

ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

19 November 2020 at 6.00pm held virtually via Microsoft Teams

Committee Members

Present:

Councillor L. Harrison (Chair)
Councillor A. Hicken (Vice-Chair)
Councillor P. Bott
Councillor S. Johal
Councillor P. Kaur
Councillor G. Singh Sohal
Councillor I. Shires
Councillor M. Ward

Portfolio Holders

Present:

Councillor A. Andrew	Deputy Leader and Regeneration
Councillor G. Perry	Deputy Leader and Community, Leisure and Culture
Councillor O. Butler	Clean and Green

Officers Present:

Simon Neilson	Executive Director of Economy and Environment
Dave Brown	Interim Director Place and Environment
Kathryn Moreton	Head of Highways & Transport
Fraz Hussain	Lead Accountant
Liz Stuffins	PHP – Service Development Manager
Jaki Brunton-Douglas	PHP – Marketing and Funding Manager
Alan Bowley	Interim Head of Clean and Green
Eleanor Cooper	Senior Transport Planner
Matt Crowton	Transportation Major Projects & Strategy Manager
Matt Powis	Democratic Services Officer

Other Attendees

Present:

Cheryl Bullock	Lead Petitioner – Minute No.15/20
Councillor Samra	Ward Member for Streetly

10/20 Apologies

There were no apologies.

11/20 Substitution

There were no substitutions.

12/20 Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

There were no declarations of interest or party whips.

13/20 Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)

There were no items to consider in private session.

14/20 Minutes of the previous meeting

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 6 October 2020, as amended, copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

15/20 Petition: Road Safety at Doe Bank Lane

The Committee considered a petition in regard to road safety at Doe Bank Lane which received more than 500 signatures. The Chair outlined the format for the item and invited the petition organiser to introduce their petition.

The Committee received a presentation from Cheryl Bullock (Lead Petitioner) and Councillor Andrew which introduced the petition for the Council to consider improved road safety measures following community concern over excessive speeding and a recent road traffic collision. Members considered the comments and concerns from the Lead Petitioner. There were community concerns that without preventative action, Doe Bank Lane would experience further incidences of dangerous driving and excessive speeding.

The Head of Highways and Transport confirmed that the Doe Bank Lane was classed as a local distributor road, connecting Bridle Lane to Queslett Road in the Pheasey Ward. It was noted that 68 properties were located at the south eastern end of the road, located between the junction with Queslett Road and Doe Bank Wood and a 20mph speed limit extends for the length of this residential section. It was noted that a 30 mph speed limit from Doe Bank Woods to the junction with Bridle Lane.

The Committee noted speed data from 2019 which indicated an average speed of 26mph inside the 20mph speed limit. However, the Council had agreed to install additional repeater signage throughout the length of Doe Bank Lane and Bridle Lane to reinforce surrounding speed limits.

The wider area including Doe Bank Lane and Bridle Lane had also been included as part of the Community Health and Safety Programme (CHSP). All proposed community schemes would be assessed as part of the Road Safety Review due to be undertaken in early 2021.

A lengthy discussion commenced on the petition and approaches to alleviate community concerns about dangerous driving and excess speeding.

A Member sought clarification on whether a community speed watch could be established for Doe Bank Lane. In response, the Portfolio Holder highlighted that a community speed watch was proposed on a similar road in the area however, volunteer turnout was limited.

The Committee welcomed the Council's commitment to install additional repeater signage and consider further measures as part of a Borough road safety review. As part of a wider scrutiny review, a Member requested that a report on the annual review of road safety was considered prior to Cabinet consideration.

The Committee thanked petitioners and the wider community for highlighting their concerns.

Resolved:

- 1. That, the Cabinet note the installation of additional repeater signage throughout the length of Doe Bank Lane and Bridle Lane to reinforce both the 20mph speed limit and the adjoining 30mph speed limit as part of the 2020/21 minor highway works programme.**
- 2. That, further engineering works on Doe Bank Lane be considered as part of the annual borough wide road safety review.**
- 3. In connection with (2) above, the Committee consider an item on annual road safety review at a future meeting of the Committee.**

16/20 Draft Revenue Budget 2021/22 – 2023/24

The Committee considered the draft revenue budget for 2021/22 and 2023/24.

The Chair invited each portfolio holder to present their proposals to the Committee. The following summary of the discussion in regard to the proposals were discussed by the Committee and broken down by portfolio.

