

Minutes of Economy Skills Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board

**Thursday 10th March 2022 at 5.45pm
in the Council Chamber, Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

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

Officers: Tony McGovern (Director of Regeneration and
Growth), Robin Weare (Service Manager – Highways),
Jenna Langford (Regeneration Manager), Stephnie
Hancock (Senior Democratic Services Officer) and
Oliver Ford (Transportation Planning Officer).

17/22 **Apologies for Absence**

No apologies were received.

18/22 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

19/22 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 9
and 11 February 2022 are confirmed as a correct
record.

20/22 **Urgent Additional Item of Business**

There were no urgent additional items of business to
consider.

On Street Residential Electric Vehicle Charging Scheme

It was reported that the Council, in partnership with Black Country Transport, had been successful in a bid to the Department of Transport for £300,000 to deliver 37 dual socket electric vehicle chargepoints (74 sockets). The Black Country ULEV Strategy highlighted a need to deliver 175 7kW public charging sockets by 2025 to support the boroughs transition to ULEVs in light of the Government's 2030 ban on the sale of new petrol and diesel cars.

The chargepoints would be located on streets without off street parking where installation of private, individual chargepoints was not possible.

25% matched funding was required from the chargepoint operator, who would deliver the hard infrastructure and manage the day to day operation of the charge points on a concession basis. As a contingency, funding had been identified within existing transport budgets, but was unlikely to be required.

Locations for the chargepoints had been selected based the following criteria:

- non-availability of off-street parking;
- resident requests for charging infrastructure;
- suitable pavement and road width to accommodate a charge point;
- availability of on-street sites not directly located outside dwellings;
- sufficient electrical grid capacity to serve a charge-point at a non prohibitive cost;
- likely ultra low emission vehicle adoption in an area by residents, as assessed in the Black Country ULEV Strategy.

To ensure standardisation across the region and to reduce the amount of replicated work, procurement of a charge point operator was being led by the Transport for West Midlands procurement team for each of the four Black Country authorities, with guidance and oversight from Black Country Transport and internal procurement colleagues. Key

considerations were low end-user costs and ease of use of the charge points by residents. Although one operator would be appointed for the Black Country, each local authority would enter into its own concession contract with the operator.

Consultation with affected residents had closed on 11th February and findings were being reviewed. However, out of the 4,800 letters sent out to affected residents only 27 had responded, objecting to the installation of a charge point near their home.

The following was noted in response to members' comments and questions:-

- A bid had been made for funding from the City Region Sustainable Development Fund to support the installation of more chargepoints across the borough.
- The funding was for residential streets only.
- As demand increased more chargepoints would be installed.
- There would be no restrictions on use of the spaces in front of the charging points so residents would be expected to self-police.
- There would be no loss of parking spaces in the streets identified and locations for the chargepoints were at the end of streets/roads to make more accessible.
- The Black Country Ultra Low Emission Vehicle Strategy identified potential car park sites for chargepoints in town centres.
- Transport for West Midlands was working on developing a network of charging stations that could operate like fuel stations. There was also private sector interest in the same.
- The council would not enter into a contract with an operator without guarantee that the matched funding could be met.
- The chargepoints would be 7kw so on average it would take around 3 – 4 hours to fully charge a vehicle. However, some on-street chargepoints could provide 24kw.
- There would be no help for residents to purchase electric vehicles.
- The Black Country Ultra Low Emission Vehicle Strategy promised 115 chargepoints by 2025.

- The imminent increases in utility bills would not be a prohibitive factor as electric vehicles were cheaper to run than petrol and diesel vehicles.
- There was no increased risk of vandalism to cars parked in chargepoint spaces.
- There would be strict performance indicators in place for the operator to respond to vandalism of chargepoints.

Resolved that a progress report on the installation and operation of on-street electric vehicle chargepoints be provided to the Board in 12 months.

[Councillor Jalil left the meeting after consideration of this item.]

22/22 **Towns Fund Tranche 3 Full Business Cases**

Further to Minute No. 31/21 (of 30th September 2021), the Director of Regeneration and Growth and the Regeneration Manager provided an update on the Towns Fund and the business cases for the Tranche 3 projects.

In September 2019, Government announced that 101 Towns had been identified to benefit from the Towns Fund, to deliver long term economic growth through Urban regeneration, planning and land use; skills and enterprise infrastructure; and Connectivity. In Sandwell the Towns of West Bromwich, Smethwick, and Rowley Regis were chosen by Government.

