

Minutes of Economy Skills Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board

**Wednesday 9th February 2022 at 5.45pm
in the Council Chamber, Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

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

Officers: Alice Davey (Director of Borough Economy), Tony
McGovern (Director of Regeneration and Growth),
Matthew Huggins (Interim Service Manager Parks and
Grounds).

01/22 **Apologies for Absence**

No apologies were received.

02/22 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting

03/22 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 November 2021 were received. In respect of Minute No. 37/21 (Levelling Up Fund) it was reported that the bid to upgrade the Metro Depot in Wednesbury had not been successful, however the scheme would instead be funded through The City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement.

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 8 November 2021 are confirmed as a correct record.

04/22 **Urgent Additional Item of Business**

There were no urgent additional items of business to consider.

05/22 **Emergency Active Travel Fund 2020**

The Board received an overview of the Emergency Active Travel Fund 2020.

The Fund had been announced by Government in May 2020 as part of its preparations for the lifting of the first period of Covid-19 restrictions and to encourage a greener, more sustainable return to economic and social activity.

£250m had been allocated nationally in Tranche 1, of which £3.85m had been allocated to West Midlands via the Combined Authority. The Department for Transport (DfT) had stipulated that Tranche 1 of the fund had to be used for temporary measures to aid social distancing, encourage cycling, or temporary bus lanes to encourage use of public transport. 57 separate schemes had been funded across the seven metropolitan authorities, of which four were in Sandwell at a cost of £296k:-

- SAN001 - A two-way cycle route with light segregation was implemented between Oldbury Town Centre and Sandwell and Dudley railway station, continuing to NCNR 81 and canal access off Bromford Road.
- SAN001A - A series of modifications were made in Oldbury Town Centre. Birmingham Street was re-designated as one-way with the other lane reallocated to pedestrians to widen the footway outside retail businesses and bus stops using temporary barriers to allow social distancing.
- SAN002 - Smethwick High Street was re-designated as one-way between Fenton Street and the junction with lower High Street, with the other lane reallocated to pedestrians to widen the footway outside retail businesses and bus stops using temporary barriers to allow social distancing.

- SAN002A - A two-way pop-up cycle lane was implemented on the A457 Tollhouse Way from Smethwick Rolfe St Station to Smethwick Galton Bridge Station with new cycle parking installed adjacent to Rolfe St Station.

Due to time restraints on expenditure of the funds, it had not been possible to carry out the consultation activity usually associated with traffic management projects. The changes had therefore been implemented through Experimental Traffic Regulation Orders, which allowed the schemes to be implemented and feedback to be sought on their operation.

All four temporary schemes had now been removed following the receipt of feedback and consultation with the Cabinet Member for Environment. However, as the Council had been able to demonstrate the successful delivery of the DfT objectives using Tranche 1 funding, funding had been approved under Tranche 2 for a number of permanent projects in Bearwood, Blackheath, Wednesbury and a joint scheme with Dudley on the A4123. These schemes were based on the Sandwell Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan.

It was also reported that the Council had been successful in securing funding of £4.62m through the Government's Towns Fund initiative to provide a high quality permanent off-road two-way cycle route adjacent to the A457 between Galton Bridge Station and the new Midland Metropolitan University Hospital at Grove Lane. This route would form part of the Sandwell Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan and the first phase of the project, from Galton Bridge to Rolfe Street had been completed in Summer 2021. Further phases would be delivered by 2024.

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

- Birmingham City Council had received funding for a similar segregated cycle route between the city centre and the new Midland Metropolitan University Hospital at Grove Lane. It was intended for the two cycle routes to join up. A business case was being developed to

extend the cycle route to Oldbury Ringway. This would create a segregated cycle route from Oldbury to Birmingham City Centre.

- Funding had not been distributed on a percentage basis. Birmingham and Coventry already had a developed cycle infrastructure programme in place, therefore funding had accelerated progress.
- TfWM was required to report back to Government on the programme as a whole (all 57 schemes across West Midlands). There was no requirement to report back on a scheme by scheme basis.
- As two of the schemes were social distancing projects, they had become redundant when restrictions had been lifted.
- Had the two cycle projects remained in place, the Council would have been required to report annually on the effectiveness of the schemes.

06/22

2022 Mowing Season

(Councillor Abrahams joined the meeting during the consideration of this agenda item.)

The Board received a report outlining the grass mowing schedule for 2022.

