

**BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL**

**SUSTAINABILITY AND TRANSPORT O&S COMMITTEE**

**1000 hours on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2019, Committee Room 2 – Actions**

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**Present:**

Councillor Liz Clements (Chair)

Councillors Muhammad Afzal and Timothy Huxtable.

**Also Present:**

Simon Needle, Principal Arboriculturist/ Principal Ecologist, BCC

Baseema Begum, Scrutiny Officer

Rose Kiely, Overview & Scrutiny Manager

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**1. NOTICE OF RECORDING/WEBCAST**

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

**2. APOLOGIES**

Cllrs Armstrong, Choudhry Freeman, Johnson and Jones.

**3. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS**

None.

**4. SUSTAINABILITY & TRANSPORT O&S COMMITTEE ACTION NOTES**

The action notes of the meetings held on the 16<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> October were agreed.

**5. LOCAL ENGINEERING SERVICE RE-DESIGN**

Due to the late notice received by the Chair of the unavailability of an officer to cover the item it was agreed that it would be rescheduled.

**RESOLVED: -**

1. Item to be rescheduled to a future meeting.

**6. TRACKING – BIRMINGHAM TREE POLICY INQUIRY REPORT**

(See document No. 1)

The Chair, Cllr Clements welcomed Simon Needle to the meeting who updated Members on the progress made on outstanding recommendations as listed in the report circulated.

During discussion with Members the following points and queries were made: -

- The slippage in the time taken to implement some of the recommendations has been due to a reduction in staffing levels. Some of the specific work set out in the recommendations requires a certain expertise and falls on a small number of staff that are already working under pressure on a number of other priorities. This is on top of re-structuring that has taken place making it difficult to achieve the outcomes and ambitions set.
- The broader role that trees play in the environment including their valuable role in acting as a flood mitigation measure should be noted and included in the city's tree strategy.
- The re-procurement of the Highways PFI contract is an opportunity to get things right in the existing PFI contract that the Council would have liked to change.
- Trees that are owned by BCC Highways but fall outside the scope of the Highway PFI are dealt with separately by an arrangement with the Parks and Grounds Maintenance service. There is however no budget to maintain these trees therefore clarity is needed on who is looking after these trees.
- In response Simon Needle stated that there is a need to address some of the issues raised in relation to tree planting as part of the Highways PFI contract. The key issue is that of tree maintenance and finding monies to do this. The Council is looking at various sources of funding that will help address this issue. The re-negotiation of the PFI is an opportunity to address the wider issues raised.
- The benefits of trees are wide-ranging including the positive impact on air quality and should be noted in light of the Council declaring a climate change emergency. However, trees do need to be maintained adequately to address issues of shedding in autumn where leaves can cause issues of slippage on roads and pavements. Gullies, drains and ponding issues should also be noted along with the impact of heavy rainfall and flooding events. Therefore, the draft tree strategy should address considerate tree planting and dealing with nature's events.
- The ambition of trees in the context of the climate change emergency declared by the Council was highlighted and whether there was something more to be included in the Birmingham Design Guide outside of what is noted in the city's

Tree Policy. The role and good work of Birmingham Trees for Life (BTfL) was also highlighted and enquiry was made as to whether there was a role for them in future policy developments.

- It was confirmed that canopy coverage is one of the better measures used to assess how a city can be resilient against future climate trends and the added benefits of trees to the environment in terms of benefits to air quality.
- The city currently has a 18.6% canopy coverage and it is hoped that the Forest Commission's forest research team will share data that will enable Council officers to understand some of the reasons as to why there has been a change in tree coverage during the last 20 years.
- It was explained that information for applicants within the Birmingham Design Guide and design management policy documents gives the necessary information on what canopy coverage is within their ward or site. Data is collected on a 3-yearly basis and this will allow for analysis for comparison purposes.
- There is a need to establish trees and to give them the correct environment. Work with developers earlier in the planning process is essential to this to allow for the correct type and quality of trees to be planted. The emphasis should be on quality rather than quantity to get the overall benefit. Getting higher and better tree coverage should be the aim. The ambition is to get 25% canopy coverage across the city. Presently some areas of the city area have over 30% whereas other areas are as low as 9%. Therefore the aim is to increase the canopy in those areas as there are clear benefits to air quality and the environment.
- There are multiple data sources that can be used to establish where trees are going to be most beneficial for example where they can act to mitigate flooding. The WM Air Project based at the University of Birmingham has further data and this can be used to target specific areas.
- The Future Parks Accelerator Project is a 2-year project looking at how parks are managed long term. As part of this work further investigation may be done to look at changing infrastructure and the make-up and value of existing green spaces. This can then be used as an opportunity to look at the benefit of trees in areas such as health and wellbeing, housing and education to see how these can be integrated into future funding mechanisms. In support of this the Council can also look at how other sectors can support its aims.
- The importance of apprenticeships was noted however it was highlighted that there has been a reduction in the available accredited horticultural learning offer in the West Midlands area. It was noted that there was a big challenge for the further education and skills sector to address these issues in light of the climate change emergency as this is where many of the jobs and careers of the future will lie.

**RESOLVED: -**

1. The Chair to write to the Cabinet Member for Transport & Environment in respect of the vacant Highways Tree Asset Manager post.

2. The next update will be scheduled onto the Committee's work programme in approximately 6 month's time.

## **7. SUSTAINABILITY & TRANSPORT O&S COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME**

(See document No.2)

The Chair explained that a number of decisions have been delayed due to purdah rules and as a consequence the Committee's work programme has been affected. The work programme has been amended to reflect this and those items will be rescheduled appropriately.

Members then discussed the possibility of holding a May meeting to enable all the items on the Committee's work programme to be scheduled during the current municipal year.

Cllr Huxtable raised the issue of the update on the Highways Maintenance and Management PFI contract and informed the Committee that an informal member working group had been set up by the Cabinet Member for Transport & Environment Cllr Waseem Zaffar to consider issues relating to the contract. The lead member of the informal working group is Cllr Mike Leddy and Cllr Huxtable requested that it might be helpful if he is invited to a future meeting when this item is due to be discussed.

The Chair stated that due to the changes on the work programme for a number of reasons the Committee's December meeting will be used to focus on the cross-party Climate Change Emergency motion agreed at City Council in June. The Cabinet Member for Transport & Environment, Cllr Waseem Zaffar is unable to attend due to a prior commitment but has asked relevant senior officers to attend.

Furthermore, the Chair explained that cross party lead members who are on the Route to Zero (R20) taskforce set up as part of that motion will be invited to attend the meeting.

Cllr Clements added that the budget consultation and performance indicators were also areas of interest for the Committee to do some further work on.

### **RESOLVED: -**

1. Cllr Leddy is invited to a future meeting of the Committee when the Highways PFI contract is due to be discussed.

## **8. DATE OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

Noted.

## **9. REQUEST(S) FOR CALL IN/COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION/PETITIONS (IF ANY)**

None.

**10. OTHER URGENT BUSINESS**

None.

**11. AUTHORITY TO CHAIRMAN 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.

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The meeting ended at 10:55 hours.