On 3 March 2021, the government had confirmed approval of Town Investment Plans for each of the three towns and Heads of Terms were offered for West Bromwich £25m Smethwick £23.5m and Rowley Regis £19m, making Sandwell's total Towns Fund allocation £67.5m. The Towns Fund projects were divided into 3 tranches for Government submission based on complexity. Three projects had been approved in 2021 as part of Tranches 1 & 2. The remaining projects were allocated to Tranche 3 which were due for submission on 24 March 2022.

The Regeneration Manager outlined the Tranche 3 Project Assurance process.

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

- The maximum level of investment in the Towns Fund per area £25m, Government provided guidance on how much of this funding should be allocated to each area.
- The Urban Greening Project, West Bromwich (Minute No. 44/21 of 8 November 2021 refers) had now been approved by Government and funding had been received.
- All projects included green credentials.
- Officers were on track to submit all applications to Government by the March 2022 deadline.
- The timescales for the Towns Fund funding to be spent was March 2026. Some projects would continue for longer than this period, however additional funding would be secured thereafter.
- Not all 16 projects would be led by Sandwell Council, some were to be led by a range of partners, such as the NHS, Canal and River Trust, Sandwell College etc.

The Board received an outline of each of the projects and the following comments were made/feedback noted by officers:-

West Bromwich Projects

- Concerns were raised in regards to the West Bromwich Connected Project in regards to cycle path and resident safety. Members were assured that public safety was paramount across all schemes
- The Retail Diversification project aimed to make improvements to Kings Square Shopping Centre, would re-ignite conversations about improvements to the bus station.

Smethwick Projects

- Regeneration of Smethwick High Street would not be a part of the Towns Fund project, however there were other initiatives that would focus on this.
- Regarding the Smethwick Connected Project, wheelchair users were also accounted for as part of the scheme and when building the footpaths.

- A number of sites would be identified in April to pilot modular housing in Sandwell, but this was not part of the Towns Fund projects. Further detail would be provided to the Board in due course.
- There was a requirement to report to Government on the number of local jobs that had been secured as result of the schemes. There would be engagement with larger contractor level to ensure that sub-contractors had regard to the local economy.
- The Midland Met Learning Campus would be complementary to the Healthy Futures campus in West Bromwich and there would be no impact on the health related course offered at the Sandwell College in West Bromwich.
- Alternative heat sources would be considered for new build residential properties; however the costs could be prohibitive.

Rowley Regis Projects

- Lighting improvements were required to the Netherton Tunnel.
- There would be campaigns to encourage more use of walking and cycling routes as part of the progression of the projects.

The Board welcomed the projects and the opportunities for Sandwell and thanked officers for their hard work in tight timescales.

The Director of Regeneration and Growth reported that the business case for the Blackheath Interchange project was still in development and subject to a different and more complex process. He undertook to provide further detailed information to members separately.

[Councillor Kaur left the meeting after consideration of this item]

23/22

Scrutiny Review of the Strategic Road Safety Plan 2017-2022 – Draft Scope

Further to Minute No. 10/22 (of the meeting held on 22 February 2022), a draft scope for the review of the Strategic Road Safety Plan was presented for consideration.

The Service Manager Highways emphasised the need for members to understand the Council's statutory duties in respect of road safety, along with guidance and data from the Department of Transport. The key focus of the Strategic Road Safety Plan was the reduction of harm and injury. It was also important to address any misconceptions about traffic and road safety management before commencing the review.

Resolved that the Chair and Vice Chair work with officers to finalise the scope for the review of the Strategic Road Safety Plan. 2017-2022.

24/22 **Scrutiny Action Tracker**

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

The Director of Regeneration and Growth provided an update on the Levelling Up Fund. Officers continued to meet with local MP to discuss the bids and would also be engaging with Town boards and business ambassadors.

25/22 **Cabinet Forward Plan**

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

26/22 **Work Programme**

The Board noted its work programme and the items to be carried forward into the next municipal year.

27/22 **Governance Review Improvement Plan**

The Board noted progress on implementation of actions arising from the external auditor's value for money governance review, that are relevant to its terms of reference.

28/22

Thanks

The Chair thanked members and officers for their contributions and hard work on the Scrutiny Board throughout the municipal year.

Meeting ended at 7:54pm

Contact: democratic_services@sandwell.gov.uk