The mowing season ran from 28th March to 28th October and was an in-house service, covering over 4 square miles of land. Mowing was split into three groups, with the following outputs:

Mowing Type	Description	Outputs	Plots	Sq. Metres
Amenity Mowing (Cut and Drop)	Mow/Strim Grass Plots – no collection of clippings	Ave: every 4 weeks / min. 7 times per season	2,472	3,704,759
Prestige Mowing – Cut and Drop	Increased Frequency – Mow/Strim Grass Plots –	Ave: every 2 weeks / min. 14 times per season	77	99,273

	no collection of clippings			
Prestige Mowing – Cut and Collected	Increased Frequency – Mow/Strim Grass Plots – clippings collected and disposed	Ave: every 2 weeks / min 14 times per season	121	282,759

Prestige mowing also took place at high profile locations such as bowling greens and Green Flag parks on a more frequent basis.

The schedule was designed to make the best use of Council resources, however, there could be additional demand outside of the schedule, dependent on weather and growth speed.

The schedule was published online and at libraries. Officers undertook to look at publishing the schedule in the Sandwell Herald in addition.

It was noted that breakdown of machinery could now become more frequent due to the age of the fleet. However, it remained fit for purpose for 2022 and a pro-active approach was being taken to ensure that replacement parts were in stock and available in advance and a fleet replacement programme was also in place.

A new performance and tracking system was in place for the start of 2022 mowing season, which would give real time updates on delivery, performance monitoring on time taken at each site and quality. It would also allow the service to use this data for more specific communications to the public on scheduled mowing for open spaces.

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

- Housing Revenue Accounts works were included within the schedule, but a more detailed written response would be to the Board.

- A strategy on rewilding and converting green spaces into meadow land would be introduced towards the end of 2022. Officers undertook to consult members at town level for a on the development of the strategy.
- The focus for 2022 was getting service performance back to 'business as usual', and secondly, using the data collated through the new performance and tracking system to assist in identifying appropriate locations for rewilding and creation of green spaces.
- Where privately owned land was overgrown, officers in Regeneration and Growth worked with developers to tidy it up.
- The schedule was based on minimum staffing requirements and included both full time staff and seasonal staff.

Resolved:-

- (1) that town fora are consulted on the draft strategy for rewilding;
- (2) that the draft strategy for rewilding is presented to the Board at a future meeting.

07/22

Update on Waste Services and the Cleanliness of the Borough Review

The chair provided an update on the progress of the scrutiny review on the Performance and Management of the Waste Partnership Contract.

The working group had completed its evidence gathering in December 2021 and the draft report and the recommendations were to be presented to the Board at its meeting on 11 February 2022. It was anticipated that the final report would be submitted to Cabinet on 23 February 2022.

08/22 **Scrutiny Action Tracker**

The Board noted the progress on previously agreed actions and recommendations.

The Director of Borough Economy undertook to circulate the final Street Naming Policy to the Board prior to its submission to Cabinet.

09/22 **Cabinet Forward Plan**

The Board noted the Cabinet forward plan for the period February to May 2022.

10/22 **Work Programme**

The Board noted its work programme for the remainder of the 2022/23 municipal year.

Following a decision of the Council at its meeting on 18 January 2022, the Board would be conducting a review of the Strategic Road Safety Plan 2017-22. A draft scope would be submitted to the meeting on 10 March 2022 for consideration. The Board agreed to set up a working group to carry out the review. Those members who presented the motion to the Council but were not a member of this Board would also be consulted on the scope.

The Board noted the elements of the external auditors Value for Money Governance Review that were relevant to its terms of reference. The Board would be updated at each meeting on the implementation of the associated recommendations.

The Director of Borough Economy reported that the Street Cleansing Recovery Plan had been received from Serco on 3 February 2022. She undertook to bring Serco's Fleet Replacement Programme to the Board once it had been received. It was highlighted that 19 new vehicles had now been delivered between Christmas and the new year.

The Director of Regeneration and Growth confirmed that a report on the regeneration pipeline would be presented to

Cabinet on 23 March 2022. The draft report would be circulated to members to the Board for comment prior.

Resolved that a working group, comprising the following Councillors, is established to carry out a review of the Strategy Road safety Plan:-

Hughes
C Padda
S S Gill
Kaur
Owen
Abrahams

11/22 **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.

12/22 **Levelling Up Fund**

Further to Minute No. 37/21 (of 8 November 2021), the Board was consulted on the longlist of Towns Fund projects currently being discussed with local MPs.

The Board's comments and suggestions would be included in the long list and discussed with MPs.

Meeting ended at 7:51pm

Contact: democratic_services@sandwell.gov.uk