Response to the draft budget options

Deputy Leader of the Council and Regeneration

P6: Re-profile the highway maintenance mainstream budget for 2021/22

A Member sought clarification regarding the re-profile of the highway maintenance budget for 2021/22. In response, the Executive Director confirmed that the re-profile would allow the Council to manage cash flow and revenue expenditure. This was confirmed as a temporary 1 year only saving due to the extraordinary circumstances of the pandemic.

P8: Increased capitalisation of highway works

A Member sought clarification regarding the increased capitalisation of highway works. In response, the Interim Director of Place confirmed that this increase capitalisation was created as a result classification changes for highway works from revenue to capital expenditure. Due to the saving, there needed to be a long-term focus and monitoring on the condition of highways especially if the condition of highways deteriorated.

Deputy Leader of the Council and Resilient Communities

Ref: 20 - Unauthorised Encampment Works

A Member welcomed the increased expenditure with Unauthorised Encampments. However, there were concerns about the one-off investment as there was still a high number of vulnerable sites across the Borough. The Executive Director confirmed that whilst it was confirmed as a 100k cost pressure in 2021/22, the base budget would be adjusted in future years too.

P14: Bereavement Services – The sale of keepsake memorials and a range of personal memorabilia

A Member sought clarification proposal 14. The Executive Director confirmed that the sale of memorials and memorabilia would enable the Council to offer the service for individuals and families suffering bereavements.

OP102: Restructure and efficiencies within Regulatory Services and Community Protection

A Member sought clarification regarding the restructure and efficiencies with Regulatory Services and Community Protection. The Executive Director responded that the Council was developing a resilient communities model under the Economy, Environment & Communities directorate. As a result, the model would encompass a number of services from across the Council including Regulatory Services and Libraries to make greater efficiencies and savings overall.

OP103: Review of existing fees and charges within resilient communities

Member sought clarification in regard to review of existing fees and charges. The Executive Director informed that a detailed plan of the changes with fees and charges would be circulated to the Committee in writing.

The Committee Resolved:

That,

- 1. The Committee draft revenue budget and capital programme 2020/21 to 2023/24 be noted;**

2. **The consultation on all new 2021/22 policy savings shown in appendix 1 be noted;**
3. **Further savings proposals be presented to the Committee at a future meeting.**

**17/20 Corporate Financial Performance – Quarter 2 Period 5 (August 2020)
Financial Monitoring Position for 2020/21**

The Committee considered a report on revenue and capital outturn for 2020/21 for services within the remit of the Committee.

This position highlighted a revenue overspend of £845,000 as a result of delayed savings, unachieved income and necessary spending increases across the directorate. However, a result of mitigating actions this figure had reduced to an overspend of £645,000.

It was noted that forecast use of reserves were £8.899m including a one-off expenditure of £6.659m relating directly to implications of COVID-19 restrictions.

A Member expressed concerns that the COVID grant would not cover the costs already incurred by the Council during the pandemic. It was noted whilst the Government had announced a number of grants. One particular grant would allow Councils to be reimbursed for 75p in every £1 spent to cover the costs of COVID measures.

Resolved:

1. **To note the revenue and capital forecast for the financial year end 20/21 for the services under the remit of the Committee.**
- 2 **To note the actions being taken to address the overspend.**

18/20 Council Firework and Bonfire Displays

The Committee received a report on Council administered bonfires and firework displays at it's meeting on 20 February 2020. As a number of questions arose from this meeting, it was agreed that the Committee consider an updated report.

The PHP – Service Development Manager informed the Committee that employee numbers had remained static throughout 2018 and 2019 with 70 members of non-security staff and 115 security staff employees across display sites. However, staffing costs had increased from £9,376 in 2017 to 13,241 in 2019 due to increases in overtime requests.

The Committee then considered the overall cost breakdown for the period 2017 to 2019:

	2017	2018	2019
Expenditure	-80,331	-114,986	-119,576
Income	69,235	105,022	75,987
Net position	-11,096	-9,954	-43,706

It was noted that due to considerable improvements with the entertainment offer at Walsall Arboretum and landscape infrastructure improvements costs had increased by £34,655 for the period 2017 and 2018.

A question and answer session took place and following on, the principal points from the ensuing discussion:-

- Income position was lower in 2019 compared to 2018 due to weather conditions.
- A Member sought clarification on the impact of cashless payments for events in 2019 and whether any customers were denied entry. In response, it was confirmed cashless payments were implemented due to security concerns and ease of payment processing.
- It was highlighted that customers were able to purchase tickets in advance from box offices and online. However, one of the main reason for the reduction in ticket sales was due to the unfavourable weather conditions.
- A Member sought clarification on whether the Council had financially contributed towards bonfire and firework events in the Borough. In response, the Committee confirmed that this statement was correct.
- A Member highlighted that a number of local residents had expressed concerns about firework noise.
- There were concerns about the long term strategy for bonfire and firework events in the Borough. In response, the PHP – Marketing and Funding Manager confirmed that the Council was investigating future ways to organise events such as pursuing subcontracting and examining delivery models.

The Chair thanked officers for their attendance.

Resolved.

That, the report be noted.

19/20 **Cycling in Walsall Update**

The Committee considered a report on the National Cycling Network 5 (NCN5) including better streets project update.

The Transportation Major Projects and Strategy Manager informed the Committee that the West Midlands Mayor and Transport for West Midlands (TfWM) launched a 'Better Streets Community Fund' to help improve local

streets for residents. Across the West Midlands, £2 million was made available for community-led projects to assist with cycling and walking projects.

The Council was allocated funding to develop and deliver two local schemes aimed at improving cycling and pedestrian facilities between Pelsall and Walsall Town Centre, Walsall Arboretum whilst utilising parts of the cycling network.

The project scope was presented as follows:

- Improve highway crossing over Harden Road on the NCN5
- Improve cycling route between Ryecroft Cemetery and Walsall Town Centre
- Install modified P-barriers at approved locations on the NCN5

Prevention measures for anti-social behaviour had been considered by the Council as concerns had been raised regarding unauthorised motorcycles use on cycling routes and footpaths. In response, P-barriers were installed which managed to reduce the number of instances of anti-social behaviour. However, work was still ongoing to develop a strategy to mitigate issues in future.

A question and answer session took place and following on, the principal points from the ensuing discussion:-

- Grant funding for cycling improvements was due to expire at the end of 2021.
- There was a consensus that COVID-19 lockdown measures had increased the numbers of residents that were cycling.
- Member highlighted that the Council needed to make cycling easier for local residents.
- The Council had worked with TfWM to identify further cycling routes across the Borough. The Government had announced further funding to capitalise increases with cycling in local areas. However, further discussions were needed with TfWM and the Government regarding specific cycling funding for the West Midlands.
- In regard to P-barriers, a Member expressed concerns about appropriate access for disabled residents whilst protecting cycling pathways from unauthorised motorbike and vehicle use. In response, Members were informed that the Council recognised concerns regarding P-barriers with unauthorised motorbike users and work was being undertaken with Community Protection, stakeholders and landowners to identify a long-term solution.
- The Council was investigating the potential benefits of installing modified P-barriers. However, further consultation and trials would be required before implementing modifications in other locations across the Borough.
- A Member expressed concerns about radar keys, which could be used to unlock P-barriers, and sought clarification on whether the Council was considering a specialist key which could be purchased by residents. In response, Transportation Major Projects and Strategy Manager confirmed that the Members' concerns had been noted and would be considered as part of the consultation.

The Committee thanked officers for their attendance.

Resolved:

That, the report be noted.

20/20 Areas of focus – 2020/21

The Committee considered its areas of focus and the forward plans of Walsall Council, the Black Country Joint Executive Committee and West Midlands.

Members debated and suggested the following items to be considered at a future meeting of the Committee:

1. Carbon Neutral Council – Update on proposals
2. Council Waste Strategy
3. Walsall Allotments Boundary review
4. Road Safety Plan

Resolved:

1. **That, areas of focus 2020/21 and forward plans be noted.**
2. **That, the following items be considered at a future meeting of the Committee:**
 - a. **Carbon Neutral Council – Update on proposals**
 - b. **Council Waste Strategy**
 - c. **Walsall Allotments Boundary Review**
 - d. **Road Safety Plan**

21/20 Date of next meeting

It was noted that the next meeting would take place on 21 January 2021.

Termination of Meeting

There being no further business, the meeting terminated 7.32p.m.

Signed:

Date: