

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

SUSTAINABILITY AND TRANSPORT O&S COMMITTEE

1400 hours on 17th March 2021, Online Meeting – Actions

Present:

Councillor Liz Clements (Chair)

Councillors Olly Armstrong, Muhammad Afzal, Zakir Choudhry, Eddie Freeman, Timothy Huxtable and Julie Johnson.

Also Present:

Alderman Tony Kennedy

Hannah Hogan, Flood Risk Manager

Mel Jones, Head of Transport Planning & Network Strategy

Joe Green, Travel Demand Manager

Ceri Saunders, Acting Group Overview & Scrutiny Manager

Baseema Begum, Scrutiny Officer

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

Councillor Zaker Choudhry notified the Chair that he had to leave the meeting early for a medical appointment.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

Standing declarations noted.

4. SUSTAINABILITY & TRANSPORT O&S COMMITTEE ACTION NOTES

The action notes of the meeting held on the 17th February were agreed.

Cllr Clements stated that inquiries would be made to see if Cllr O'Shea has responded to the issues raised in the briefing note sent to all Members from Birmingham Friends of the Earth in relation to the waste procurement process.

5. FLOOD RISK AND MANAGEMENT ANNUAL REPORT

(See Item No.5)

The Chair welcomed Alderman Tony Kennedy and Hannah Hogan, Flood Risk Manager who talked through the presentation circulated and during discussion with members the following points were made: -

- The Council is working with the Environment Agency (EA) in relation to the significant flood risk presented by the River Cole. The EA are struggling to get outcome measures that provide a cost-effective alleviation solution. All alleviation aspects from EA have been priced out and are not in line with the partnership funding rules. The EA are still looking to develop the River Cole Valley strategy and the Council, Severn Trent and other partners are lobbying the EA on this. There is a baseline solution or alleviation from property flood resilience as highlighted, but this does not deal with the flood risk itself and will only safeguard the fabric of the buildings.
- The Council has put in a bid to the EA to deal with waste management and an environmental drive in the Sparkbrook and Sparkhill area as this is a significant factor in causing flooding in relation to the River Cole and the impact on businesses that are experiencing regular flooding. The bid will be assessed alongside other national bids. If the Council is successful it will have discernible benefits.
- The Council does work with the Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust in relation to the protection of wildlife within the area of the River Cole. There are some ecological and environmental benefits in relation to the measures being put in place however without an engineered alleviation scheme the full benefits won't be achieved.
- The new 6-year flooding plan highlights the issues in relation to properties that have been flooded historically including those that are known and those at historic risk whether private or council-owned. A key issue with installing property resilience measures is that ownership and long-term maintenance has to be agreed with residents and homeowners. There are challenges such as if there is an absentee landlord or if a house is sold in the future whether the new owner will partake in the scheme and the impact of this. However, property resilience is key and the team welcome input from members to identify those dwellings at risk.
- Lots of learning happened from the 2018 flood event and this helped with being prepared for the flooding in June 2020. This included good support from Kier who are responsible for maintaining the public highway under the Highways PFI and close working with the Council's Resilience team. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic the 'environment' cell set up has worked effectively in

helping different teams work together and liaise better for example in waste management and street cleansing etc. in relation to issues with flooding. Cross-team working took place to ensure site visits were undertaken and efforts focussed safely with the correct PPE.

- In addition, there was one issue that didn't go so well and that was the confidence in the amber alert weather forecast issued. The amber alert issued by the EA was a blanket across the country and there was no detail on where and the intensity of the rainfall to be expected so that it could be prepared for. However significant flooding on the Stratford Road did lead to Severn Trent identifying the problem area and working to fix it. Partnership working really helped manage the flooding event in 2020 and comparatively Birmingham didn't get the worse of the flooding in comparison to neighbouring areas.
- In terms of how communities protect themselves against flooding there are 4 Flood Action Groups (FLAGs) in the city and a couple of informal groups have also been set up that will become formalised in the future (set up as a result of the 2018 flooding event). In areas where flooding is a concern it is best to set up a FLAG as it means that the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) can support residents with resilience measures such as sandbags. The benefit to the community is there is one point of contact and this also helps with lobbying.
- The Council's Flood Support Team can help support those interested in setting up a FLAG and any issues or concerns that residents or businesses may have in relation to flooding.
- The level of groundwater is dependant on the properties, soil and aqua in the area and historically has been affected by abstractions from groundwater and discharges into rivers and water environments. There also has not been as many abstractions as in the past and ground water is starting to rise. It has been a wet year and pooling of water on the surface etc. Groundwater flood risk is quite hard to address however some things can be done to buildings to help them become more resilient to flooding. One way that it can be dealt with is through setting aside land that can be used for wetlands however this does depend on the quality of the surrounding land and several factors need to be considered. The Council does want to work with the Trent Rivers Trust, Wildlife Trust and Natural England and other partners to protect wildlife as part of this and to improve placemaking among other factors.
- Members can alert areas at risk of or have issues with flooding to the Council's Flood Action team as well as the EA. The Flood Action Team works with partners to identify problems and provide help. Issues such as development of areas, local land planning, loss of greenery etc. can be identified and worked through. The focus is on internal flooding as that is where the funding is given but the Council can work with partners to provide help.

