

COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday, 19 October 2021 at 6.00 pm in Telford Room, Addenbrooke House, Ironmasters Way, Telford, TF3 4NT

Present: Councillors S Bentley, E J Carter, G H Cook and C R Turley (Chair)

In Attendance:

Apologies: Councillor T L B Janke and R Mehta

COMSC23 Declarations of Interest

None.

COMSC24 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED - that the minutes of the meeting held on 7 July 2021 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

COMSC25 Neighbourhood Enforcement Activity Review

The Committee received the report of the Director: Neighbourhood & Enforcement Services.

Members heard that the report was an update on the work of the Neighbourhood Enforcement team in 2020 and an overview of the team's areas of focus for 2021 to date. Key themes included tackling anti-social behaviour (ASB), investigating environmental crime, the rollout of civil parking enforcement powers, and CCTV works. The team's work was underpinned by intelligence and data but engagement and education remained key.

In tackling ASB, there was a dedicated reporting line, which picked up a number of issues for the team to investigate. Fly-tipping constituted a part of this work and there had been an increase in this activity during the pandemic.

Partnership work with the police and other agencies, through the MATES programme, was of the utmost importance. The pooling of information and intelligence allowed for a single approach to ASB and criminal behaviour across the Borough.

In its work, the Council utilised all of the tools and powers available to it; proactive use of a significant CCTV system that covered the Borough's town centres were a part of this strategy.

The Authority had taken on civil littering from vehicles legislation and was holding the registered keeper of such vehicles from which littering occurred to

account. Fines of £150 would be issued to the keeper of these vehicles. From May 2021 to the date of the meeting, over 60 fines of this nature had been issued. Officers stressed that fine targets were not used.

Work had also been carried out targeting fly-posting, abandoned vehicles, and unauthorised encampment. There had been over 7500 reports of fly-tipping, over 580 abandoned vehicles, and over 189 reports of graffiti.

Civil parking enforcement powers had been acquired in 2020 but implementation of the powers had been delayed due to Covid-19. Almost 7000 tickets had been issued since implementation and complaints around officer conduct were low.

The CCTV project had been significant, with the establishing of a control room at Oakengates that was staffed by volunteers and the camera stock of the Borough nearing 500 cameras. Existing cameras had been upgraded and now provided high quality images.

A discussion followed and Members posed a number of questions:

There was concern that people did not report matters to the police as often as they should, could people be encouraged to do so?

There was a misconception that people did not report, people did report and when they did, the Council had provided CCTV images to assist the police where possible.

Norbroom Park, Newport, had been subject to significant and ongoing vandalism, could roaming CCTV be utilised at the park?

While there could be an issue, due to a lack of lighting, the Authority could look into the matter.

Who was responsible for the removal of waste fly-tipped on private land?

The legislation covering the matter mandated that the Council support investigations into such fly-tipping, however, the responsibility for removal lay with the landowner.

How could those affected be assisted?

CCTV could be deployed in key areas to deter fly-tipping. Work was also being carried out to improve lighting and signage in key areas. The Authority was working in partnership with the Environment Agency, Farmers Union, and police to share intelligence.

It was suggested that a joint working group, with the Environment Scrutiny Committee, could be established to examine fly-tipping. The suggestion received broad agreement.

COMSC26 Strategic Transport Review (Scene Setting)

Members received the report of the Director: Neighbourhood & Enforcement Services.

The Local Transport Plan, an overarching document covering the management of highways, had been in place since 2011 and ran through to 2026. There were, in addition, a number of sub-strategies. All came together to present the overall network management. Since the plan was originally written, there had been significant changes in the Borough – notably the climate emergency.

Work on the replacement Local Transport Plan had begun and the plan was in its early stages. Officers would be looking to hold workshops, both internally and externally, to gather thoughts on the new proposals. A number of other strategies, including the local plan, would inform the new transport plan.

The Committee also received updates on a number of other issues.

With regard to electric vehicles (EV), Members heard that, while EV was growing, there were relatively few EV in the Borough but that the Council was planning for an expansion in the number of such vehicles. At the time of the meeting, there 24 publicly available charging points in Telford. The Authority was keen to improve access to charging points and would be working with private car park operators and businesses to expand availability. Linking into the Council's bus strategy, electric buses were being investigated with a view to decarbonising transport to as great an extent as possible.

