

Minutes of Economy Skills Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board

**Thursday 30th September 2021 at 5.45pm
in the Council Chamber, Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

Present: Councillor Moore (Chair);
Councillors Abrahams (Vice-Chair); S Gill, Jalil, Kaur, Millar
Owen and C Padda.

Also present: Councillors Bostan (Cabinet Member for Environment)

Officers: Tony McGovern (Director of Regeneration and Growth),
Oliver Ford (Transportation Planning Officer), Stephnie
Hancock (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Andy Miller
(Strategic Planning and Transportation Manager), Elizabeth
Stephens (Environmental Health Officer) Andy Thorpe
(Healthy Urban Development Officer).

20/21 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Councillor Rollins.

21/21 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting



22/21

Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 22 July 2021 are confirmed as a correct record.

23/21

Additional Item of Business

There were no additional items of business to consider.

24/21

Sandwell's Air Quality Action Plan – progress report

Further to Minute No. 9/21 (of the meeting held on 25th March 2021), the Board received an update on the implementation of Sandwell's Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP).

Following the adoption of the Plan by the Council and its acceptance by DEFRA's Local Air Quality Management team, several actions had taken place since the last report to the Board:

- Monitoring and reporting
- Specific projects
- Promotional activities
- Briefing for elected members.

Monitoring and Reporting

Particular air pollutants were regularly monitored to assess levels of pollution across Sandwell and to prioritise pollutants which had been identified to have the highest risk of breaching the air quality objectives. Various aspects of the monitoring programme had been completed over the last six months, including the continuous monitoring of nitrogen dioxide levels using diffusion tubes and a full dataset was being achieved, and the renewal and modernisation of equipment at four permanent air monitoring stations to allow for accurate and reliable monitoring of pollution levels.

Additionally, low cost air quality monitors (Zephyrs), which were capable of monitoring various types of air pollution, had been purchased to enable air quality projects to take place at specific locations. Currently, 13 of the planned 21 monitors were in location, eight were located next to faith centres, two monitors had been located at potential air pollution hotspots in Smethwick and another in Wednesbury, and one monitor had also been co-located

next to a permanent monitoring station site for calibration purposes. Air pollution monitoring data from across Sandwell was published in an Annual Status Report (ASR) which is submitted to DEFRA.

Specific Projects

- There were plans in place to declare the whole of Sandwell as a Smoke Control Area (SCA). SCAs were designed to reduce the emission of smoke from chimneys by requiring the use of either authorised fuel or by using DEFRA “exempt appliances”, for example certain burners and stoves.
- The Council had been awarded Air Quality Grant funding by DEFRA to pursue a project designed to improve and increase awareness of air quality issues by engaging with faith leaders and their communities. The two-year project involved eight faith centres in year one and another eight centres in year two. Engagement with faith centres had been successful, and air quality monitoring units and display equipment had been located at each centre. Creation of the bespoke web-based dashboard to report air quality data in real-time on the display equipment was almost complete. Ongoing support would be provided to each centre to ensure that they receive adequate help and advice and that interest in the project was maintained through the year.
- Work was being undertaken with the Energy Saving Trust (EST) to address emissions from fleet vehicles and business mileage.
- The most effective ways to influence and improve low and ultra-low emission vehicle use in Sandwell’s taxi fleet were being explored. A survey was being devised by the Energy Saving Trust (EST) to gauge opinions about electric vehicles (EV) from taxi and private hire drivers.
- The Black Country Ultra Low Emission Vehicle (ULEV) Strategy was being coordinated by Sandwell officers. The Strategy aimed to accelerate the uptake of ULEVs across the area in anticipation of a nationwide 2030 ban on the sale of petrol and diesel vehicles.
- A recent bid for funding for the installation of 37 double EVCPs (74 in total) across the borough had been successful and further on the proposals would be brought to a future meeting.

Promotional activities

- Clean Air Day had taken place on 17 June 2021. This was the UK’s largest air pollution campaign which aimed to engage

people through social media. This year Clean Air Day had benefitted from national promotional work.

- Sandwell's "Great Big Green Week", was held between 18 September and 26th September 2021, helped to progress awareness and action for Air Quality and Climate Change.
- Sustainable Travel awareness was ongoing through the Council's collaboration with Transport for West Midlands (TfWM) in relation to the Government funded Active Travel Fund (ATF) project. This also included engagement with schools and workplaces to encourage walking and cycling, improvements to Sandwell's cycling network, promotion of car sharing, the e-scooter trial in West Bromwich, and the promotion of walking through the national 'Go Jauntly' web application.

Elected members had been engaged in many events to increase awareness of air quality issues.

Following comments and questions from members of the Board, the following responses were made, and issues highlighted:-

- The launch of a website had allowed Sandwell residents to check their nearest air quality monitor to check the air quality levels in their area.
- Officers were collating a list of faith centres interested in participating next year's programme. Officers emphasised the importance of equality, therefore were seeking to involve faith centres from across the Borough.
- Members highlighted the importance of engaging with schools and including them in similar future projects.
- Speed limit reductions on the M5 had been implemented as a result of recommendations from a member working group. Concerns around the location of the M6 toll section and its impact on air pollution due to congestion had been raised at the Combined Authority.
- Sandwell's car sharing scheme, Lift Share, was part of a national programme.
- Transport for West Midlands was submitting a bid to the Air Quality Grant for a number of buses to be retrofitted to comply with Euro 6 standard. Many bus providers were currently engaged with replacing their fleets.
- The Cabinet Member had raised concerns about the re-location of older buses to Sandwell routes due to their bigger carbon footprints. Assurances had been given by the West Midlands Mayor that they would be replaced with electric buses.

