

Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel

Minutes - 6 December 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 Val Evans
Cllr Bhupinder Gakhal
Cllr Christopher Haynes (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Beverley Momenabadi
Cllr Martin Waite (Chair)

In Attendance

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

Employees

Martin Stevens (Scrutiny Officer) (Minutes)
Ross Cook (Service Director – City Environment)
Lina Martino (Consultant in Public Health)
Steve Woodward (Head of Environmental Services)
John Roseblade (Head of Transport)
Helen McGourlay (Finance Business Partner)
Tim Philpot (The Professional Lead for Transport Strategy)
Ric Bravery (Strategic Health Lead – City Planning)
Richard Johnson (Direct Works/Arboriculture Manager)

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

- 1 **Apologies**
There were no apologies for absence.
- 2 **Declarations of interest**
Cllr Philip Bateman declared a non-pecuniary interest on the Active Travel item as he was a Board Member on the Canal and River Trust.
- 3 **Minutes of the previous meeting**
The minutes of the meeting held on 4 October 2018 were approved as a correct record.

4 Matters arising

The Chair referred to the new quarry being opened in Staffordshire. He had received a response from the Head of Transport that the quarry would mean an additional 20 vehicle trips per day over and above what was currently operating at the quarry. Seventy percent of those trips would be travelling through Wolverhampton. It was the view of the Head of Transport that it was unlikely to have a detrimental impact upon free flow of traffic, road condition and road safety in the Wolverhampton area.

The Chair stated that he had spoken with Cllr Jaqueline Sweetman, the Chair of the Stronger City Economy Scrutiny Panel, regarding the concept of a joint meeting with the Stronger City Economy Scrutiny Panel on the issue of public transport. He had received a positive response from Cllr Sweetman and would be raising the issue at Scrutiny Board in the following week.

The Chair reminded Members that the Service Lead for Residential had circulated to the Panel further information regarding the training Kingdom employees receive on dealing with vulnerable adults.

5 Draft Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2019-2020

The Chair stated that Finance had asked for specific feedback on the Scrutiny process of the budget and on the consultation process. He asked the Finance Business Partner to present the report.

The Finance Business Partner stated in March 2018 it had been projected that the Council would be faced with finding further estimated budget reductions totalling £19.5 million by 2019-2020. Following reports to Cabinet in July and October 2018 the budget deficit for 2019-2020 had been reduced to in the region of £6 million. There would be a further report in the New Year which would detail the latest position.

The Finance Business Partner stated that the appendices to the report detailed the budget reduction and income generation proposals that the Council were required to consult on. Within the remit of the Panel there were a number of budget reduction and income generation proposals out for consultation. These were, the proposed review provision of the toilet at the Mander Centre, the review of the residents parking scheme, the review of the maintenance and routine cleaning of illuminated road signs and the WV Active catering offer. All the other proposals that fell within the remit of the Panel were efficiencies which would be dealt with by the Budget Managers for each area.

The Finance Business Partner asked for comments on the overall Draft Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy, the proposals held within it, the consultation process and the overall budget scrutiny process.

Resolved: That the Draft Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2019-2020 be noted.

6 Management of Trees in the City

The Head of Environmental Services introduced a briefing note on the subject of the Management of Trees in the City. Section two of the note outlined the ways trees were managed in the City dependent on the land in which they stood and the risk

they presented. Trees close to the adopted highway were subject to a four yearly inspection and maintenance regime. All other trees were not maintained as part of a programme. There were 350,000 to 400,000 trees in parks, open spaces and cemeteries within the Wolverhampton area. The maintenance on these trees was reactive only. On education land, schools were responsible for their own tree maintenance regimes. Where schools had an SLA (Service Level Agreement) with Environmental Services, the service was reactive. Some schools had been encouraged to include an annual tree inspection into their SLA with environmental services.

The Head of Environment Services remarked that Corporate Landlord had an arrangement with Environmental Services for conducting reactive works. Canals, towpaths and railway lines were the responsibility of the Canal and River Trust and Network Rail. They followed a risk-based maintenance regime. On private land, all maintenance and safety issues were the responsibility of the owner.

The Head of Environmental Services commented that Trees that fell onto Highway land and Council Land, including privately owned trees, would be cleared. There were different categories of response depending on the situation, these were emergency, priority and routine. When members of the public had concerns about tree roots owned by the Council affecting their land, buildings and services, they were referred to the Council's Risk Management and Insurance Team. They were advised to contact their home insurance company and arrange a survey. The survey would determine if there were grounds to make a claim against the Council.

The Head of Environment Services said that the Council did not respond to every request to prune trees on the adopted highway, the team would be despatched if it was thought the tree was dangerous. If Council owned trees were touching buildings, then the Council would prune them. Otherwise they encouraged people within reason to prune the trees to the boundary of their property. The Council did not normally respond due to loss of light caused by trees, for satellite and TV signal, or for tree debris. The Council operated a risk-based approach with only high risk trees maintained and inspected.

The Head of Environment Services stated that the briefing note outlined the concept of producing a cross directorate, Trees and Woods Strategy. The Strategic Health Lead (City Planning) commented that the Woodland Trust had attended a recent meeting of the Council's Sustainability and Advisory Group. As a consequence, Councillors had requested that Officers investigate what the Council could do to help support their agenda. This had culminated in the decision to produce a Trees and Woodland Strategy. The proposals would be taken to the Sustainability and Advisory Group at their meeting at the end of January.