As part of a national bus strategy, the Council would have access to significant funding to improve bus services in the Borough. An enhanced bus partnership scheme had to be implemented by June 2021 as a condition of funding partnership and improvement plans had to be in place by April 2022. Officers were looking to increase usage of bus services and to improve routes. New guidance from the Department for Transport was being received on a daily basis.

The Bus Service Improvement Strategy (BSIP) was reviewed by bi-annually and republished yearly. The Council had consulted with residents to discover why they did not travel by bus and what would encourage them to travel by bus more often. From that consultation, issues were identified surrounding fare structuring, multi-operating ticketing, and network coverage. Consultation carried out by the adult social care team had also informed the review having highlighted barriers to services. There was an ambition to develop a more resilient network with wider route coverage and better rural services. The Department for Transport wished to see reduced fares.

Active travel had been a focus in the preceding year, with officers noting the Council's Gear Change policy. An active travel policy had been developed in 2017 and was due for review. A consultation had been carried out in June and July 2021 and received a strong response. The Authority was processing responses and working with partners to develop a revised strategy.

Following the report, Members posed a number of questions:

When could a report on Active Travel be expected?

April 2022.

Would the bus strategy report be available in the same timeframe?

This was expected in early 2022. The BSIP was intended to be a living document and it was hoped that the Council's scrutiny function could review the document in the first quarter of 2022.

What was being done to encourage and facilitate business provision of EV charging points? Especially with regard to businesses with forecourts, such as McDonalds.

The Authority would look to engage commercial partners and operators of shopping sites. It was hoped that the Council's strategy would sufficiently demonstrate the demand for EV charge points and that businesses would bring forward their own initiatives or the Council could work with business to deliver the necessary infrastructure. The EV strategy would not just be a matter of the Council building infrastructure alone.

What role was there for rail in the transport strategy?

Rail would be a key part of the strategy and there were ambitions for electrification of the line between Shrewsbury and Wolverhampton.

How much did the bus subsidy spend amount to? How was it split?

The subsidy was £400,000. The spending split was not to hand.

Following questions, there was a discussion on the provision of rural bus services.

A suggestion was made that the Council's red bus service could supplement bus services in rural areas during school hours when the buses were not in use.

COMSC27 Review of Development Management Including APT

The Committee received the report of the Director: Prosperity & Investment.

As a result of a change of service area reporting lines and a limited range of concerns raised on the subject of apT, the Council's development management function, a review of apT and development management had been undertaken.

Development Management (branded as ApT) fulfilled a number of duties. It had determined over 1200 planning applications in the calendar year 2020/2021, seeing a 25% increase in applications being made compared to previous years. It was also responsible for the Authority's building control and enforcement, development control relating to highways engineering, and rights of way. In addition to these functions, apT provided a range of specialist development services.

Development Management (branded as ApT) offered enhanced discretionary services, and was encouraged by government to do so. One such services was the offer of pre-application planning advice. The charges for this service were available in the meeting papers and were on the lower end of the pricing

for such services within the region. It was thought that the process provided for higher quality applications enabling greater service efficiency. Additionally, the service provided a development brief service, fast track service, highway design, and Planning Performance Agreements.

External work was also undertaken, with work outside of the Borough taken on. Such work included the promotion of local plans, neighbourhood plan work, and support to other local authorities on specialist areas such as ecology.

In terms of service performance, in excess of 90% of applications were delivered against statutory timescales compared to a government target of around 60%. 71% of appeals against the Council had been dismissed and a significant number of enforcement cases had been undertaken.

The review highlighted that development management was a high performing service area with a number of external clients generating income for the Authority to deliver frontline services. However, issues around branding had to be resolved.

The Council's Development Management function had been rebranded as apT in 2017. This included a website, social media platform, change in logo, and email addresses. Correspondence from the local planning authority was, therefore, apT branded. Though the correspondence included the civic office address and a Telford & Wrekin Council logo, the fact that apT was the Council was not necessarily clear. Complaints had been received because of the confusion that led to residents believing the function had been outsourced to a private company.

As a result of the review, the decision had been made to withdraw the apT brand name and to revert to the old branding. External work would continue under the BiT branding. A project team would be established to oversee the conversion of appropriate materials to BiT branding and communicating the changes to clients.

In the ensuing discussion, Members noted that there was some confusion around the apT branding and that there had been a negative perception of the service as a result of this.

COMSC28 Chair's Update

None.

The meeting ended at 7.34 pm

Chairman:

Date: Tuesday, 30 November 2021