

Minutes

of the Meeting of

The Place Policy and Scrutiny Panel

Wednesday, 8 March 2023

New Council Chamber - Town Hall

Meeting Commenced: 2.00 pm

Meeting Concluded: 4.06 pm

Councillors:

John Crockford-Hawley (Chairman)

Mike Bird
John Cato
Sarah Codling
Patrick Keating
Phil Neve
James Tonkin

Apologies: Councillors: Peter Crew (Vice-Chairman), Gill Bute, Mark Crosby and Richard Westwood.

Absent: Councillor James Clayton.

Also in attendance: Councillor Ann Harley, as substitute for Peter Crew.

Officers in attendance: Esther Coffin-Smith, Emma Diakou (Head of Business Insight, Policy and Partnerships), John Flannigan, Carl Nicholson, Colin Russell, Lizzie Shepherd, Jenny Ford, Leo Taylor, Brent Cross and Liz Godfrey-Day.

24 Public Discussion (Standing Order SS09)

None.

25 Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary Interest (Standing Order 37)

None.

26 Minutes

Minutes of the Panel meeting held on 23 November 2022 – to approve as a correct record.

Resolved: that the minutes of the meeting of 23 November 2022 be approved as a correct record.

27 Matters referred by Council, the Executive, other Committees and Panels (if any)

None.

Change to agenda order: Item 10 to be heard before item 6

28 WESTlink Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) (Agenda item 10)

The Integrated Transport Unit manager presented on the WESTlink demand responsive transport service, which was to begin operating on 3 April 2023. The service would use 30 vehicles across the region, and the zone in North Somerset would cover 50 square miles of no fixed route, no timetable service. It was stressed that the service was not door-to-door transport, but would use the 900 existing bus stops in the District. The use of electric buses had been investigated, but due to the short notice of obtaining the funding and the long lead-in times for purchase of these (with funding only available for two years initially) it was decided to use buses with internal combustion engines. This did not prevent a shift to alternatively powered engines in the future.

Fares would be aligned to bus fares across the region, and a single journey anywhere within a zone would cost £2 initially (concessions such as Diamond Travelcards would also be taken). Similar services had been run successfully in Milton Keynes and the West Midlands. ViaVan was the contracted partner to provide the service and was an industry leader worldwide. Driver recruitment was on target, and a PSV (Professional Service Vehicle) license was required for drivers. Journeys could be booked with a mobile app (due to launch 14 March) as well as over the telephone. The Service Level Agreement for the telephone service was contracted to WeDRT.

When arriving at a stop, drivers would have to wait for a minimum of 60 seconds to collect passengers. If the journey had been booked using the telephone service, there was facility for the driver to have personalised notes for the passenger (for example whether they needed assistance). If the service was unable to meet the guaranteed one hour pick-up time, the contractor would pay a fine.

Members discussed how the zones had been defined, as well as the long-term viability of the service. Members of the public were urged to use the service as the initial funding would be for two years.

Concluded: that the report be received and that Members' comments be forwarded to officers in the form of minutes.

29 Levelling Up Fund update (Agenda item 6)

The Head of Placemaking and Development updated the Panel on the £19.9 million funding received from national government, which had been match funded with £3 million from North Somerset Council. Funding had been obtained for the

three themes outlined in the report and needed to be spent by March 2025. Stakeholder and member engagement would occur with each project.

In discussion, the following points were raised:

- That the funding bid had allocated the monies to specific projects, which could not now be changed;
- That the Panel would prefer this to be a standing item on the agenda instead of the 6-monthly reports outlined in the report to better facilitate scrutiny and policy;
- That one of the conditions of the funding was to have specific measurable outcomes. Money had been included in the bid for establishing a baseline and evaluating progress;
- Whether there would be future opportunities for areas in North Somerset outside Weston to obtain levelling up funding.

In response to the last point, officers highlighted that a report explaining the rationale for focusing on Weston had been considered and agreed by Full Council in July 2021. The reason was that the government criteria for Levelling Up focused on metrics relating to deprivation and Weston was the only area of North Somerset with socio-economic statistics meeting the criteria.

However there was already other funding being spent across the whole of North Somerset, including the UKSPF programme and service-specific projects such as the recent play park improvements.

The council has access to a Grantfinder service, which provides alerts on a wide range of funding sources available to the public sector and community organisations. A summary of the funding opportunities was regularly included in bulletins to members; if they thought one was suitable for a project in their area, they should contact the relevant service.

In addition, officers highlighted that Town and Parish Councils received 15% of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) income from developments in their area, which could be used to fund local improvements. Nailsea and Portishead in particular had received large sums in recent years.

The recent work to agree placemaking strategies and priorities for towns outside of Weston would be helpful in relation to future funding bids.

