

Minutes of the Prosperous Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 11 January 2024

Present: Tina Clements (Chair)

Attendance	
Charlotte Atkins	David Smith
Philippa Haden	Samantha Thompson
Philip Hudson	Ross Ward (Vice-Chair (Scrutiny))
Rev. Preb. M. Metcalf	Bernard Williams

Also in attendance: Jonathan Lindop

Apologies: Darryl Eyers, Graham Hutton and Peter Kruskonjic

Part One

46. Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest made.

47. Minutes of meeting held on 13 December 2023

RESOLVED - That the minutes of the meeting held on 13 December 2023 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

48. Update on the Preparation of the Staffordshire Local Transport Plan

The Committee considered a report of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport updating them on the progress made in the preparation of a new Staffordshire Local Transport Plan (LTP4) (schedule 1 to the signed minutes).

The County Council were required to produce a Local Transport Plan under the Transport Act 2008 setting out the transport goals and objectives for their area with a view to maintaining and improving transportation for residents for the period until 2025.

At their meeting on 22 March 2023, the Committee learned of new draft Guidance for LTPs which had been published by Central Government. Whilst final Statutory Guidance was still awaited, recent announcements (eg cancellation of HS2 Phase 2 and delay in the ban of new petrol- and diesel-powered vehicles), indicated a shift in national transport policy. However, work was continuing on the preparation of a new Plan owing to its importance for the Authority's Highway Maintenance and Integrated

Block allocations, bids for external funding (eg Network North grants) and the need to give clarity to their approach to managing and maintaining the existing Highway network etc.

Members learned that an important aspect of producing LTP4 was an evaluation of the success of the policies included in the previous LTP3. Therefore, they noted the following objectives contained in this Plan together with the Cabinet Members' assessment of the extent to which each objective had been met over the Plan period:-

(i) Improve Journey Time Reliability

Data from the Department for Transport indicated that there had been an overall increase in vehicle miles travelled from 5.63 billion in 2011 to 5.87 in 2022. Whilst various Highway Improvement schemes had sought to facilitate the expeditious movement of traffic data from the National Highway and Transport Satisfaction Survey indicated an 8% fall in the level of satisfaction in addressing congestion.

(ii) Improve Access to Employment

Improving access to existing and new employment sites in the County had been a primary for the Council. Although, employment levels were not directly linked to improvements in transportation, they had increased during the Plan period. In addition, the number of young people Not in Education, Employment or Training had seen significant reductions when compared to neighbouring Authorities.

(iii) Maintain Current Condition of the Highway Network

Maintaining the condition of the Highway network had been particularly challenging since 2011 owing to a reduction in funding by Central Government, increasing costs and higher volume of traffic. However, in March 2023 the County Council an extra £30m investment in Highway works during 2024/25 and 2025/26 in addition to their existing £50m annual spend on Highway maintenance.

(iv) Increase Bus Patronage Levels

Bus patronage had shown a significant overall decline during LTP3's plan period. There had been 22 million passenger journeys in 2009/10 whereas there had only been 5.9 million journeys in 2018/19. This trend had been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic which saw 9.1 million during 2021/22. However, certain routes in Tamworth and between South Staffordshire and the West Midlands conurbation had seen growth. In addition, there had been continued investment in bus transport infrastructure eg bus stops and passenger information displays during this

time.

(v) Improve Access to Town Centres

The County Council had invested in several regeneration schemes including in Lichfield and Burton-on-Trent. Also, the Authority had worked to enhance Newcastle-under-Lyme town centre (and access to it) using a combination of public and developer funding.

(vi) Reduce Cost of Travel for the Young, Elderly and those with Disabilities

Schemes promoted by the County Council that have sought to reduce the cost of travel for young, elderly and those with disabilities, included the Concessionary Fare Scheme for people over 66 years, the Concessionary Fare Scheme for Disabled People, Staffordshire Young Persons' Travel Card, and the Wheels 2 Work Scheme.

(v) Reduce the Number of Road Casualties

Staffordshire continued to perform well in reducing the number of Road casualties in the County, year on year. Countywide programmes such as Safer Routes to School and Bikeability focused on children – one of the county's main vulnerable road user groups. It was estimated that approximately 120,000 pupils had received Bikeability training since 2010. In addition, clusters of accidents had been addressed through local safety measures such as anti-skid surfacing, average speed cameras, junction modifications, traffic calming, speed limit reviews, gateways, signing and improved road markings.

