

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

SUSTAINABILITY AND TRANSPORT O&S COMMITTEE

1400 hours on 7th September, Committee Rooms 3&4, Council House

Present:

Councillor Lee Marsham (Chair)

Councillors David Barker, Colin Green, Timothy Huxtable and Waseem Zaffar

Also Present:

Councillor Liz Clements, Cabinet Member for Transport

Craig Cooper, Strategic Director City Operations

Philip Edwards, Assistant Director, Transport & Connectivity

Mohammed Sajid, Interim Head of Financial Strategy

Martin Price, Co-Chair, Better Streets for Birmingham

David Cox, Chair, Pushbikes

Denis Murphy, Group Secretary, Living Streets

Tim Egan, Head of Behaviour Change and Engagement, Midlands and East, Sustrans (online)

Ewan Hamnett, 20s Plenty for Birmingham

Orla Campbell, Head of Regional Engagement, Active Travel England

Sharon Suresh Kumar, Regional Manager for West Midlands, Active Travel England

Hannah Dayan, Head of Technical Services Unit, Transport for West Midlands

Philip Havenhand, Active Travel Implementation Lead, Transport for West Midlands

Adam Tranter, Mayor's Cycling & Walking Commissioner, West Midlands Combined Authority

Mel Jones, Head of Transport Planning

Andy Middleton, Active Travel Portfolio Lead

Amelia Wiltshire, Overview & Scrutiny Manager

Baseema Begum, Scrutiny Officer

The meeting started at 14:00 hours

Members of the press and public were present.

1. NOTICE OF RECORDING/WEBCAST

The Chair advised those present that the meeting would be webcast for live and subsequent broadcast and that Members of the press/public may record and take photographs except where there are confidential or exempt items.

2. APOLOGIES

Councillors Saima Ahmed and Richard Parkin.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None.

4. SCRUTINY CONTRIBUTION TO BUDGET SAVINGS AND RECOVERY PLAN

The Chair re-ordered the agenda to receive this item first and outlined the position of the Council following the issuing of a Section 114 notice.

Councillor Liz Clements, Cabinet Member for Transport, Craig Cooper, Strategic Director City Operations, Philip Edwards, Assistant Director, Transport & Connectivity and Mohammed Sajid, Interim Head of Financial Strategy were in attendance for this item.

Mohammed Sajid, Interim Head of Financial Strategy read out a statement made on behalf of Fiona Greenway in relation to the issuing of the Section 114 notice. The Chair then moved to an open discussion with the officers present and the following were amongst the points made: -

- Members were informed that as part of the Section 114 notice all spend is frozen and authorisation for any spend must be approved by the Section 151 officer. The criterion for this was explained: -
 - Spend authorised on the basis that it does not worsen the Council's financial position;
 - Spend approved on the basis that it generates a financial return; and
 - Spend approved if it stops the situation re-occurring.
- Guidance has been issued to Members and officers on the freeze on any spending. Instance of where spend may be approved have also been shared and these are specifically for projects that are fully externally funded and where seeking authorisation given for spend would demonstrate value for money.
- Targets set for savings are low within the Transportation and Highways sections and these are on track to be achieved as set out in the Medium-Term Financial Plan. Staff vacancies within with these areas are at approximately 3%. Officers within these sections have been given guidance on spend control.

- It was highlighted that an Extraordinary Council Meeting was due to take place later in the month to discuss how the Council will respond to the Section 114 notice and plans for balancing the budget.
- The Cabinet Member shared her views on the extreme seriousness of the situation and the need for every service area to contribute to the savings required.
- In relation to road safety concerns, it was explained that a Cabinet decision had been made in relation to the procurement of a new contractor for the maintenance of the public highway under the Highways Maintenance and Management PFI programme. This has been agreed with the DfT and the responsibility of this is with Birmingham Highways Limited (BHL).
- In relation to funding transport projects, it was clarified that most of the projects within the capital programme are externally funded and this covers staff costs and so there is no impact on delivery. It was added that consultancy and external staff are recruited for their skills and expertise however the Cabinet Member received regular updates with the relevant strategic directors following the notification of the Equal Pay liability. Furthermore, weekly spend control meetings are held.
- It was added that external monies to the Council in relation to transportation projects are ringfenced. However, all spend does need to go through the additional step of approval by the section 151 officer for approval.