The Chair thanked and offered her congratulations to Hannah Hogan and her team for all the hard work that has been carried out during the pandemic and an exceptionally busy year.

RESOLVED: -

- The report was noted.

6. ACTIVE TRAVEL FUND – TRANCHE 2 UPDATE

(See Item No.6)

Mel Jones, Head of Transport Planning & Network Strategy and Joe Green, Travel Demand Manager shared the key points from the presentation and during discussion with Members the following responses were made to queries raised: -

- More School Streets schemes are included as part of the Active Travel Fund (ATF) Tranche 2 under the 'Places for People' package. Some funding has been used to match, expand and improve existing measures as part of the safer routes to schools' schemes. There are also measures for some new schemes as part of the school streets project in some of the 'Places for People' areas and how these can be expanded.
- As part of the evaluation of Tranche 1 of the ATF monitoring is taking place of Low Traffic Neighbourhood pilots such Kings Heath. Modal shift and behaviour change are being encouraged and there is anecdotal feedback that people are making changes. Concerns have been raised about displacement of air pollution and congestion and it is envisaged that with less traffic in local areas it will impact the level of air pollution rather than it being displaced (by fewer vehicles making journeys leading to 'evaporation' rather than displacement). This has happened in other places such as London in similar schemes however there is a period of adjustment and adaptation to be expected. The Council will be monitoring the impact and have noted the concerns raised.
- There are 2-3 locations that have been identified as quick win measures as highlighted by orange pinpoints on the map within the presentation. There is a restriction on the number of schemes that can be installed across the city due to funding. It is hoped that future funding will become available that will allow for other schemes to be identified.
- All Councillors will be engaged with ahead of development of the schemes for Tranche 2. Arrangements will also be made to include local stakeholder input into proposed schemes for Tranche 2.
- The evaluation report on Tranche 1 is being finalised and further details on when this will be available for circulation will be shared when available. The report picks up on feedback and information provided as part of the review of Tranche 1 and contains some relatively high-level recommendations taking on-board the lessons learnt. Recommendations will identify quick-win mitigation measures, snagging issues and where lessons/proposals for Tranche 2 can be implemented. Any changes will be communicated to Members and elected Members and others will be consulted with as part of this.
- Unfortunately monitoring of all roads in the city is not feasible in relation to displacement of traffic due to new measures being introduced. It has been noted that more robust monitoring is required.

- A lot of activity is taking place on the road network in the city centre that is taking advantage of fewer vehicles on the roads due to the pandemic.

The Chair thanked the officers and said she was encouraged by all this work and noted that although air quality thresholds and World Health Organisation targets were currently not being met progress was being made. It was added that with the Clean Air Zone due to start in June this would also have some effect on this as well as the work taking place on encouraging more people to walk and cycle shorter journeys.

RESOLVED: -

1. The report was noted.
2. Mel Jones to share further details with Cllr Afzal in relation to roadworks in the city centre and providing early notification of highway works to road users.

7. WORK PROGRAMME

(See Item No. 7)

The Chair explained that the postponement of items scheduled for the April meeting due in part to purdah rules and that these items would be scheduled appropriately in the new municipal year.

Cllr Clements invited members to put forward suggestions for the April meeting and a discussion was had that included looking at issues relating to climate change in further detail.

The Chair added that an announcement from Government on the revised bus strategy and the importance highlighted about bus priority was of key interest and this is something that she would like to pick up as part of the future work programme.

Cllr Huxtable suggested looking more closely at what part the city can play in improving and supporting biodiversity with input from relevant stakeholders. Reference was made to how the Council's green and blue assets could be used to shape people and places in the future.

RESOLVED: -

1. The report was noted.
2. The Chair to talk through the detail with Cllr Huxtable and the scrutiny officer in relation to improving and biodiversity in the city ahead of a future meeting.

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

None.

9. OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

In relation to issues raised by Members on the efficiency of old street lighting and the cost alongside the announcement of additional government funding for safety purposes including street lighting and CCTV in public places (and how these funds would be used in Birmingham) the Chair, Cllr Clements confirmed that a briefing note with further detail on these issues would be requested from the Highways section.

10. 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.

The meeting ended at 16:09 hours.