(vi) Reduce Road Transport Co2 Emmisions

CO2 emissions from road transport on the local road network was estimated to have fallen from 1659.8 kilo tonnes in 2008 to 1173.7 kilo tonnes in 2020. This was mainly due to advances in vehicle and fuel technology but was also evidenced by a reduction in the number of Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) in the County from 17 to 6.

(vii) Maintain Levels of Recreational Cycling

Sustainable and active travel was an increasing priority for the County Council and Central Government and significant levels of funding had been made available to achieve LTP3's objective. Investment had been made to improve sections of the National Cycle Network, including routes linking to Stafford and Newcastle-under Lyme, as well as cycle connections serving Uttoxeter, Burton-on-Trent and Staffordshire Moorlands.

In addition, they also learned of:- (i) the proposed evidence base for LTP4; (ii) the two Guiding Principles for preparation of the Plan which had so far emerged ("Provide a Transport System that Promotes High Quality, Prosperous Places and Puts People First" and "Reduce Dependency on Petrol and Diesel Vehicles"); (iii) funding opportunities arising from Central Government's Network North initiative following the cancellation of HS2 Phase 2; (iv) a one-day event planned for March 2024 to provide officers with an opportunity to identify and discuss ideas for short-term deliverable schemes within a five-year implementation plan together with their medium and long term ideas for delivery of the LTP4's Vision and; (v) proposed governance arrangements including the establishment of an Internal Working Group, External Sounding Board and Project Board.

In the full and wide-ranging discussion which ensued Members gave detailed scrutiny to performance against LTP3's various Objectives together with the progress made in preparing LTP4, asking questions, seeking clarification and raising areas of concern as necessary, including:- (i) measures aimed at seeking residents views on the draft document; (ii) how LTP4 would dovetail with other County Council key policy documents eg Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy; (iii) the need for robust cross boarder consultation arrangements with other Local Authorities; (iv) the role of taxis in providing access to public transport where bus services were either absent or infrequent; (v) the unique needs of Staffordshire's rural areas; (vi) co-ordination with District/Borough and Parish Councils; (vii) the role of the 'Lichfield South' Development in improving access to existing and new employment sites and its inclusion into LTP4's evidence base; (viii) the role of local Members in promoting alternative methods of transport eg cycling and the need to include relevant data on the use of cycleways into LTP4's evidence base and; (iv) the need for innovative solutions and a renewed partnership approach to maintain the reductions in road accident casualty statistics which had been achieved.

In conclusion, Members welcomed the significant progress which had been made towards achieving many of LTP3's objectives. However, they were disappointed to hear that bus patronage levels had also declined in the County, in line with national trends. They spoke of the need for greater clarity from Central Government regarding national policy and looked forward to the publication of statutory guidance. However, they supported the assumptions which had been made by the Cabinet Member in the interim, having regard to the importance of LTP4 to the Authority's Highway Maintenance and Integrated Transport Block funding allocations.

They were also reassured that the proposed evidence base for preparation of LTP4 was comprehensive.

RESOLVED – (a) That the report be received and noted.

(b) That the significant progress which had been made in achieving many of LTP3's objectives be welcomed.

(c) That the early progress which had been made in the preparation of LTP4 be welcomed.

(b) That further scrutiny be given to LTP4's progress, particularly having regard to the absence of Statutory Guidance, at the appropriate time, as necessary.

49. Lighting for Staffordshire Update and Energy Framework Proposal

The Committee considered a report of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport outlining:- (i) the operational performance of the long-term Lighting for Staffordshire Private Finance Initiative contract and; (ii) the proposed procurement of a contract for the supply of electricity for road lighting, for the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2028 (schedule 2 to the signed minutes).

Members heard that Lighting for Staffordshire (LfS) Limited had commenced delivery of the street lighting PFI contract on 19 May 2003 for the period of 25 years. The value of the contract was £250 million for which the County Council received a Revenue Support Grant of £1.54 million per annum.

Unlike many other PFI street lighting contracts, The Staffordshire contract included a continuous programme of asset renewal in order to safeguard against the need for a large-scale renewal over a relatively short time period. This approach also enabled the network to benefit from continuous technological improvements might occur over the duration of the contract.

Since 2003, the quantity of street lighting assets on Staffordshire Highways had risen from 99,343 to 108,224 (as of September 2023) which represented a growth of 8.9%. During this time, performance against the Asset Renewal Programme set out in the contract was as follows:-

Block Period	Target Asset Renewal No.	Actual Asset Renewal No.
2003-2008	27,059	25,503
2008-2013	11,590	12,188
2013-2018	9,370	10,616
2018-2023	9,170	10,215
2023-2025	7,700	1,455
Total	64,889	55467

However, they heard that the agreed mechanism used to value each asset had resulted in some discrepancies arising between the Target Asset Renewal and Actual Asset Renewal figures in each of the five-year blocks shown above. Notwithstanding these discrepancies, the Cabinet Member was confident that the Programme and its approach to renewal ensured that assets with a longer than expected life cycle were not replaced earlier than was necessary and provided the most cost-effective solution.

