

Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel

Minutes - 25 March 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 Martin Waite

In Attendance

Cllr Steve Evans (Portfolio Holder for City Economy)

Employees

Martin Stevens (Scrutiny Officer) (Minutes)
Ross Cook (Director of City Environment)
Steve Woodward (Head of Environmental Services)
Lamour Gayle (Head of Customer Engagement and Registrars)
Julia Cleary (Scrutiny and Systems Manager)
Earl Piggott-Smith (Scrutiny Officer)

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

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

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

- 3 **Minutes of the previous meeting**
The minutes of the meeting held on 28 January 2021 were confirmed as a correct record.

4 Matters arising

The Chair commented that the Work Programme had been discussed at the last meeting. He thought it would be useful for Wolverhampton Homes to be added to a future agenda and also WV Living.

5 Digital Technology in City Environment

The Head of Environmental Services gave a summary presentation of the report titled "Digital Technology in City Environment," which had been despatched with the agenda for the meeting.

The Portfolio Holder for City Environment commented that there were considerable services within the Directorate that were already digitally connected. The key was to ensure simplicity and ease of access for the general public. The public needed to have confidence in the systems so they could report and track issues. Digital was also important for enabling them to access information such as on the City's parks. The pandemic had certainly accelerated the digital agenda and its importance. It was important to remember though, the people in the City that did not use digital. The Business Improvement Manager was currently liaising with some Councillors on a digital reporting mechanism for Councillor enquiries. Being aware of the applications available and the plethora of information was key. He commented on the way Covid-19 had changed the nature of working, with so many people able to carry out their roles at home.

A Panel Member spoke in support of the Portfolio Holder's comments on the importance of getting things right for the residents of Wolverhampton, including the availability of the information. He asked about the CRM (Customer Relationship Management) system and whether in future it could send automated messages to the public on the progress of an issue that had been reported. He felt this was an issue which needed improvement. The Head of Customer Engagement and Registrars stated that the system could send automated messages and they had started this with some services. She agreed with the Member that improvements were needed. She added that the current automated response templates they were using needed improving. There was a Customer Services and ICT roadmap which they were currently developing. The first step was to improve the templates and the next step would be to roll it out to all areas that currently used the Customer Engagement platform.

The Panel Member responded that there would be times when an automated message would not be appropriate to a customer enquiry. Where there were unresolved cases, in some software products, it would add the enquiry to an agent's workflow automatically. He thought this was a good way to keep to service level agreements. He had raised issues to do with customer responses over three years ago and felt there should be some urgency to improvement. The Head of Customer Engagement and Registrars added that all the Panel Member's points were being looked at as part of the development of the service. There was a Service Development Team within Customer Services and they were setting up some Customer User focus groups.

The Portfolio Holder remarked that Customer Services now came under the City Environment Portfolio, which was advantageous as many customer enquiries were often related to this area. He accepted that some of the wording of the automated messages needed to be clearer for residents.

A Panel Member spoke on the rapid change, evolution of digital technology and the challenges and opportunities this brought. He felt that the public wanted the Council to use digital technology more. He asked how many CCTV cameras the Council owned that played a role in the digital revolution. His second question was how the Council could continue to inform Members of the Council about the development and the pace of digital technology. He had been most impressed, when he heard as part of the Officer's presentation, the ability to conduct digital autopsies. He was in favour of the Council developing the use of digital within services.

The Head of Environmental Services responded that Environment Services did not own enough CCTV cameras, they were looking to purchase more. The cameras could be deployed anywhere in the City and moved from location to location. They were predominately used to detect and deter fly tipping offenses. Environment Services owned approximately ten cameras. There were other cameras the Council used including those in the Town and City Centres operated by the Business Improvement Districts and also the transport cameras. Cameras helped people to feel safe.