- A Bus Service Improvement Plan would be required to bid for funding to move to an all-electric fleet. Sandwell's plan was due to be submitted to DEFRA in October.
- The Council's fleet vehicles were replaced every 7 years. A report would be presented to the next meeting on the fleet management and replacement plan.
- Sandwell's biggest emission source was from refuse collection vehicles. Officers were trying to obtain data from Serco on its fleet emissions.
- New planning regulations now required new developments to include infrastructure for electric vehicles.

Resolved:-

- (1) that a report be submitted to the next meeting of the Board on the Council's proposals in relation to the successful funding bid for the installation of electric vehicle charging points across the borough;
- (2) that the Council increases its lobbying activity with external stakeholders to ensure that it receives its fair share of funding towards improvements to highways infrastructure to support electric vehicles;
- (3) that a report be submitted to the next meeting of the Board on the Council's fleet management plan and proposals to replace its fleet with electric vehicles.

25/21

West Bromwich E-Scooter Trial

Further to Minute No. 102/20 of the Cabinet (meeting held on 18 November 2020) the Board considered a report on the current e-Scooter Trial taking place in West Bromwich.

West Bromwich was chosen as the location for the trial based on its high footfall; low speed roads (due to West Bromwich's 20mph zone); transport links (in particular West Midlands Metro and West Bromwich Bus Station); day time population (estimated pre-Covid at approximately 13,600) and size (just over one square mile). 50 Voi scooters were operational in the trial zone.

The trial had been extended to March 2022, which would allow the Council to assess the operation of e-scooters in a fully open town centre environment, as opposed to what had primarily been a partially open down centre due to lockdown.

The speed limit and operating hours had been increased, which brought the West Bromwich trial into line with regional and national trails, which would improve the quality of the data collected from the trial.

Scooters were one of the new forms of transport emerging as technology, cost effective manufacturing and batteries improved. In a wider initiative to promote walking and cycling as part of a green and healthy recovery from COVID 19, the Secretary of State for Transport had announced the acceleration of twelve-month E-Scooter trials planned for 2021.

Scooter parking would continue to be 'dockless'. Apart from defined 'no park zones', users would be able to leave their scooters wherever their trip ended as long as it followed parking standards. Parking docks or incentivised parking zones (IPZs) may be installed by Voi based on where trips naturally began and ended within the extended the trial zone.

Users were be able to book and pay for the E-Scooters using Voi's smartphone app. Users would pay a basic rate of 20p per minute, or £12 per hour.

Since the trial began in December 2019, the West Bromwich trial zone had seen:

- 85,591km travelled.
- 1,614 total users.
- 0.7 average rides per vehicle per day.
- 0 Serious injuries (self reported, broken bones etc.).
- 4 slight injuries (self reported, falling off scooter, bruises, cuts).
- Average of 5 reports of pavement riding per week.

Following comments and questions from members of the Board, the following responses were made, and issues highlighted:-

- Use of illegal e-scooters continued and the majority of serious accidents, including the recently reported death in Wolverhampton, had occurred due to illegal and inappropriate use.
- Users were required to register a driving licence to use e-scooters as part of the trial.
- Voi's model of e-scooter included a GPS tracking device which recorded where the e-Scooter was located - if a scooter was to

leave the trial zone or enter a 'no ride zone' as reported by GPS, the engine would cut out.

- The trial would enable officers to identify issues and gather sufficient data to report back to the Department for Transport and allow Sandwell to have a say in discussions around potential legalisation.
- The e-scooters' speed was currently limited to 10mph.
- The Council could halt the trial at any point.
- The trial had been positive so far. The use of e-scooters was part of the wider conversation about sustainable transportation to reduce emissions.
- Members felt that the cost of the scooters was unaffordable for many.
- The area of the trial zone would not be extended due to concerns around the safety of the highways in the extension area.

The Board would maintain oversight of the trial.

26/21

Update on Waste Services and the Cleanliness of the Borough Review

It was reported that data was currently being collated for members prior to the first meeting of the working group taking place.

The Chair highlighted the efforts of the frontline staff during the pandemic and emphasised that the inquiry would focus on the wider management and performance of the contract.

The working group currently included Councillors Abrahams, Jalil, Kaur, Moore and C Padda. Councillors Millar and S Gill also indicated that they would like to participate in the review.

27/21

Scrutiny Action Tracker

The Board noted progress on previous actions and recommendations.

28/21

Work Programme

The Board noted its work programme for 2021/22.

In reference to Minute No. 24/21 (above), items would be added on the following: _

- Proposals in relation to the successful funding bid for the installation of electric vehicle charging points across the borough.
- Fleet management plan and proposals to replace its fleet with electric vehicles

29/21 **Cabinet Forward Plan**

The Board noted the Cabinet forward plan for the period September 2021 to January 2022.

30/21 **Exclusion of the Public and Press**

Resolved that the public and press be excluded from the rest of the meeting to avoid the possible disclosure of exempt information under Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act, 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006, relating to the financial and business affairs of any person, including the authority holding that information.

31/21 **Towns Fund Programme Update**

The Board received a report and outline of the current position on the Towns Fund Programme.

Meeting ended at 7:34pm

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