

Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel

Minutes - 3 March 2022

Attendance

Members of the Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Mary Bateman
Cllr Greg Brackenridge
Cllr Chris Burden
Cllr Alan Butt
Cllr Christopher Haynes
Cllr Keith Inston (Via MS Teams)
Cllr Barbara McGarrity QN (Chair)
Cllr Andrew McNeil
Cllr Ellis Turrell (Substitute for Cllr Paul Appleby)

In Attendance

Cllr Steve Evans (Cabinet Member for City Environment and Climate Change)

Witnesses

Alex Greatholder (Principal Policy and Strategy Officer – Transport for West Midlands)
Jake Thrush (Associate Policy Advisor – Transport for West Midlands)

Employees

Martin Stevens DL (Senior Governance Manager)
John Roseblade (Temporary Director – City Environment and Housing) (Via MS Teams)
Steve Woodward (Head of Environmental Services)
Marianne Page (Service Lead – Transport Strategy)
Ric Bravery (Strategic Health Lead – City Planning) (Via MS Teams)
Elizabeth Grimshaw (Project Manager) (Via MS Teams)
Julia Cleary (Scrutiny and Systems Manager) (Via MS Teams)
Earl Piggott-Smith (Via MS Teams)

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

- 1 **Apologies and Notification of Substitutions**
An apology for absence was from Cllr Paul Appleby. Cllr Ellis Turrell was substituting for Cllr Paul Appleby.

The Chief Operating Officer sent his apologies.

Cllr Greg Brackenridge stated that he needed to leave early due to a Mayoral engagement.

The Chair advised that Cllr Alan Butt would be a little late for the meeting.

2 **Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

3 **Minutes of the previous meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 October 2021 were approved as a correct record.

The Chair asked for the form used for Citizens Assemblies to be clearer on whether the Council can contact the individual again for future correspondence. She also asked if there was a further update on the quarterly newsletter referred to in the minutes. The Senior Governance Manager promised to look into the matter and inform the Panel accordingly.

The Chair suggested an apprentice could be appointed to assist the Council with their ongoing work on climate change. The Senior Governance Manager promised to pass on the suggestion to the relevant Officer.

The Chair asked if there was any further news on funding from the WMCA for climate change work. The Senior Governance Manager responded he had contacted the Project Officer recently who informed him they were still awaiting news. The Senior Governance Manager had requested that he contact him when news was received so he could inform the Panel.

4 **West Midlands Local Transport Plan Core Strategy Engagement**

From Transport for the West Midlands, part of the West Midlands Combined Authority, Alex Greatholder, Principal Policy and Strategy Officer and Jake Thrush, Associate Policy Advisor gave a presentation on West Midlands Transport Plan Core Strategy Engagement.

The Principal Policy and Strategy Officer stated that the Local Transport Plan (LTP) was the responsibility of the West Midlands Combined Authority. It covered the seven constituent authorities. The Combined Authority and the 7 Constituent Authorities had duties to implement the plan. The LTP was required by law and carried statutory weight in public policy decision making including local planning functions. It was a key document for making the case for funding.

The Principal Policy and Strategy Officer spoke about the new policy agendas, which included recharging the West Midlands after the pandemic, the WM2041 climate emergency, the Inclusive Growth Framework and the Local Industrial Strategy. They were also mindful of new areas such as the post pandemic transport market and the cost-of-living crisis. In July of last year, they had published a Green Paper, this set out some of the key issues that they wanted to resolve. They had engaged with the public on the Green Paper to obtain their views. Over 600 individual citizens had

responded. 92% of respondents were concerned by climate change and 83% agreed that a key policy aim should be to tackle inequalities in transport access. Two thirds of people felt that levels of traffic on local roads were a problem. The majority thought increasing active travel was important, but that dangerous and busy roads were holding people back.

The Principal Policy and Strategy Officer stated that people felt that we couldn't build our way out of all the problems and there was a need to focus on using existing infrastructure better. The shift to electric vehicles was supported but there was a concern that electric vehicles wouldn't solve the wider transport issues. There was a clear message that whilst the car was going to be important in the future, the majority of people agreed that car use needed to reduce. This was clearly a challenge as so much of society had been built around car use. 68% of polled respondents to the green paper consultation said "sticks" were needed to achieve significant change in travel behaviour. How you went about discouraging certain travel behaviours was where there was disagreement on.