A Panel Member gave an example of a recent Customer Services enquiry. He referred to a raised junction off Broad Lane South, Wednesfield, which had been reported six weeks beforehand. He had heard nothing since and was being asked by the public about progress. Feedback on enquiries into Customer Services was important, such as the raised junction off Broad Lane South. He also cited as another example the need to keep the public informed on the clean up of incidents of fly tipping within the City.

A Member of the Panel commented that he was often asked about public protection issues and environmental crime. Residents were becoming more aware of the Report It App. He congratulated the team on the report.

The Director for Environment Services thanked the Panel Members for their contributions to the reports on digital over the last year. A report would be received by the Scrutiny Board on the work the Scrutiny Panels had completed on digital.

6 **Update on Climate Change Action Plan**

The Director for City Environment gave a short presentation updating Members on the Council's, Climate Change Action Plan. He commented that it was a topic which Members might wish to revisit in the next municipal year in more detail. The Council had declared a Climate emergency early last year. A commitment to an action plan had been agreed at the end of last year. A Climate Emergency Working Group had been formed, which cut across all Council Directorates and had good representation from each Service. The aim was to reach the target of making all Council activities net carbon zero by 2028. The Council had appointed a Climate Champion, Cllr Barbara McGarrity QN, who had been Chairing the Member Climate Working Group. The Council had changed all of its electricity to renewable energy, which had really helped with reducing the carbon footprint of the Council.

The Director for City Environment remarked that a Citizen Assembly had been held with residents from the City. The Assembly discussed what the Climate Change Action Plan needed to focus on and what the responsibilities the Council, Community

Groups and Citizens should be as a whole. A public consultation then took place on the action plan and this was then adopted by the Council in September 2020. A new Project Manager had been appointed in February 2021.

The Director for City Environment presented a slide showing the overall City Carbon Footprint of the City. The overall City Carbon Footprint for 2019 /2020 for the Council was 12,423 tonnes. They were working with partners to influence wider decarbonisation as industry and commercial, domestic and transport accounted for much of the carbon emissions with the City. Robust Governance and oversight measures were being put in place, including within Council reports to help achieve the net zero target by 2028 for the Council.

The Chair asked about boiler scrappage schemes and if Wolverhampton Homes were facilitating them and the use of Solar Panels on Council buildings and assets. The Director for City Environment responded that they were working with Wolverhampton Homes and were in discussions about their action plan. There were 22,000 homes to consider. It was clear that some houses were worthwhile investing in energy efficiency measures, whilst others needed to be rebuilt. The Council would also be working with private rented accommodation and privately owned, to make sure schemes were available. Solar panels were in place across some Council assets and they were looking to introduce more in the future. There was a major plan to build a solar farm to power the Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust, New Cross Hospital site. Any alternative fuel or energy the Council would consider as part of its plans moving forward.

The Portfolio Holder complimented the team on what they had achieved to date on climate change, citing some examples such as electric charge points, plans for a solar farm and the planting of trees. The Council had been awarded three national awards for their work.

The Chair asked if the Council were engaging with any transport providers on matters such as emissions from buses, which he doubted were all of Euro 6 standard. The Director for City Environment responded that they were in discussions with transport providers. They were in contact with Transport for West Midlands about installing an electric charging point for buses at the major bus station in the City. The Council were part of the Quality Bus Partnership which did restrict certain buses from entering the City, this would be strengthened in the coming years.

A Member of the Panel stated that climate change was now a core policy for local authorities and for nations. He added that having a Member Climate Champion had been a real benefit for the City and thanked them for their work. The next thirty years were going to be very important for climate change.

The Chair proposed that an update on the Climate Change Action plan should be an item for the Panel to consider in the municipal year at an appropriate time. As it was the last meeting of the municipal year, he thanked Members and Officers for their contributions to the Panel meetings throughout the last year.

Resolved: That an update on the Climate Change Action Plan should be considered by the Panel in the new municipal year at an appropriate point.

The meeting closed at 7:09pm.