The Head of Environment Services referred to section four of the report, financial implications. Due to recent changes in Legislation and Civil Law, Environmental Services had been advised by Insurance and Risk Management that the tree inspection and maintenance regime needed to be increased from the current four-year programme to a two-year programme. Changing to a two year programme would come at a cost. Insurance & Risk Management had also advised that recent Court of Appeal Cases had removed any defence the Council could put forward, if the Council could not demonstrate a risk-based approach to the management of trees. They had recommended resources were directed at identifying trees where

there was a high risk in terms of potential exposure and that an inspection regime be implemented following the guidance in the cases. The current budget for the Highways Maintenance Tree Programme was £294,813.00. For parks, cemeteries and open spaces the budget was £40,201.00. As a result of the recent case law, more work was required on the implications. He commented that there was a tree replacement programme, which amounted to £10,000. There were several locations they were considering for the forthcoming year.

A Member of the Panel commented that he was aware of a person who had replaced the footpath, three times outside their property because of tree roots. He was also aware of someone registered blind, where the lack of light caused by trees was making it harder for them to see. He knew of an elderly person having to pick up a large amount of leaves in their small garden. He believed vulnerable persons and people with disabilities needed to receive special consideration and reasonable adjustments made in line with the Equalities Act. He gave the example of leaves on the footpath outside vulnerable people's households. The Cabinet Member for City Environment asked for the particular details of the footpaths to be shared by email and he would check if it was listed on the Autumn Leaf collection programme and its priority rating.

The Direct Works/Arboriculture Manager remarked that Sheffield Council had removed many of the trees in the City and had been fiercely criticised for the policy. City of Wolverhampton Council generally only removed trees if they were dangerous, dead or had become unmanageable.

Cllr Phil Bateman referred to the information in the briefing note, which stated that the average repudiation rate on insurance claims over the last three years was 85%. He asked Officers to write to him with the details of the cost for the remaining 15%. He also asked for Officers to provide him and the Panel with the amount of Tree Preservation Orders within the City of Wolverhampton Local Authority Area. The Strategic Health Lead responded that the Council did not put Tree Preservation Orders on trees the Council maintained but there were some on trees which the Council managed, for reasons such as the council acquiring land on which there was already a Tree Preservation Order in place.

The Cabinet Member for City Environment remarked that the Government had made some funding available for tree planting. Councils were able to bid for funding, but it had to be match funded. He praised the Council employees for their swift action during Storm Doris to remove the trees that were posing a hazard and the ongoing work completed by the team. Compared to other Local Authorities in the West Midlands he thought Wolverhampton ranked favourably in how they dealt with trees. He referred to the vast amount of information available on the Council's website regarding trees.

7 **Active Travel**

The Professional Lead for Transport Strategy presented a briefing note on Active Travel. The note set out the importance of Active Travel for Wolverhampton and identified the actions required to make it flourish. It described the context, which was a City with low levels of physical activity, congestion and air quality problems. All of these were detriments which active travel could help to overcome. The note outlined

the Council's current approach to strategic transport planning. The Council wanted all modes of transport to move better throughout the City including walking and cycling. A consultation was currently live on the A454 Eastern Gateway. They had worked hard with the designers to have a continuous cycle route through the whole scheme.

The Professional Lead for Transport Strategy commented on the situation in local neighbourhoods which included problems with parking and speeding, which deterred people from Active Travel. The note outlined some of the approaches that could be taken to resolve these issues, which included partnership working with the Police.

The Professional Lead for Transport Strategy highlighted the area of the note which detailed the positive action the Council were taking to promote active travel. He acknowledged that there was more work to be completed on how the Council monitored the progress on active travel.

The Public Health Consultant stated that there were three key issues with Active Travel, sustainability, public health and the general impact on air quality and the flow of traffic and functioning of the transport network in the City. It was important to understand the wider context of these issues and what improvement would look like. As an example she cited that one third of the population of Wolverhampton were classed as inactive, which meant less than 20 minutes of physical activity per week. They had concluded that an "Active Travel Needs Assessment" was required, which would be ready in time for the next meeting of the Panel in February 2019.

A Member of the Panel stated that he was very supportive of Active Travel. He asked if Active Travel could be linked to more routes such as the canal towpaths. In response the Professional Lead for Transport and Strategy commented that the Council had been working closely with the Canal and River Trust over the last four years as part of a programme titled, "Managing Short Trips." They had secured funding for expensive works on the towpaths. People could now access the towpath at Bentley Bridge and come into the City Centre on a properly surfaced path. People could also travel on a fully surfaced canal towpath from Wolverhampton City Centre to Birmingham. The towpaths were not lit and so they were only really for use during daylight hours.

Resolved: That an "Active Travel Needs Assessment" report be received by the Panel at the next meeting scheduled for 28 February 2019.

8 **Christmas Waste Collections**

The Service Director for City Economy gave a short presentation on the forthcoming Christmas waste collection service. For residents whose general waste would normally be collected on the Tuesday, which fell on Christmas Day and Wednesday, which fell on Boxing Day, their waste would be collected instead on the 27th and 28th of December. Dry recycling had always been fortnightly and there was no change compared to previous years. The Cabinet Member was keen to promote the free Christmas tree (real) collection service.

- 9 **Work Plan**
The Panel agreed to receive the, “Active Travel Needs Assessment” at the meeting scheduled for 28 February 2019. The Portfolio Holder Question and Answer Session would be moved to the meeting scheduled to take place on 11 April 2019.

Meeting closed at 7:35pm.