The Principal Policy and Strategy Officer remarked that at the Leaders Summit, one of the key points to come out of the summit was that being risk averse would be an inherently risky strategy. They also raised the case for demand management, acknowledging that it was essential for behavioural change and it was essential to ensure the viability of public transport.

The Principal Policy and Strategy Officer stated that the Core Strategy had a vision called "Well connected 45-minute region" or "15-minute neighbourhoods," based on walk and wheel modes. The vision was set on the premise of people being able to thrive without having to own their own motor vehicle. Travel beyond the local neighbourhood could be by using ride modes, such as tram and buses. He described five key motives for change which were within the core strategy. These were:-

- Sustaining economic success
- Creating a fairer society
- Supporting local communities and places
- Becoming more active
- Tackling the climate emergency

There were three key transport system changes which he cited, as part of the core strategy these were to improve accessibility, reduce traffic and electrify transport. He cited a method of avoid, shift and improve.

Avoid – Avoiding travel – for example by accessing services online and consolidating the trips we make.

Shift – Shifting travel – to places that are more accessible by sustainable modes of transport, such as cycling, walking or public transport and travelling by these modes.

Improve – Improve travel – by designing out emissions and other impacts from the vehicles we use and tailoring their use – for example by adopting ULEVs.

The Principal Policy and Strategy Officer described five important principles for delivering the core strategy. These are summarised in bullet form below: -

- Working with LAs and Communities so that local measures implemented are appropriate to the area.
- Ensuring a balance between rapid progress and long-term transformation.
- Recognising that significant behaviour change requires carrot and sticks (at local and national level)
- Ensuring delivery is based on what there is public support for.
- Ensuring a just transition where the burden of change is distributed and target support to adapt.

The LTP Core strategy consultation had started on 7th February 2022 and it was scheduled to end on 4 April 2022. Materials were available on line and physical copies of information had been made available in libraries across the West Midlands. They were trying to have inclusive engagement and reach different audiences. They had an attitude of being unbiased and empowering with a deliberative approach. In terms of developing the LTP, there was the core strategy, 4 area strategies which would be consulted on in the Summer, an implementation plan and a monitoring and evaluation plan. The Principal Policy and Strategy Officer presented a slide on City Region Sustainable Transport Settlements (CRSTS).

The Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change gave his views on the West Midlands Local Transport Plan Core Strategy. He was disappointed with the CRSTS settlement, he understood the WMCA were competing with other regions. Whilst the funding was welcome, it was not near the amount that was required. There were however many things that the Council could do to achieve the 45 minute well connected region and 15-minute neighbourhoods. The Metro had been under invested in. Wolverhampton had chosen not to have electric scooters for hire in contrast to other areas in the West Midlands. There were no plans for a congestion charge in Wolverhampton. LED Streetlights, Bluetooth and AI he spoke in high regard. The Traffic Control Centre at the Civic Centre he praised. The Bluetooth and AI were able to monitor air quality and helped to manage the traffic flows in Wolverhampton. He recommended Scrutiny Panel Members visit the Traffic Control Centre. He also spoke in support of control speed zones, which helped improve air quality.

The Cabinet Member praised the enhancements to the bus, rail and metro system within Wolverhampton, which he described as first class. He stressed the importance of people who wanted to cycle to be able to feel safe. Steps were being taken to help this moving forward. Wolverhampton had been chosen to be a pilot for net zero neighbourhoods. Charging hubs for electric vehicles would be important for the City.

A Panel Member asked how the WMCA intended to increase the amount of people participating in consultation about the strategy, as the numbers as a percentage of the population were statistically small. The Principal Policy and Strategy Officer responded that they had done some work with younger people

and would continue to do this in the future. As the year progressed they would be giving more thought as to how they engaged with people further.

A Panel Member praised the £1 billion Sustainable Transport Funding that had been awarded to the region, which he thought was the largest settlement out of all the transport authorities in the country. He spoke in support of the extensions to the Metro and the freezing of bus fares. He was particularly interested in the future use of the car as a form of transport. He thought the use of the car would continue as a major form of transport for quite some time into the future. He welcomed the commitment from the Cabinet Member not to introduce a clean air zone in Wolverhampton.

The Principal Policy and Strategy Officer acknowledged how important the use of the car was to people in the West Midlands. The question was how they could be used less, which many people wanted. On clean air zones, it was something which the Combined Authority would work with Local Authorities directly on. It was for Local Authorities to shape, but it was important to note the changes to the Environment Act and the limits on air pollution in the future.

A Panel Member stated that in the UK, the most transport funding went on road building and road maintenance. When this was the case, it became the most used transport method. He cited the case of Amsterdam, where there had been a huge investment in cycling infrastructure, which had meant many more people using this transport method. He spoke in support of Junction Prioritisation. He asked why Wolverhampton was not on the Sprint Network as he had hoped there would be one going from the City Centre to the i54. He was concerned about Wolverhampton's future place in the Sprint Network. He asked how the WMCA were considering multiple indices of deprivation particularly when considering permanent transport infrastructure. He thought this was a key point to the future of transport in the West Midlands. He asked how the funding awarded for Sustainable Transport would be spent in Wolverhampton. He was conscious that it was less than the £1.7 billion which had been requested. He also wanted further information on how cycle lanes would be introduced.

The Principal Policy and Strategy Officer acknowledged the "build it and they will come" philosophy. "Decide and Provide" was a principle that was emerging and particularly in the CRSTS Programme. They were mindful of deprivation and this was a key factor they were looking at as well as wider issues such as disability, gender, age and aspirations of people. The Associate Policy Advisor remarked that there would be other funding which they could apply for to add to the funding awarded for the CRSTS Programme. There was new guidance (LTN-120) in the West Midlands on cycle lanes.

The Service Lead for Transport Strategy responded to the questions about Sprint. Whilst there was the absence of the Sprint name on the A449, there wasn't an absence for an aspiration of bus rapid transit or rapid public transport connectivity on the corridor. This remained in the area action plan and was a core part of the ambition for the corridor. They were progressing the walk, cycle, bus corridor on the A449. They would be following the new cycle lane guidance as best as they could. Funding from CRSTS was allocated after discussions about the priorities for the region as a whole and local priorities. The projects which had been submitted to the Department for Transport were all extremely valuable and

priorities for the area. Wolverhampton had more than its fair share in the projects. They were also keen to engage in other projects which may be awarded funding in the future. She commented that the Local Area Strategy element of the West Midlands Transport Plan could come back to Scrutiny later in the year when it was more developed.

The Temporary Director of City Environment and Housing spoke about the Levelling-Up agenda and how that could benefit the City. Investing in areas that needed it the most, active travel and cycle routes were an important part of the future. These would also have Public Health benefits.

A Panel Member spoke about the spontaneity of the motor car and the difficulty of replacing this in any new transport plan. He also spoke about the importance of connectivity between areas such as Shropshire and Wolverhampton. The Principal Policy and Strategy Officer responded that they talked directly with the Shire authorities and also worked with Midlands Connect, who were developing a strategy looking at longer distance connections. They didn't underestimate the spontaneity of the motor car. Leisure, shopping and visiting friends accounted for more travel than the work commute. Frequent services were key to try and match the spontaneity of the motor car. E-scooters for some young people could also be beneficial for local travel, as they could often not afford a car.

A Panel Member commented that some parts of the City could take 45 minutes to travel to from other parts of the City and some places felt cut off from services. Making the City fairer was essential. He highlighted the importance of reducing climate change and the need for more active travel.

A Member of the Panel spoke about the importance of language in consultation, in order to encourage people to engage. He would encourage people to respond to the consultation which he thought was important.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the proposed approach and progress on development of the West Midlands Local Transport Plan (LTP) and the publication of the West Midlands Transport LTP Core Strategy for consultation be noted.
- b) The approach for developing LTP Big Moves and Area Strategies through to Summer 2022 be noted.

5 Arbor Services Future Plans Update

The Head of Environmental Services introduced the report on Arbor Services Future Plans Update. He gave a presentation which covered the main points in the report, which had been circulated with the agenda. This covered the expanded programme, the CEU (Councillor Enquiry Unit) development, tree planting co-ordination and a summary of the key work in the City.

The Head of Environmental Services stated that the number of existing highways tree inspections had doubled and a new two-yearly Condition Survey would be introduced to routinely inspect trees in the Council owned parks, green open spaces,

cemeteries and land under the responsibility of the Corporate Landlord. Additional resources had been identified and a review of work schedules and efficiencies were being delivered through the IT Solution 'CONFIRM' software. The highway tree maintenance programme had been updated. The Customer Services tree maintenance business rule had been revised to reflect the new inspections. Emergency jobs went straight to the field to ensure a quick response. CONFIRM had been configured for the Arboriculture operation and was also being used to schedule inspections and maintenance.