Cllr Marsham concluded that he would in his capacity as Chair keep a watchful eye on the budget savings and recovery plan and keep Members up to date on any issues as they relate to the Committee's remit.

5. ACTIVE TRAVEL INQUIRY EVIDENCE GATHERING

Cllr Marsham welcomed all attendees and explained the format of the evidence gathering would be as a roundtable discussion with stakeholder views noted. It was added that following this Inquiry a separate Inquiry into Road Safety would be launched and that much of the work of the Active Travel Inquiry would complement that work.

It was added that time permitting, the Cabinet Member for Transport and Council Officers may be asked to respond to the views heard.

Stakeholders introduced themselves and explained the purpose of their respective organisations. A discussion was held, and the following were amongst the points made: -

In response to a question on what the Council could do in the next 6 months to improve active travel stakeholders the following points were made: -

- Clarity on what is involved in the process of delivery and the political will for making improvements. It was felt imperative that priorities were re-set in light of the climate crisis.
- The concept of '15-minute neighbourhoods' was raised and how that could work in practice if people are being encouraged to take up other options instead of using a car to do everyday tasks. It was highlighted for it to work

there needs to be better choices for people, better public transport and maintenance of roads and pavements and canal towpaths that allow people to take up options for travelling in a more active and safe way to access employment, education, and health settings. The added benefit of residents not using their car was improvements to health and wellbeing and less strain in the future to the Council in social care provision.

- It was highlighted further that many of the active travel schemes such as cycle lanes do not exist in the most deprived neighbourhoods that also suffer from higher health inequalities. It was suggested that there is some public resistance in these areas to such initiatives that residents may feel fear and stress about the introduction of such schemes when their car is a 'place of safety' and the risk of having restricted access to it. In addition, residents may not view it as beneficial to them when they have many other issues to contend with. In such cases It was suggested therefore that involving local people in identifying challenges and for the Council to work with them to tailor and design schemes that will work for them is the way forward.
- Members heard that the city has many good schemes relating to cycling for example such as led rides and the Big Birmingham Bikes scheme to encourage more people to cycle and walk however it was stated that one model cannot be imposed across the city as there are different needs.
- Connecting blue and green spaces so that people can connect and mix modes of travel was highlighted. The opportunity to make less attractive parts of the city more attractive by options of different modes of travel was suggested and to give people an alternative to the car, especially those who may live in terraced areas where parking is an issue.
- From a pedestrian viewpoint it is key that the road safety strategy that is currently being refreshed is a success and as part of this partners are brought together to improve active travel measures by 50% by the end of the decade. It is crucial that targets are set for this, and all parties are held to account if they feel to meet them.
- The financial climate in which the Council finds itself in was acknowledged in respect of being able to procure external expertise and the impact of this on projects. This also meant that there could be a delay in completing projects and the additional costs that might be incurred as prices rise for materials and other requirements.
- The delay in implementation of schemes with active travel measures outlined shows a poor delivery record so far with the added pressures of time-limited active travel funding. There is a need to deliver projects in more shorter timeframes with schemes ready to go once funding is given.
- It was explained that as part of Tranche 1 of the Active Travel Fund (ATF) Birmingham was awarded £1.5m. Birmingham has received a total sum of £6.5m through ATF Tranches 2,3 and 4. There has been significant delays to schemes as part of Tranche 2 and this is due to the change and control process instigated by Council officers and TfWM.
- It is crucial that consultation is carried out at the earliest opportunity and well before the design stage so that residents can be fully involved and onboard with plans. It was noted that not every scheme and decision will have 100%

buy-in however it is imperative that any scheme that is agreed is implemented well.

