

Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes - 18 November 2021 at 6.00pm held at Walsall Council House, Lichfield Street, Walsall, WS1 1TW.

Committee Members

Present:

Councillor L. Harrison (Chair)
Councillor B. Allen
Councillor P. Bott
Councillor L. Jeavons
Councillor E. Lee
Councillor P. Kaur
Councillor J. Whitehouse
Councillor R. Worrall

Portfolio Holders

(attending remotely)

Councillor A. Andrew Deputy Leader and Regeneration
Councillor C. Towe Education and Skills

Officers

(Present)

Paul Gordon Director Resilient Communities
Helen Owen Democratic Services Officer

(Remote)

Matt Crowton Transportation Manager, Major
projects and Schemes
Jane-Kaur Gill Employment and Skills Manager
Fraz Hussain Lead Accountant

19/21 Apologies

Councillors Singh Sohal, S. Coughlan, and Follows.

20/21 Substitution

No substitutes attended.

21/21 Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

There were no declarations of interest or party whips.

22/21 Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)

There were no items to consider in private session.

23/21 Minutes of the previous meeting

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 18 November 2021, a copy having been sent to each member of the committee, be approved and signed as a true and accurate record subject to the inclusion of Councillor P. Bott on the list of members present.

24/21 Draft Revenue Budget and Draft Capital Programme 2022-23 to 2025-26

The Lead Accountant, Mr F. Hussain presented the report which provided an extract of the Proud draft revenue savings proposals and Investments/Cost Pressures for 2022-23 to 2025-26 which fall within the remit of this committee for consideration. The report also provided a summary of the draft capital programme for schemes within the remit of this committee.

(see annexed)

In presenting the report, Mr Hussain confirmed that any feedback from this committee would be reported to the Cabinet on 12 December 2021 to inform the final budget recommended to Council on 24 February 2021

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

25/21 Corporate Financial Performance – Quarter 2

The Lead accountant, Mr F. Hussain presented the report which was submitted at the request of the Chair and which provided the budget monitoring position for the period 5 2021-22.

(see annexed)

Resolved

That the report be noted.

26/21 Employment and Skills Support

The Employment and Skills Manager, Ms J. Kaur-Gill presented a report which explained the current programmes of support and how the programmes delivered contributed to the Corporate Plan priorities and the positive outcomes secured for our customers from each of the employability programmes.

(see annexed)

Ms Kaur-Gill responded to a number of questions and points of clarification from committee members during which time she explained that the programme was promoted actively by the Walsall Works team on social media such as Facebook and Twitter by paid and unpaid marketing campaigns. She said that it was clear that the paid campaigns which were used to drive interest to key vacancies were more successful. She also reported there was limited interest for the current apprenticeship vacancies, which was a national challenge particularly as the Kickstart scheme may have displaced the apprenticeship scheme given that it was fully funded paid work placements. To mitigate this, Ms Kaur-Gill said that the team were looking to actively promote apprenticeship incentives to employers as a 'bolt-on' to the Kickstart scheme. In addition she assured members that Walsall College were trying hard to sustain apprenticeships in host employers and were actively marketing the incentive funding available. The Cabinet portfolio holder for Education and Skills, Councillor Towe, also advised that the number of apprenticeship places available with local training providers were also less than usual and that this had been compounded by the difficulty training providers were finding not being allowed into schools to promote what was available to year 11 and year 13 leavers.

In answer to a further question on the new Community Renewal Fund project Works+, Ms Kaur-Gill confirmed that the Walsall Works team were working in partnership with Walsall Housing Group (whg) to identify social housing tenants and unemployed residents in the seven most deprived wards of the borough who would be in scope for support. She said that whg would promote the opportunities to their tenants via an extensive marketing campaign through their communication channels including their newsletters.

At this point both the Deputy Leader for Regeneration, Councillor Andrew, and Councillor Towe extended their thanks to Ms Kaur-Gill and her team for the excellent work and she and her team undertake to support employers and tackle youth unemployment. Councillor Harrison concurred and extended her thanks on behalf of the committee. She asked for an update to be submitted to the committee in the new year.

Resolved

- (1) That the current Employment and Skills Support services and the level of dependency on grant funded programmes be noted.
- (2) That the commencement of planning for future resource to sustain services beyond grant end dates be supported.
- (3) That the committee receives a progress report in the new year.

