

ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

20 February 2020 at 6.00pm at the Council House, Walsall

Committee Members

Present:

Councillor L. Harrison (Chair)
Councillor A. Hicken (Vice-Chair)
Councillor S. Johal
Councillor P. Kaur
Councillor A. Nazir
Councillor G. Singh Sohal
Councillor I. Shires
Councillor M. Statham
Councillor R. Worrall

Portfolio Holders

Present:

Councillor M. Bird	Leader of the Council
Councillor A. Andrew	Deputy Leader and Regeneration
Councillor G. Perry	Community, Leisure and Culture
Councillor C. Towe	Education and Skills

Officers Present:

Lorraine Boothman	Regulatory Services Manager
Jaki Brunton-Douglas	PHP Marketing and Funding Manager
Matt Crowton	Transportation Major Projects and Strategy Manager
Paul Gordon	Head of Business Change
Joe Holding	Senior Programme Development and Commissioning Manager
Liz Stuffins	PHP Service Development Manager
Matt Powis	Democratic Services Officer

Other Attendees

Present:

Steve McAleavy	Director of Customer Experience at Transport for West Midlands
Adrian Jones	National Federation of Gypsy Liaison Groups
Abiline McShane	National Federation of Gypsy Liaison Groups

45/19 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P. Bott, Creaney, Follows, Mazhar and Ward.

46/19 Substitution

Councillor M. Statham substituted for Councillor M. Follows and Councillor Worrall substituted for Councillor M. Ward.

47/19 **Declarations of Interest and Party Whip**

There were no declarations of interest or party whips.

48/19 **Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)**

There were no items to consider in private session.

49/19 **Minutes of the previous meeting**

In reference to Minute No. 40/19 M6 Junction 10 Major Transport Scheme, bullet point 13 be amended to read 'A Member welcomed the retention of B4464 Bus Lane and sought clarification on whether there were any proposals for a park and ride scheme in Walsall to encourage public transportation uptake.'

A Member requested information on the proposed meeting dates for the Driving Culture and Vehicle Idling Working Group. In response, the Democratic Services Officer confirmed that meeting dates would be circulated to relevant Members.

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 14 January 2019, as amended, copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

50/19 **SPRINT – A34 Walsall to Birmingham Presentation**

The Committee received a presentation from Transportation Major Projects and Strategy Manager and Director of Customer Experience at Transport for West Midlands on SPRINT about Vision for Bus and SPRINT.

The Director of Customer Experience informed the Committee that public transport was an essential part of the transportation infrastructure with 4 out of 5 journeys taken by bus in the West Midlands. However, the bus network faced a number of challenges including reliability, accessibility and levels of investment.

The Committee were informed of TfWM's key objectives and opportunities:

- To deliver an integrated transport system encompassing Metro, Rail and Bus networks;
- Delivering SPRINT Routes across the West Midlands with an anticipation of the Commonwealth Games 2021;
- Commencing rollout of zero emission buses;
- Introducing simple, easy, value for money fares and payments;
- Access bus delivery options from the Bus Service Act 2017 powers such as local franchising;
- Monitor, manage and improve bus performance;

- Coordinate an approach for safer travel with Police Partnership options.

In reference to the Bus Services Act 2017, it was highlighted that local authorities had the capability to establish enhanced partnerships (EP) which aimed to improve bus services in the local area. TfWM had developed an EP for the region and proposed schemes for the A34 (North) and A45 (Lode Lane Corridors) to Solihull and Birmingham Airport. It was hoped that with the success of this arrangement, future funding could be secured from central government to further enhance the partnerships.

To strengthen the public offer with transportation, the West Midlands Bus Alliance was established. This alliance was the first of its kind in the UK as it established a joined up approach with the following partners:

- Local bus operators;
- Local authorities including Walsall Council;
- Transport Focus;
- Confederation for passenger transport;
- Police forces,
- Department for Transport;
- TfWM.

In respect to low emission bus fleets, it was noted that all buses within the West Midlands would be at a Euro 6 standard by April 2021. However, new electric bus corridors were planned for Birmingham to Solihull and Coventry City Centre to the University Hospital of Coventry and Warwickshire in 2020.

TfWM were working with operators to support the Swift system to provide easy contactless payments with account based ticketing and best value capping. In addition, work had commenced on a new phone app which incorporates journey planning, ticket finding, across transport payments, parking, car share and car hire options.

It was noted that an investment funding package of £28m was announced by Government to alleviate congestion hotspots in the region.

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

- A Member highlighted that the SPRINT route to Walsall through the Paddock Ward would not benefit the local area, increase local parking issues and remove vital greenspaces.
- A Member circulated a copy of the SPRINT – A34 Walsall to Birmingham Full business case report which was presented at the WMCA Board on 14 February 2020. He highlighted that the report outlines that the SPRINT buses would be significantly more reliable than existing X57 buses which operate in the area. In addition, the service would be a shorter service which would give Walsall increased prioritisation for transport infrastructure in future.

- A Member welcomed SPRINT proposals and specifically the route into Walsall Town Centre. However, he expressed concerns over the proposed route's traffic pinch points and whether consideration had been given to bendy buses. In response, it was confirmed that TfWM were investigating the use and implementation of bendy buses.
- There was a discussion on the original proposals for Sprint (Phase 1), a Member expressed his disappointment that the final business case did not meet original expectations for the project.
- The Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Regeneration empathised with resident concerns regarding the project as local road infrastructure was not designed to accommodate proposals. He highlighted that the project would not have come to fruition without the Commonwealth Games in 2022 in Birmingham.
- The Leader of the Council concurred with the Deputy Leader regarding existing road infrastructure and that issues remain routing SPRINT into Walsall Town Centre. However, he expressed concerns that existing transportation strategies focus too heavily on public transportation and do not consider existing car usage. In addition, he highlighted that removal of the Perry Barr flyover and the Clean Air Zone in Birmingham would result in disruption across the West Midland transport network impacting Walsall.
- There was a discussion on proposals for a park and ride scheme to connect with the SPRINT Network. Some Members felt that park and ride proposals would take away vital footfall from Walsall Town Centre to Birmingham.
- A Member sought clarification on the SPRINT incentives for Walsall residents. In response, the Director of Customer Experience confirmed that Walsall had benefited from a low fair zone since 2017 and the swift system was making ticketing easier and cheaper for customers. He highlighted that SPRINT would provide substantial benefits to the residents of Walsall with a predictable and quicker service.
- A Member sought clarification on how WASPI women apply for concessionary fares. In response, the Director of Customer Experience confirmed that whilst WASPI women were not included in the national concessionary schemes however, there was a local arrangement in place for the West Midlands WASPI women. He confirmed that a response regarding the application process would be circulated to Members of the Committee.

The Committee thanked Transportation Major Projects and Strategy Manager and Director of Customer Experience for their attendance.

Resolved:

- 1. That, the SPRINT A34 Walsall to Birmingham Presentation be noted;**
- 2. WASPI women application process be circulated to Members of the Committee.**

51/19 Council Firework and Bonfire Displays

The Committee considered a report on Council run bonfire and firework events which was presented by the Senior Programme Development and Commissioning Manager and the Healthy Spaces Service Development Manager in Public Health.

It was highlighted that since 2005, the Council had operated bonfire and firework displays across the Borough. However, in recent years the cost and strength of fireworks had increased significantly.

Since 2016, the Council organised displays at a financial loss. In 2019/20, the Council undertook a restructure and established a Healthy Spaces Team under Public Health which was created from mergers from Sport and Leisure Development and Environmental Improvement services. The team was responsible for the delivery of the events for 2019 and was given an 11 week timetable for bonfire night preparations.

Advanced online ticketing was utilised for all bonfire events combined with arrangements for cash ticket sales at the Active Living and Leisure Centres and Box Office outlets for non-advanced ticket sales. It was noted that the Healthy Spaces Team developed and delivered four professionally run bonfire and firework events with 94% positive feedback received regarding the ticketing process. However, attendance was poor compared to previous years across all Council organised displays due to heavy rain, competing events, late marketing and comments on social media.

The Committee noted that there were 76 events which were delivered across the Borough with majority of events taking place in the summer period.. Future proposals included the establishment of an outdoor cinema, community cycling, sports taster days and big day out experiences.

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

- All bonfire and firework locations in Walsall introduced a cashless policy.
- A Member requested a breakdown of staff numbers and associated costs including the cost of time off in lieu and sought clarification on why costs had increased so dramatically for the reported years 2017, 2018 and 2019. Members were informed that a response would be provided in writing.
- Member sought clarification on the number of customers who were turned away due to a policy on cashless entry. In addition, he also requested information on the booking fee for online transactions. Members were informed that responses would be provided in writing.
- The Leader of the Council informed the Committee that the Borough had a long tradition of running successful bonfire fires and firework displays. He noted that due to seasonal factors and a boycott campaign on social media, attendance at events was lacklustre however, he stressed the importance of an organised event which was safe and appropriately managed. He

highlighted that Public Health had insufficient time to prepare for scheduled bonfire and firework events.

- There was a view that the events represent more than just monetary value and represent a chance to bring together communities.
- A Member highlighted that many communities suffered with firework nuisance outside of prohibited times as defined under the relevant legislation.
- The Vice-Chair asked whether staff members were actively sabotaging Council run events. In response, the Senior Programme Development and Commissioning Manager denied that staff members within the Healthy Spaces team were sabotaging events and confirmed that all members of staff deliver events to the best of their abilities. As Public Health only took responsibility for the 2019 he could not comment on what had occurred for previous events.
- Members expressed concerns about the lack of project documentation for events.
- The Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Regeneration informed the Committee that the Council was not the sole provider of bonfire and firework events. Community groups across the Borough hold successful events without any costs associated to the Council.

The Chair determined that further information was required for the Committee to alleviate their concerns. Therefore, it was requested that a report be presented at the next meeting of the Committee on 9 April 2020 with the relevant Portfolio Holders and Senior Officers invited to attend.

Resolved:

- 1. That, the Council firework and bonfire displays report be rescheduled for 9 April 2020;**
- 2. In connection with (1) above, the relevant Portfolio Holders and Senior Officers be invited to attend.**

52/19 Unauthorised Encampments Final Report

The Committee considered the final report and recommendations of the Unauthorised Encampments Working Group (UEWG).

The Democratic Services Officer introduced the report which investigated the reasons for UE increases in the Borough and requested the establishment of a long-term strategy for GRT Communities.

Members of the Gypsy Traveller Liaison Groups welcomed the final report and the recommendations as it demonstrated that the Council had listened to concerns of the community. The Liaison Group gave an overview of the struggles that Members of the GRT Communities face when accessing pitches, medical care and school places.

A debate ensued about the role of negotiated stopping. Following a lengthy discussion on the Council's legal position and responses from the Portfolio Holders, the Committee resolved to make the following amendment to the working group's recommendations 'that, the Council's approach on negotiated stopping be commended'.

Resolved:

That, the final report of the Unauthorised Encampments Working Group be approved and forwarded as amended to Cabinet for deliberation.

53/19 Areas of focus – 2019/20

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

The Chair advised that a Professor Gatrad from the group, Walsall Against Single Use Plastic (WASUP) wished to address the Committee on single-use plastics. A discussion ensued on this topic and it was resolved that this presentation be scheduled at 5.50p.m before commencement of the Committee at 6.00p.m.

A Member requested that a report on the Black Country Transport Team Collaboration Agreement be presented to the next meeting of the Committee on 9 April 2020.

Resolved:

- 1. That, areas of focus 2019/20 and forward plans be noted.**

54/19 Date of next meeting

It was noted that the next meeting would take place on 9 April 2020.

Termination of Meeting

There being no further business, the meeting terminated 7.55p.m.

Signed:

Date: