblade (Head of City Transport)
Julia Cleary (Scrutiny and Systems Manager)
Earl Piggott-Smith (Scrutiny Officer)
Amy Pote (Apprentice) (Observed the meeting)

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

1 **Apologies**
There were no apologies for absence.

2 **Declarations of interest**
There were no declarations of interest.

3 **Minutes of the previous meeting**
The minutes of the meeting held on 26 November 2020 were confirmed as a correct record.

4 **Matters arising**

There were no matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting.

5 **Digital Technology in Transportation**

The Head of City Transport presented a report on the subject of digital technology in transportation. He stated that the Council had been successful in obtaining European Regional Development Funding (EDRF) to replace all of the City's streetlights to low energy Light Emitting Diode (LED) lanterns. The EDRF funding allowed them to make 9,000 of the streetlights smart enabled. He displayed a map showing the progress of the LED replacement programme to date. They had replaced about 5,500 units to date, the aim was to replace 27,000 in total using the EDRF funds. He thought it would take approximately 18 months for the programme to be completed. The energy saving was huge which helped to support the climate change agenda.

The Head of City Transport remarked that they had developed a new strategy for displaying information on the highway utilising modern LED signage. They had been useful in relaying information to residents and drivers. Sometimes the messages displayed were of national importance such as "Stay at Home." The signs could also be used to influence driver behaviour based on intelligence. For example, if an area was prone to congestion or poor air quality, they could direct traffic accordingly using the signs. One of the areas they were hoping to expand on was having information about car park usage displayed on the signs. The signs could be used to relay road safety information.

The Head of City Transport commented that Wolverhampton currently hosted the Urban Traffic Control Centre (UTC) for the Black Country. The control room was based in the Civic Centre. Approximately 150 cameras were monitored and traffic lights could be controlled from the UTC. Journey times had been logged by detecting mobile phone signals. This information was very useful in making the road network as efficient as possible. They had been monitoring traffic throughout the pandemic.

The Head of City Transport stated that City of Wolverhampton Council had led on the introduction of digital average speed cameras across the Black Country. There were now two areas in Wolverhampton which had average speed cameras in place. The cameras had gone live on 1 December 2020. Whilst it was the responsibility of the Police to enforce compliance with speed limits, the Council had a shared obligation to reduce road traffic collisions and make the City's roads safer. They were effective at reducing average speeds and reducing road traffic accidents.

The Head of City Transport referred to the Council having successfully secured investment of nearly £5 million to provide a full fibre network across the City. The Council were looking at how they could use the faster broadband speeds to improve CCTV, the traffic management network and parking management systems. 5G could also be used effectively to enhance systems.

The Head of City Transport spoke on active travel routes. There was over 60km of cycle routes across the City. He acknowledged that some of the routes were better than others. The Council had been successful in securing near to £1 million from the Active Travel Fund for 2021/22. This funding would be used to create a large segregated cycle route around the ring road and St. Peter's. It would also link to

existing networks and thus enhance the cycle route offer. They were developing systems using artificial intelligence to track how many people used the cycle routes. This would help them to choose where they invested in the future.

The Head of City Transport stated that the City Transport Team were currently in the process of procuring a new Fleet Management System. They had an ambition to transform the fleet from one which used predominately diesel engines to all electric vehicles. They had secured the consultation advice from the Energy Saving Trust. They were determining which vehicles would be suitable to convert to electric, the electric vehicles that would need to purchased and addressing what charging infrastructure would be required. The Council was in the process of installing publicly accessible electric vehicle charging points across the City to support the general uptake of electric vehicles.

The Head of City Transport remarked that the Council had a new fleet of gritters. They were equipped with the latest technology and they could be tracked on the network. The technology allowed for automatic spreading rates, which allowed the drivers to focus entirely on driving.

The Head of City Transport referred to the Escooters trial, which was being rolled out across the West Midlands. It had been put on hold due to the national Covid-19 lockdown. There had been an initial trial in Birmingham and Coventry. Each Escooter had telematics, the trial in Birmingham had shown that over 60,000km had been covered by 30,000 individual trips, up to November 2020. If this distance represented 12-16% of what would have normally taken place in a car, it would equate to a saving of 250 to 525 tonnes of CO2 over the course of the trial in Birmingham. The cycle hire scheme was also being rolled out across the region. The Council were hoping to secure nearly 200 cycles with approximately 20 of them being electric. A trial would be taking place in Sutton Coldfield's first. He hoped to see the scheme introduced in Wolverhampton at the beginning of April, if all went to plan.

Cllr Paul Birch commented that people who did not have their own driveway were less inclined to buy an electric car because of the difficulty in charging the vehicle. He said that chargers for electric cars on the whole were divided into two groups. The chargers that were offered free of charge were generally 7 Kilowatts, which were similar to what someone would have at home. An hour's charge using a 7 Kilowatts charger would add about 20-30 miles to battery. It could take up to forty hours to fully charge the vehicle.

Cllr Paul Birch stated that the bigger demand was for the rapid 150 Kilowatt chargers. This type of charger could charge an electric car from zero to full in approximately forty minutes. For this type of charger people expected to pay to use it. Payment was normally made using a RFID card, app or subscription. He said that there was an opportunity in the City to use the electricity network from streetlamps for charging purpose. He had seen this demonstrated in the City of London and some other areas. BP and Shell had moved heavily into the rapid chargers' market

Cllr Paul Birch referred to the Government's current BIC (Benefits in Kind) rate, which was also known as P11D. For this financial year it was zero percent, the next financial year it was 1% and then the following year it would be 2%. This contrasted

with internal combustion engines where it was 20-30%. The Benefit in Kind rate for electric vehicles acted as an incentive for companies to purchase electric vehicles. Another advantage was they could claim back half the VAT (Value Added Tax). Most of the electric vehicles also had zero or low APR (Annual Percentage Rate). A Panel Member commented that some of the housing developers in Wolverhampton were now putting charging points on their new houses as standard. One of the housing providers had also put solar panels on new houses as standard. She thought in ten years' time electric vehicles and chargers would be much more prevalent.

Cllr Paul Birch spoke on the matter of Escooters. He had a concern of the potential for crime using Escooters. He spoke in favour of the cycle hire scheme that the Head of City Transport had outlined. He asked about the prospect of using electric bicycles.

Panel Members praised the Transport Team, the smart nature of the street lights and the benefits of being able to monitor usage of certain paths, for instance by canals.

The Cabinet Member for City Environment commented that it was important for people to feel safe walking at night by canals and they were looking to introduce more lighting. He acknowledged the concerns that Cllr Birch raised about Escooters and crime. Before an Escooters trial was agreed in Wolverhampton, they would be assessing the effect of them in other areas. If a trial did go ahead in Wolverhampton it would be limited to a small location. They would stop the trial if there were issues. They were working with the WMCA (West Midlands Combined Authority) on providing electric cycles to hire in the City. They were also looking at electric cargo bikes for Council staff to use in the future.

The Cabinet Member for City Environment stated that the Government had announced that the sale of new vehicles with combustible engines would be outlawed by 2030. The Council had passed an emergency resolution to have zero emissions by 2028 as part of their climate change commitment. The Council had already put a number of charging points across the whole of the City. They were currently working with a provider to put in charging points in other areas. BP Charge Master now had 30,000 charge points across the country. Across the world, ion batteries were being developed which could be fully charged after 5-10 minutes. The problem was ensuring that the battery did not overheat and cause a fire risk. The Council were not currently exploring the idea of using the streetlight electricity network as charging points for electric vehicles. He did however think that the Council needed to support garages, supermarkets and utilise carparks and laybys to provide charging points. He spoke on the implications for the car industry and the UK's exit from the European Union.

The Head of City Transport commented that last year extensive research had taken place on where residential charging points would be best placed to be most effective. This had influenced where the on-street chargers would be placed. There had been some resistance to the proposals, due to the demand for parking. In the next few months, he hoped to see more on street charging points. 9,000 smart streetlights amounted to good coverage across the City, which amounted to about a third of the total streetlights. They would be on key routes, retail areas and heavily pedestrianised areas. It was possible that the system could be expanded into the future, if it was successful. Being able to monitor how areas were being used was

vital, with one of the benefits being to add evidence to business cases for future funding bids.

The Cabinet Member for City Environment spoke highly of the digital nature of the new streetlighting and the fact that Wolverhampton was one of the few Cities in the Country to be rolling out 5G infrastructure. He was proud of the work that had taken place in technology to enable the City to prosper. He recommended a visit by Panel Members in the future to the Urban Traffic Control Centre at the Civic Centre. He believed it to be one of the best in the country. He recommended the Panel speak to Oliver Thomas, in the future, on his work on electric vehicles and charging points. Oliver had been leading on the work for Wolverhampton. It was clear that charging points would be very important in the future.

A Member of the Panel asked about the data that was going to be generated by the smart sensors and the 5G network that was being built in Wolverhampton. He asked how Wolverhampton could take advantage of being one of the first cities to have 5G, to support the Council and local businesses, in how they could use data to make their processes more efficient and attract inward investment. The Head of City Transport responded on the data question, that this was potentially an area for the Panel to address in the future and was a wider question for the organisation as a whole. It was being used to improve the traffic monitoring systems and CCTV systems in his own team. There was great potential for the technology. The Panel Member asked if the question of how the Council levered the data could be put to the Chief Executive or the Leader. Another Panel Member remarked that the Council had just launched the Digital Wolves website, which brought together much of the digital innovation work being carried out in the City. The information on the website covered some of the information regarding how 5G and other digital technology could be harnessed to the advantage of the City.

The Chair on behalf of the Panel congratulated the team on the work that had taken place, as outlined by the Head of City Transport at the meeting. He asked what funding the Council obtained for hosting the Urban Traffic Control Centre for the Black Country and the time length of the contract. On active travel routes he asked where the people of Wolverhampton could find the information on them, such as on a website or an app.

The Head of City Transport commented that they had a shared services agreement in place. There was a contract predominately between the Council and Walsall, but there were also smaller contracts with other local authorities such as Dudley and Sandwell. The main contract with Walsall lasted for nine years and expired in 2026. Each authority made financial contributions depending on the scale of the service the Council provided. On active travel routes he felt that they weren't advanced in how people accessed the routes and discovered them. There were proposals on the Consultation Hub on the website for some of the new routes planned. He was aware that many people used mobile phones now to access information. He felt there was a lot more work that could be done to optimise people's routes depending on the mode of transport they used. Another piece of work they wanted to complete in the future was to look at how integrated the active travel routes in the City were with current mapping providers such as google maps and independent apps. He thanked the Chair for the question.

Resolved: The Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel recommends: -

A) That a report on Escooters and Electric cycles be reported to the Panel in the future after any trial that may take place in Wolverhampton.

B) That a representative from City Fibre attend a meeting of the Panel in the future to report on the rollout of Full Fibre in the City.

C) That Officers conduct work on optimising and displaying active travel routes in the City on digital platforms.

D) That the report on Digital Technology in Transport be noted.

6 **Work Programme**

There were no comments on the current Scrutiny Work Programme for the Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel.

7 **Future Meetings**

It was confirmed that the next meeting of the Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel was scheduled to take place on Thursday, 25 March 2021 at 6pm.