The Head of Environmental Services remarked that the service was also coordinating with Wolverhampton Homes and the Schools partners to ensure they were working to a two-year inspection programme. There had been a significant investment in the Arbor Service to increase the inspection regime and to better use technology to support the maintenance programme. This would improve the information available to residents about trees and how and when they were maintained. The service would experience an underspend this year, as there had been a delay in the recruitment to the Project Manager post and bringing in the agency tree inspectors, whilst the CONFIRM software had been developed. The Project Manager he was pleased to say was now in post.

The Head of Environmental Services stated that the team had experienced an unprecedented number of enquiries since it had gone live. Prior to the CEU the Service would have on average 20 Councillor enquiries a year. In the first 7 months of the CEU, 176 tree maintenance enquiries had been received. It was 203 at the date of the meeting. They had been working with the CEU to address the challenges posed.

The Head of Environmental Services commented that it was unfortunate that there had been an increase in verbal abuse and threats to the Council's Arbor Service Officers due to unrealistic expectations of what tree maintenance can do for the issues that some residents faced. They had improved the FAQ's section on the CEU so Councillors could pass on this detailed information to residents when they approached them about tree enquiries.

The Strategic Health Lead – Planning spoke on the matter of tree planting Co-ordination. In 2021/22, 29,000 plus trees would have been planted by the City of Wolverhampton. All of this planting had been carefully discussed and planned through the Tree Planting Co-ordination Group. The Group was aware of the issue of maintenance. This was taken into account when planting trees and when looking at funding streams to provide maintenance for them in the future. The majority of tree planting was in areas where the trees would not need routine maintenance. The service was receiving an extra £10,000 per annum from Parks Services to inspect new trees that had been planted. It was not expected to plant trees at the same level in the future.

The Head of Environmental Services concluded the presentation by saying that the current tree inspection and maintenance programme was working and there were clear plans to ensure that now the Council's responsibility had increased due to the more frequent inspection programme, that they delivered on their legislative responsibility. They needed to ensure that the right amount of resource was in place to deliver best value for the residents of Wolverhampton. It would not solve all the residents' complaints around trees and would not make everyone happy about all the

decisions made, but it would make the service more transparent and accessible with more information on trees in the City available than ever before.

The Cabinet for City Environment and Climate Change commented about the trees on the highways and footways. Unless the tree was dead, diseased or dangerous, it was the Council's policy not to take action unless absolutely necessary. Making information more accessible would help the public with their understanding in how trees were managed. He was proud of the work that had taken place with partners. It was important to rely on the expert knowledge of the Arboriculturists.

Panel Members condemned any abuse that was being received by the Arboriculturists. Panel Members praised the work of the team.

A Panel Member asked about the underspend, where the extra resources were coming from and how Councillors should log emergency requests. He also raised a point about ownership of land and if the Council did own the land which department was responsible. It had been difficult for him to obtain this information during a recent case, which had caused him some surprise.

The Head of Environmental Services responded that some of the resources would come through recruitment to permanent staff positions and some would be agency staff. Recruitment of permanent staff would take place over the next twelve months. The underspend would go back into the general fund. The CEU could log Councillor enquiries, but if it was an emergency, Customer Services were the best to contact.

A Panel Member complimented the Officers involved in the tree planting project. The Head of Environmental Services echoed the point.

The Temporary Director for City Environment and Housing thanked Members for their compliments. The recent storms had highlighted some of the challenges the Arbor Service team faced. This often meant working through the night. He was aware that sometimes decisions on trees were not popular and that was why it was important that Councillors had all the information available to them on how the Council managed trees.

A Panel Member asked about Acorn Tree Services and whether the Council would need to sub-contract any more work in the future. The Head of Environmental Services responded that the Council had their own in-house team and also used Acorn Tree Services as a sub-contractor. They used them during storm damage, which was imperative. They also did Arbor work associated with tree maintenance to supplement the in-house team. They wanted to keep the services of Acorn.

The Cabinet Member for City Environment and Climate Change thanked the Scrutiny Panel Members for their comments and gave praise to the Head of Environmental Services for his work and that of his team. The Chair thanked the Arbor Services team on behalf of the Panel. She also gave praise to the Scrutiny team for their support for the meeting logistics.

The meeting closed at 8:17pm.