Concluded:

- 1) That the report be received and that Members' comments be forwarded to officers in the form of minutes; and
- 2) That a report updating the Panel on the work associated with the Levelling Up Funding be a standing item on Panel agendas until the funding expired in March 2025.

30 Proposal to implement a pilot scheme for delivering Biodiversity Net Gain, required from development, on North Somerset Council's open space (Agenda item 7)

The Head of Open Space, Natural Environment and Leisure presented the report

on the proposal to implement a pilot scheme to deliver Biodiversity Net Gain on North Somerset Council-owned open spaces. This followed on from DEFRA's requirement that new development should include a 10% biodiversity net gain for a minimum of 30 years, and that trade in biodiversity units (as defined by DEFRA's metric) was to be introduced when the Environment Act 2021 would come into force in autumn 2023.

It was emphasised that the sites listed in the report were provisional and were open to discussion.

The following points were raised in discussion:

- That developers would have a choice of sites / biodiversity providers in an open market;
- North Somerset Council expectations that developers provide biodiversity would remain;
- That the biodiversity net gain market should be encouraged across North Somerset as both an income stream and a way to increase biodiversity for farmers and landowners.

Concluded: that the report be received and that Members' comments be forwarded to officers in the form of minutes.

31 Ash Dieback Update (Agenda item 8)

The Natural Environment Manager presented an update on the ASH dieback programme. In the first year, 1,000 trees were felled. The funding for this was from the North Somerset Council budget, as there had been no central government funding to assist the programme. Funding was to be £620,000 in 2023-24 to cover the 20 schemes planned – although these would be confirmed after a re-survey of ash trees was carried out in May.

Members then discussed the following (officer responses in italics):

- Was there any value in the timber left after felling? *Roadside trees were not shaped as timber trees and sometimes contained inclusions of metal; some trees were chipped on site, but the felled trees were also left in situ as valuable habitats;*
- That the policy remained felling along highways where a risk was present, but not to fell in isolated areas where there was no risk to the general public or property;
- That younger trees were less resistant to ash dieback disease.

Concluded: that the report be received, and the Members' comments forwarded to officers in the form of minutes.

32 Recycling and Waste Strategy Annual Update (Agenda item 9)

The Waste Minimisation Team Leader presented the report, which gave an overview and the key performance indicators of the progress made in the first year towards the eight targets in the strategy.

The baseline figures used when creating the Strategy were from before the Covid lockdowns, which explained the increases in household waste. While most targets were on track, it was felt that Target 3, to divert all non-recyclable, kerbside collected household waste away from landfill by end of 2022, had not been achieved due to planned annual maintenance shutdowns of the Energy from Waste plant. It was suggested that this target in the Waste Strategy could be amended to 'to maximise diversion of all non-recyclable, kerbside collected household waste away from landfill and showing year on year improvements'.

In discussion, the following topics and points were raised:

- Whether compost bins should be standard in new developments, and that the circular economy should not only be limited to compost but included other areas such as reuse;
- That there were still some roads that were difficult for recycling lorries to access (waste trucks with rear wheel steering were able to get around tighter corners). Meetings with planning colleagues were to be held to ensure that future developments would not have the same issues with provision of services.
- That it was difficult to separate the metric for the reduction in garden waste caused by the introduction of charging from the overall recycling rate, as it was hard to measure what people kept at home;
- Whether there had been an increase in the fly tipping of garden waste;
- That the recycling percentage should also show the figure minus garden waste;
- That the initial target for Target 3 was not achievable under the current contract, which is what prompted the request for the change in the wording;
- The many methods that could be used to report littering and fly tipping.

Concluded: that the report be received, and the Members' comments forwarded to officers in the form of minutes.

33 Q3 performance and risk update for 2022 to 2023 (Agenda item 11)

The Head of Business Insight, Policy and Partnerships presented the report, which updated the Panel on the progress against the organisation-wide Annual Directorate Statements, Key Corporate Performance Indicators and the Strategic Risk Register.

In discussion, assurance was sought that nuance had not been lost when compiling the statistics, with particular reference to the overall satisfaction of those using Adult Social Care services for care and support. These statistics had been gathered confidentially by NHS Digital and results showed that North Somerset scored higher than our statistical neighbours.

Concluded: That the report be received, and the Members' comments forwarded to officers in the form of minutes.

34 Place Finance Update (Agenda item 12)

Members received the report of the Finance Business Partner (Place), which gave the forecast against budget for the Place directorate.

Concluded: that the report be received.

35 Place Panel Work Plan - March 2023 (Agenda item 13)

The Policy and Scrutiny Senior Officer discussed the Panel's work plan and invited discussion with Members for additional items to add to it, as well as picking up any actions from the meeting.

Concluded: that the work plan be updated.

Chairman