27/21 M6 Junction 10 Transport Scheme

The Transportation Manager for Major Projects, Mr M. Crowton presented a report which provided a n update on project progress and information about the remaining construction timeline.

(see annexed)

In presenting the report, Mr Crowton said that he would circulate photographs of the bridge works to the committee members to show the scale of the works.

Mr Crowton and the Cabinet portfolio holder, Councillor Andrew then responded to questions and points of clarification from committee members during which time members were advised as follows:

Traffic flow on the motorway, across the junction and on local roads: The J10 scheme would help traffic to move more easily on and off the motorway and across the junction from Walsall to Wolverhampton, improving the capacity and easing the congestion on the local road network. The junction would be managed by significantly enhanced intelligent traffic signals which would help to control the traffic on the junction. However, this stretch of motorway was the busiest in the country and so it would not relieve the traffic flow on the motorway itself which was the responsibility of National Highways (formerly Highways England), which much of this traffic simply passing through the West Midlands.

Cycling and walking benefits of the scheme: Improving facilities for cyclists and pedestrians is one of the key objectives of the scheme and therefore a series of crossing facilities for cyclists and pedestrians were planned to enable safe negotiation through the junction using signalised crossings. Currently, an improved alternative cycling route, funded from separate external monies, was in place which would remain after the main junction opened.

Public transport benefits of the scheme: The junction was used by a high frequency bus service between Walsall, Willenhall and Wolverhampton centres and the new junction would assist with the overall reliability of the service in the future.

Air Pollution: Some analysis had been undertaken on the air quality impact of the scheme as part of the development of the business case however, whilst the scheme would reduce congestion on the local road network, there was likely to be more background traffic from new developments on sites in the vicinity and more traffic encouraged to use the new junction by those who had avoided it previously. Therefore, on balance, the overall effect was neutral. Notwithstanding this, the local transport plan was being refreshed in conjunction with neighbouring authorities and one of the key planks of this was recognising the contribution that transport needed to make and how to achieve climate targets.

Further closures: Although there were challenges with such a large scheme, it was on schedule to be completed before the Commonwealth Games next Summer. In the meantime, there were two further planned closures in May 2022 when the existing life expired bridges would be demolished. With regard to reports of HGV lorries skipping diversions to find quicker ways through smaller lanes, whilst there had been engagement with all of the large businesses and logistics companies in the borough, further work could be done with those organisations to explain the timetable for operational changes and closures and actively address the concerns in this respect at the relevant time.

Resurfacing and landscaping: the scheme included an intention to create an aesthetically pleasing junction as a main gateway to the borough. The planning approval process for this had been completed for a full landscaping design to be implemented in the coming months although it would take some time to establish itself

Members suggested that reports of this nature should include climate impact given the focus and commitment to this by the Council and nationally.

The Chair thanked Mr Crowton for his presentation and asked for a further update to be presented before Spring 2022.

Resolved

- (1) That the report be noted
- (2) That a final progress update be received before the main construction phase concludes in Spring 2022
- (3) That consideration be given to the inclusion of a heading “climate Impact” in the template for future reports to this committee.

28/21 Areas of focus – 2021/22

The Work Programme was submitted

(see annexed)

The Chair gave an overview of the work programme for 2021/22 and asked Members for their suggestions regarding items to be scheduled for the next meeting.

It was agreed to include the following matters:

- Update on the Employability and Skills support in the new year.
- Walsall Council Tree planting strategy.
- Carbon Neutral Council
- Update on J10 scheme prior to completion of construction phase – Spring 2022

In discussion it was noted that an update on the Sprint project would be submitted to the Scrutiny Overview committee.

Resolved:

That the Areas of Focus as amended, be noted

29/21 Forward Plans

The latest Forward Plans for the Cabinet, the Black Country Joint Executive Committee and the West Midlands Combined Authority Board were submitted for information.

A member referred the Green Spaces Strategy included on the Cabinet Forward Plan and asked for a report on the usage of Green Gyms across the Borough. It was agreed to forward this to Councillor Butler as Cabinet portfolio holder to consider.

Resolved

- (1) That the forward Plans be noted.
- (2) That the Cabinet portfolio holder, Councillor Butler, be asked to report on the usage of the Green Gyms across the Borough.

30/21 **Date of next meeting**

It was noted that the next meeting would take place on 18 January 2022.

There being no further business, the meeting terminated at 7.02pm.

Signed:

Date: