PRESENT

Councillor I Shires
Peter Cromar

IN ATTENDANCE
Duncan Tindall   – MVA transport consultancy
Mike Slinn   – MVA transport consultancy
Marie Newton   – Walsall MBC
Mark Rickard   – Walsall MBC
Jo Stubble   – Walsall MBC

NOTES

Members agreed the notes of the meeting held on 1 March 2005, copies having previously been circulated.

PLANNING ACCESSIBILITY SOFTWARE

Marie Newton explained that the purpose of the meeting was to enable a demonstration of the accessibility planning software and welcomed officers of the Council and representatives of the MVA transport Consultancy.

Peter Cromar welcomed this opportunity to explore the potential of the software and invited Mike Slinn and Duncan Tindall to give their presentation.

Mike Slinn circulated copies of the presentation and advised that there would be opportunity for questions at the end of the presentation, but welcomed questions at any time through out the presentation.

Members were advised that the software had been developed as a process that aims to promote social inclusion by helping people from disadvantaged groups or areas access jobs and essential services.

The presentation highlighted that this software can help make connections between people and need for example:-
- Can people get to key services at reasonable cost, in reasonable time and with reasonable ease;
- Solving accessibility problems may be about transport but also about locating and delivering key activities in ways that help people reach them

Members were advised of the five key barriers to Accessibility :-

- Availibilty and access to transport
- Cost of transport
- Services located in inaccessible places
- Safety and security
- Travel horizons

The group discussed how the Department of Transport had picked up the linkage and the need to include these aspects in the Local Transportation Plan. They discussed how Local transport authorities are to take the lead at local level working in partnership with:-

- Local Planning Authorities
- Primary Care Trusts
- Local Jobcentre Plus
- Crime and Disorder reduction partnerships

Peter Cromar highlighted that hospitals had not been included in the partnership arrangements and should be considered as many people need to travel to hospitals and they are a large employer.

Mike Slinn advised that there are many identified accessibility problems access to health care being one, he said that 31% of citizens without a car have difficulty getting to hospital and that over 1.4 million people have missed, turned down or not sought medical help in the last 12 months because of transport problems.

He advised that access to work and to learning have also been identified:

- 2 out of 5 jobseekers find lack of transport a barrier to getting a job
- 1 in 4 jobseekers say transport cost is a problem for getting to interviews
- 6% of all 16-24 year olds turn down educational opportunities because of transport problems

He further advised that access to food shops and social activities had been identified:-

- 16% without a car find access to supermarkets difficult
- 18% without a car find seeing friends and family difficult because of transport problems

He summarised by saying that a range of factors impact on accessibility including:-

- travel time
- cost of travel
- location of services
- timing of services
- fear of crime
- information on availability of services

Mike Slinn outlined the core accessibility factors:

- Education
- Employment
- Health

- Shopping/ Major Centres
- Local Indicators

Councillor Shires recognised the huge potential of this software not just to the Regeneration scrutiny panel looking at issues such as transport regeneration and getting people to jobs, but for providing key up relevant information to the Cabinet and Council when planning policy and taking key decisions; and to Local Neighbourhood Partnerships in the development of their Local plans.

MVA continued the presentation which demonstrated to members how the software works, showing the process and the range of data the system is able to collate. Of particular interest was the thematic mapping – Household information, transport, education and the example given, Ashford Borough Council, which clearly demonstrated how one theme group can be joined together with another to show areas of need and where services can be addressed.

MVA completed the presentation by demonstrating to the work group the Walsall context – preparation of accessibility strategy for the West Midlands Local Transport Plan and how the software can support and advance the strategy. Mike Slinn advised that work around education/ further education and employment is underway and that the health and food shopping audits had not yet commenced in Walsall but would be required for LTP Accessibility Strategy.

There followed a period of discussion about the software and a number of questions were raised and addressed. The key areas of discussion were:-

- The remit for the accessibility planning software – members were advised that the requirement for the accessibility strategy came from the Local Transport Plan and that was why the software currently sat in transportation section of the Council
- Training and use of software – members were advised that currently only two staff had received training
- Strategic intelligence data – members recognised the potential and were advised that the knowledge of the full extent to which the software could benefit the authority and partners had not been fully explored, there may be additional information required.
- Mike Slinn advised that there may be further research required relating to partners and joint data being collated. Members discussed whether a joint specialist post may be required some-one with expertise in this field that could be funded jointly.
- Attracting business to the area – members discussed that selling identified positives can attract business and aid regeneration.
- Members suggested that having a data base of information can give planning officers more to work with when large planning applications are being considered and enable them to be firmer in the questions they ask and considering whether the progress is in 'a joined up enough way'.

- Members considered that the right questions about this software have to be asked at a key strategic level and that the resource implications and the opportunity to develop the use of software need to be brought to the attention of the portfolio holder and the cabinet members.

Councillor Shires thanked Mike Slinn and Duncan Tindall for the presentation and invited any further comment from the work group.

Members and officers discussed the suggestion of a presentation to Cabinet and agreed that the subject of a presentation should fully demonstrate the capability of the software if used by trained staff and with all relevant information installed.
The following areas were identified as possible subjects for a demonstration:-
- The Waterfront – accessibility particularly in the evening
- Darlaston – strategic area.

Members agreed that the potential of this software far exceeds the remit of the scrutiny group and requires to be brought to the attention of the portfolio holder to make him aware of the potential of accessibility planning software.

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 4.45pm