With regard to general maintenance of street lighting assets:- (i) the number of reported faults and emergency faults had reduced by almost 50% when compared to 2003; (ii) the number of lights lit remained consistently high at over 99.3% against a performance target of 98% and (iii) a customer satisfaction rating of over 98% had been consistently achieved since completion of the first five-year Block in May 2008.

In addition, following the 'Credit Crunch' in 2008/09, the contract had been independently re-assessed for value for money and to ascertain if costs could be reduced. This had been undertaken by Ernst & Young who confirmed the Authority's approach to negotiating improvements with the contractor had been correct. The total cumulative savings against each of the relevant headings applied from January 2013 to the end of September 2023 were as follows:-

Heading	Amount
Modernisation of Service Specification	£2,793,323.12
Insurance	£650,247
Asset Renewal High Efficiency Lanterns	3,321,672 kWh/annum
Asset Renewal Dimming	768,115 kWh/annum
Retro Fit Dimming	3,829,314 kWh/annum

Converting the above-mentioned energy savings to a monetary value indicated savings of approximately £2.2m were achieved over the ten-year period April 2013 to September 2023. Furthermore, total savings at the end of September 2023 arising from contract modernisation were approximately £5.6m.

With regard to procurement of a new contract for the supply of electricity for road lighting, the Cabinet Member explained that he proposed to use the Crown Commercial Services (CCS) energy framework and their Flexible Purchasing Model to gain best value for the Authority. The annual value of electricity for the Council's Street Lighting and Intelligent Transport Systems was estimated to be £6.9m per annum.

NOTE BY CLERK: Since consideration of the report, the Cabinet Member has clarified that the annual value of electricity usage is estimated to be £7.3m and not £6.9m as originally stated.

In the full and wide-ranging discussion which ensued, Members gave detailed scrutiny to performance of the PFI Lighting contract and Cabinet Members's proposals for procuring a new energy supply contract, asking questions, seeking clarification and raising areas of concern as necessary, including:- (i) the possibility of making additional savings by utilising existing columns for upgraded lanterns rather than replacing them with new, as a matter of course; (ii) the efficacy of either extinguishing or dimming lanterns during certain hours; (iii) technical issues regarding the brightness and direction of lanterns particularly within certain residential locations; (iv) the need to manage risks associated with the ending of the existing PFI contract, effectively and; (v) the anticipated date for completion of the Light Emitting Diode (LED) upgrade programme.

In conclusion, Members welcomed the significant savings which had been achieved to date in the PFI contract together with the excellent performance of the service since 2003. They went on to give their support to the Cabinet Member's proposed approach to procuring a new contract for the supply of electricity and paid tribute to him and his operational team for their valuable work in providing an effective and efficient essential service to the people of Staffordshire.

RESOLVED – (a) That the report be received and noted.

(b) That the excellent performance of the current Private Finance Initiative contract arrangements for street lighting in Staffordshire be welcomed.

(c) That the Cabinet Members' proposed approach to procuring a new contract for the supply of electricity for street lighting and Intelligent Transport Systems in Staffordshire for the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2028 be supported.

(d) That the progress made in implementing new arrangements for street lighting in the County from 1 April 2028 be monitored closely and a further report be brought to the Committee for scrutiny at the appropriate time.

50. Work Programme

The Chairman reported that, with advice from the Director of Economy Infrastructure and Skills, the following items had been provisionally prioritised for consideration at their March 2024 meeting:-

- HS2 Sixth Monthly Update – Impact on and Opportunities for Staffordshire;
- Cultural Strategy;

- Household Waste Recycling Centres – Update.

The remaining items ie:- (i) Country Parks Strategy; (ii) Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan; (iii) Review of Job and Careers Brokerage Service Performance and; (iv) Employment and Skills Strategy – Progress Update, should be considered at an alternative future meeting to be determined.

RESOLVED – That, subject to the above-mentioned changes, the Work Programme (schedule 3 to the signed minutes) be approved.

51. Date of Next Meeting - Friday 2 February 2024 at 10.00 am, County Buildings, Stafford

RESOLVED – That the date, time and venue of the next meeting be noted.

Chair