

## **SCRUTINY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**13 December 2021 AT 6.00 P.M. AT THE COUNCIL HOUSE**

**Committee Members Present** Councillor Murray (Chair)  
Councillor Nawaz (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor Ali  
Councillor P. Bott  
Councillor Hicken  
Councillor Samra  
Councillor Singh-Sohal  
Councillor Murphy

**Officers** Simon Neilson – Executive Director (Economy, Environment and Communities)  
Stephen Gunther – Director – Public Health  
Kathryn Moreton – Head of Highways & Transport  
Matt Crowton – Transportation Major Projects & Strategy Manager  
Sharon Kelly – Director – Access & Inclusion  
Craig Goodall – Principal Democratic Services Officer  
Sian Lloyd – Assistant Democratic Services Officer

**Others in attendance** Angela Hosford – Head of Sprint Development - Transport for West Midlands  
Thomas Skidmore – Senior Manager – Sprint Development - Transport for West Midlands  
Jason Griffin – Head of Sprint Delivery - Transport for West Midlands  
Geraint Griffiths-Dale – Clinical Commissioning Group

**Portfolio Holders** Councillor Bird – Leader  
Councillor Andrew – Deputy Leader and Regeneration  
Councillor Perry – Deputy Leader and Resilient Communities  
Councillor M. Statham – Internal Services  
Councillor Towe – Education and Skills  
Councillor Craddock – Health and Wellbeing

### **353/21 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Harrison, K. Hussain, Jeavons and Rasab.

### **354/21 SUBSTITUTIONS**

Councillor Murphy substituted for Councillor Harrison.

355/21     **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP**

There were no declarations of interest or party whip identified at this meeting.

356/21     **LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985 (AS AMENDED)**

There were no items to be considered in private session.

357/21     **MINUTES**

A Member of the Committee asked for it be recorded that the £28,000 s106 money allocated to the Wards Keep site in Darlaston, for a healthy walking project, had not been completed. He explained that Clean and Green took a topslice of s106 funding received. He added a further comment about successful match funding that had been attracted to support other projects in the area including the ERDF Blue Network II Project.

It was agreed that the minutes were an accurate reflection of the information as presented at the last meeting but that an explanatory note would be included in the minutes of this meeting to provide clarity on this particular issue.

**Resolved:**

**That the minutes of the meeting held on 9 November 2021, a copy having previously been circulated, be approved.**

358/21     **COVID-19 INFECTION AND VACCINATION RATES UPDATE**

The Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing presented the update on Covid-19 in the Borough, acknowledging that this had been a period of lots of change and that a new variant of concern, Omicron, had now been detected in Walsall and was projected to become the dominant strain in the UK by the end of the month. He highlighted that this had further raised the importance of vaccinations and boosters and that anyone could still come forward to receive their vaccinations. In light of the high demand being experienced online he advised that lateral flow tests were also available from a number of pharmacies in the borough.

The Walsall Managing Director of the Black Country and West Birmingham Clinical Commissioning Group (the Managing Director) added that lots of planning had been completed over the past 24 hours to respond to the latest Government announcement that everyone over the age of 18 should be offered a booster jab so long as it has been 3 months since they received their second dose. The Managing Director advised that many GPs practices and the Saddlers Centre would be extending hours and remaining open 7 days a week to ensure that this would be possible and that he was confident that with stepping up the booster vaccination programme. He reiterated that urgent care would still be provided and that national guidance was awaited for other care services although it was expected that there may be some impact.

The Director of Public Health provided assurance that contact tracing had been completed and isolation was being monitored for all Omicron cases. He added that the mantra of hands, face, space and ventilation still applied and that measures should still be taken to reduce the spread of Covid-19 including working from home where possible, regularly testing and wearing face coverings in crowded indoor spaces. Regarding the vaccination of 12 – 15 year olds the Director of Public Health advised that vaccinations had been offered at all schools with the exception of one school which had declined this offer and that vaccines were also available at the Saddlers Centre. The rate of vaccinations in this age group was 35%. Follow up sessions were scheduled at several schools in the New Year and he also advised that there was still time for those in this age group to come forward to be vaccinated.

The Managing Director stated that pregnant women and those wishing to become pregnant were being offered vaccinations at dedicated clinics but at present the data collected did not provide specific figures as related to pregnant women so these could not be provided to the Committee at this point.

Following questions from the Committee the Director of Public Health confirmed that the return of vaccination buses was being considered but that due to the fact that it was now winter this may present different logistical issues and alternative offers may be considered preferable as a result. The Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing underlined that 89% of the people in ICU in the borough are unvaccinated and this provided a very strong argument for vaccination. The Director of Public Health confirmed that data was available on a ward-by-ward basis which was used for operational planning and could be included in future reports to the Committee and that pregnant women could receive the vaccine in any trimester of pregnancy however it was recommended to have the vaccine as early as possible. The Managing Director confirmed that plans to work with volunteers were expected not just for the vaccination process but for a long time thereafter given the benefits that had been seen from their involvement.

**Resolved:**

**That the report be noted.**

**359/21 A34 SPRINT – WALSALL TO SOLIHULL – UPDATE ON PHASE 1 & 2**

The Head of Sprint Development for Transport for West Midlands presented an update on the progress on the delivery of Sprint to date and initial details regarding phase 2 of the delivery, including proposed vehicle and service changes. She advised the Committee that the full business case was approved by the Combined Authority in February 2020 and that the project had been broken into two phases to allow works to commence as soon as possible with the aid of several contractors. It was noted that the project would see a transport corridor linking Walsall directly with Solihull and would offer greater connectivity across the region and faster and more reliable journey times.

Members were presented with photographs of current works to illustrate what this looks like on the ground and it was emphasised that measures were in place to try and mitigate the effect on traffic with works on the carriageway being kept to a

minimum. The Head of Sprint Development highlighted that these works were being completed in partnership with Walsall Council and the same process had been followed as any other developer or indeed the Council itself as Highway Authority would have to go through in terms of obtaining permits and Traffic Regulation Orders.

She advised that a network of public liaison officers were in place to help local businesses understand the impact of the works, how that will affect them and what can be done to limit the impact, including maintaining access for customers and that a helpline number had been set up to allow all interested parties to contact Transport for West Midlands (TfWM) directly and find out what works were on going on in their local area.

Phase 2 of the Sprint works were due to go to the Combined Authority in January for approval, with the aim being delivery at end of 2022/early 2023. Following this the Head of Sprint Development advised phase 2 plans were to come back to the Council and go through Cabinet. This was expected to be in Spring/Summer 2022 dependent on decision made at Combined Authority level. Full details of scheme were still being worked up by TfWM in conjunction with Walsall Council but the Head of Sprint Development advised that a proportion of the 20 green hydrogen buses funded by Birmingham Council would be used on A34 corridor into Walsall and that these were zero emission vehicles to be in full operation by January. It was advised that the understanding was that the bus company intended to replace the 51 with Sprint but using the same network tickets as currently available.

Members of the Committee and the Leader of the Council raised concerns regarding the lack of progress on works and the poor communication of road closures which had led to widespread problems across Walsall. The Head of Sprint Development advised that before any works were commenced information is sought regarding gas, electric and water supplies to try and ensure works could proceed as planned but that if these were not charted correctly, as sometimes can be the case, this could lead to delays in works whilst designs were reconsidered to ensure they had no impact on these supplies. She added that safety was a paramount concern and to manage the flow of traffic and preserve access to properties this sometimes led to more traffic measures than it would appear, on the face of it, to be entirely necessary.

Following questions from Members of the Committee the Senior Manager for Sprint Development confirmed that the X51 bus service was intended to remain after the Sprint service had come into operation. He also advised that at present no more trees were intended to be cut down as part of phase 1. Phase 2 plans were still being finalised so he could not comment whether any trees would be removed as part of those works. It was noted that Sprint intended to provide larger vehicles to hold more passengers, offer more frequent buses as they complete the route at a faster speed and bolster cross-city connectivity and that there was not intended to be any premium for using Sprint but rather that it would retain the same pricing as the rest of the bus network.

The Transportation Major Projects & Strategy Manager advised Members of plans for Ablewell Street and Lower Rushall Street and confirmed that traffic modelling had

been completed which suggested that journey times with the new road design would be comparable or improved in comparison to the current layout.

The Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Regeneration stated that he was of the opinion that the operator should have been introduced as a member of the partnership at an earlier stage, which may well have alleviated some of the issues experienced. He also noted that as a result of Sprint works there would be access to cleaner, faster journeys which was incredibly positive and this had not been highlighted to its full extent. He also advised that a charging point would be introduced on Bridge Street of which there were only a handful across the country.

**Resolved:**

**That:**

- 1. The progress being made on delivery of Sprint Phase 1 be noted, including engagement with businesses and residents during periods of disruption.**
- 2. To note the concern expressed by Members on the disruption caused by the works.**
- 3. A further update on Sprint be reported to this Committee in April 2022.**
- 4. Specific details be provided to the Committee regarding delays on works on Town Hill.**

**360/21 SCHOOL GATE PARKING**

Following a request from the Committee the Head of Highways & Transport presented a report detailing the council's approach to road safety outside schools. She highlighted that there had been a 30% reduction in the number of people killed or seriously injured on the roads in Walsall since 2017 and that the aim of the regional road safety strategy was to reach a 40% reduction on West Midlands roads by 2028. It was noted that whilst deaths and serious injuries continued to occur work on road safety would never be complete but that less than a third of serious incidents included children and took place at peak school times.

The Head of Highways & Transport highlighted a number of council initiatives designed to teach children how to be road safe, including the A\*STARS programme which was delivered in 90% of primary schools and 70% of secondary schools in the borough and focused on issues such as pedestrian training, safety in the car and 5 minute walk zones. She also provided information regarding the enforcement based approach followed by the council, highlighting that fourteen civil enforcement officers carried out foot patrols on a daily basis and two CCTV vehicles were deployed across the borough around peak school times. It was noted that there was a mandatory observation period that had to be adhered to before a ticket could legally be issued and as a result quite often vehicles were not able to be ticketed as they had not stopped for long enough.

With regards to road safety engineering, the Head of Highways & Transport emphasised that all scheme requests were recorded, assessed and categorised and referred to either Local Safety Schemes or the Promotion of Community Health and Safety programme dependent on the number of personal injury collisions that had taken place at the site over the previous three years. The Safe Routes to School programme reported to Cabinet annually was also discussed and the Head of Highways & Transport indicated that 70 potential schemes formed part of the 2021/22 version, of which 8 measures with a cost totalling just over £50,000 were scheduled for delivery within this financial year.

Due to the complex nature of the issue and its wide-reaching implications it was suggested that a working group be established to discuss specific options when Democratic Services had the capacity to support such a group.

Following questions from the Committee the Executive Director for Economy, Environment and Communities clarified that parking enforcement was outsourced to ABCOA so specific figures regarding number of officers located near schools on any given day were not currently available. He also added that parking enforcement was run at a subsidy and was not, as commonly thought, a source of income for the Council. The Head of Highways & Transport added that a proportion of the fourteen officers mentioned previously would be situated at schools and others would be in different locations such as council-owned car parks. A short discussion took place on the different powers of civil enforcement officers and the Police to manage traffic and parking. She also advised that given the fact that older Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) were only available in physical copy there had not been sufficient time for figures relating to the number of TROs around schools to be collated. Following further questions she explained that road markings in the borough were inspected at least once a year with all safety critical defects corrected.

Following a question from a Member of the Committee relating to the Resilient Communities model the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Resilient Communities advised that they saw a number of anti-social behaviour related parking complaints and operated a joined-up approach with West Midlands Police. The Executive Director for Economy, Environment and Communities stated that parking in areas with TROs was a civil enforcement matter and so fell to the Council to enforce on such matters.

**Resolved:**

**That:**

- 1. A working group be established to consider school gate parking with the following Members:**
  - a. Councillors Ali, Hicken, Murray, Nawaz and Samra.**
- 2. The Committee be provided with specific figures regarding:**
  - a. the number of enforcement notices issued as a result of use of CCTV around schools;**
  - b. The number of civil parking enforcement officers on duty at different periods of the day.**

## 361/21 SCRUTINY SURVEY RESULTS

The Principal Democratic Services Officer presented the results of the Scrutiny Survey conducted in October 2021 following a request by the Scrutiny Overview Committee. He advised that 21 responses were received, of which 16 were from Members of an Overview and Scrutiny Committee and 5 were from non-Scrutiny Members. He reported that many aspects of the scrutiny process were identified as being good or very good.

Examples were given of areas which had been identified where improvements could be made including the budget-setting process which had received mixed reviews, training on items such legal issues, chairing meetings and questioning styles. Feedback was also received about managing the length of agendas to help facilitate effective meetings. It was noted that Members appeared to be happy with the level of support to the scrutiny process offered by officers.

Following a question from a Committee Member the Principal Democratic Services Officer advised that he believed there had been one call-in in the last twelve months but detailed information would be provided to the Committee.

There was a short discussion regarding a potential action tracker for use by scrutiny committees. The Principal Democratic Services Officer explained that good practice would be reviewed and a proposal brought to the Committee. Following a suggestion he agreed to consider the approach taken by the West Midlands Police and Crime Panel.

### **Resolved:**

#### **That:**

- 1. The Member Learning and Development Programme is enhanced to include training for Members on financial scrutiny, scrutiny legislation, chairing meetings and asking questions;**
- 2. Members be encouraged to request training on subject specific topics they would like training on;**
- 3. Due to mixed comments in relation to the scrutiny of the council's budget setting process, the Scrutiny Overview Committee review the existing approach and consider how it could be improved;**
- 4. A recommendation tracker be developed to assist systematic follow up of recommendations made by overview and scrutiny committees to monitor progress on specific actions and information requested at meetings;**
- 5. The importance of ensuring agendas for meetings are manageable is understood and that prioritisation is given to reports that require scrutiny rather than reports 'for noting';**

- 6. Further development of the scrutiny report template takes place to include model recommendations which encourage outcomes and avoid requesting that reports are noted; and**
- 7. Information to be provided on the number of Call-Ins over the last 12 months.**

#### **362/21 FEEDBACK FROM OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEES**

The Committee noted the reports of the Chairs of the Overview & Scrutiny Committees on meetings of their Committees since 9 November as presented in the written report.

**Resolved:**

**That the report be noted.**

#### **363/21 AREAS OF FOCUS**

The Committee considered its work programme and the Forward Plans of Walsall Council and the Black Country Joint Executive Committee.

A Member of the Committee raised questions regarding two items on the Council Forward Plan relating to Sale of Council Land in Blakenall and Contractor Procurement Strategy for Connected Gateway as it relates to the Future High Street Fund. The Executive Director (Economy, Environment and Communities) advised that he would ask for further details on these two items to allow the Committee to make a decision on whether they wished to consider them at a future meeting.

The following items were identified for the next meeting of the Committee:

- Update on Covid-19 infection and vaccination rates to include details of Covid memorial garden;
- Corporate Plan Monitoring (Q2);
- Domestic Abuse Services Delivery Model; and
- Chief Superintendent Phil Dolby of West Midlands Police to be requested to attend to discuss his priorities for the borough, gangs and serious violence, community policing and domestic abuse.

**Resolved:**

**That:**

- 1. The Areas of Focus and Forward Plan be noted;**
- 2. It be requested that Members of the Scrutiny Overview Committee be invited to 18 January meeting of Economy and Environment Scrutiny and Overview Committee to take part in discussions on the Town Fund;**



- 3. Further information be provided to the Committee if available in relation to forward plan items on Sale of Council Land in Blakenall and Contractor Procurement Strategy for Connected Gateway.**

**364/21 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was noted that the date of the next meeting would be 7 February 2022.

The meeting terminated at 8.55 p.m.

Chair: .....Date:.....