- The Birmingham Transport Plan was praised for its vision however the delivery plan that is based on a neighbourhood approach is being awaited so that the city can benefit. A key element of this is road safety and ensuring the issue of poor parking is tackled.
- With respect to the slower delivery of schemes through the City Region Sustainability Transport Settlement (CRSTS) funding it was explained that there is an issue in accelerating delivery due to a lack of staffing expertise. Transport for West Midlands (TfWM) is working with Councils to resolve the issue through working smarter by pooling resources, packaging schemes across all transport corridors and ensuring that resources are shared through consideration of procurement activity to reduce costs.
- In addition, TfWM will be looking at scheme delivery with each Council to understand the challenges and work with them to deliver schemes more quickly and efficiently. There is also a need to look at internal processes within local authorities and the West Midlands Combined Authority to streamline governance, identify bottlenecks and capacity across the support services.
- The issue of spend on transport and highway projects with regards to the standard of build was raised. It was felt that the initial build was not at the required level to handle active travel modes and as a result retrofitting was being considered when funding becomes available. As a consequence, the city will not reach where it wishes to be in 10 years' time. London was given as an example of where the standard of build is at the required level.
- Stakeholders agreed that bold decision making was needed especially in relation to land use planning for example in relation to car parks.
- Disincentivising car travel by making active travel more attractive was emphasised. The opportunity for the Council and partners to see what can be done quickly was highlighted as a key issue. Other features that could help with this aim could include limiting taxi's speed to 30mph, altering the traffic light controls to instant when pedestrians are waiting as this makes people more likely to use if they don't have to wait.
- Issues of delays with schemes need to be notified to TfWM and Active Travel England to see if there is scope for compromise. The A38 Selly Oak High St scheme was highlighted as an example where a compromise was reached in terms of compliance however there does need to be strong reasoning for any such requests with monitoring and evaluation in place to resolve any critical issues that may transpire.
- In response to clearing the backlog of delayed schemes and learning from best practice from other local authorities' stakeholders highlighted that more collaboration and sharing of information at the early stages of planning and that large schemes worked best in this way when delivered with partners. Examples of other local authorities such as Leeds and Manchester were mentioned.

The Chair then asked the Cabinet Member and officers to respond to the points raised: -

- The Cabinet Member, Cllr Clements thanked the attendees for their contributions and said that there were points of learning to be taken away.
- Infrastructure for mode shift was setting our sights higher was highlighted and Hackney and Waltham Forest Council in London were raised as good examples.
- It was stated that car dependency is very entrenched in the city and it is a challenge to change habits however Councillors can lead by example in changing one or more of their journeys.
- Officers welcomed the positive feedback and the support for the vision of the Birmingham Transport Plan (BTP). The BTP delivery plan is currently in draft and is due to be shared shortly. The delivery plan will be focussed on the needs of local neighbourhoods and geography.
- A small team delivers on transport projects and has been dealing with a lot of queries.
- Process and proportionate governance was highlighted, and it the frustration of smaller scale schemes was acknowledged. There was support for how these can be delivered more immediately.
- Officers are aware of many of the issues raised and explained that many of these are dependent on resources being available to manage/rectify. It was added that using resources wisely by working smarter and avoiding duplication was key as well as partners working together more collective on governance.
- Consultation is a key aspect and needs to be done correctly to ensure that it is timely and proportionate.

The Chair thanked all attendees for their input and explained that further comments would be welcome and asked if these could be submitted in writing and would be shared with the Committee.

6. MINUTES

(See Item No.4)

The minutes of the meeting held on 12th July 2023 were approved. Cllr Brooks stated that he was not listed as attending but was referenced in the minutes.

7. SUSTAINABILITY AND TRANSPORT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ACTION TRACKER

(See Item No. 5)

Noted.

8. WORK PROGRAMME

(See Item No. 8)

The Chair noted that due to the issuing of a Section 114 notice that there would need to be more flexibility in the committee's work programme to be altered to enable discussions to take place at short notice as required.

RESOLVED: -

1. The report was noted.

9. DATES OF NEXT MEETING

Future meeting dates were outlined by the Chair.

10. REQUEST(S) FOR CALL IN/COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION/PETITIONS (IF ANY)

None.

11. OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

None.

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Noted.

13. AUTHORITY TO CHAIR AND OFFICERS

Agreed.

RESOLVED: -

That in an urgent situation between meetings the Chair, jointly with the relevant Chief Officer, has authority to act on behalf of the Committee.

The meeting ended at 16:05 hours.