

Minutes

of the Meeting of

The Transport, Climate and Communities Policy and Scrutiny Panel

Thursday, 20 July 2023

New Council Chamber - Town Hall

Meeting Commenced: 10.00 am

Meeting Concluded: 12.25 pm

Councillors:

Steve Bridger (Chair)
Peter Burden
Ciaran Cronnelly
Nicola Holland
Sue Mason
Stuart McQuillan
Luke Smith

Apologies: Councillors: Mike Bird, Tom Nicholson, Robert Payne, Terry Porter, Michael Pryke

Officers in attendance: Victoria Barvenova, Cara Clitheroe, Gemma Dando, Jenny Ford, Louis Mertens, Carl Nicholson, Melanie Watts, Harriet Isherwood, Philippa Penney, Leo Taylor

TCC Election of the Vice-Chairperson for the 2023/24 Municipal Year

1

Resolved: Councillor Stuart McQuillan be elected Vice-Chairperson for the 2023/24 Municipal Year.

TCC Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary Interest (Standing Order 37)

2

None.

TCC Minutes

3

Resolved: that the minutes of the Partnerships, Corporate Organisation and Overview Management Policy and Scrutiny Panel (PCOM) held on 2 March 2023 be approved as a correct record.

TCC Role, Remit and Work Plan of the Transport, Climate and Communities Policy and Scrutiny Panel

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The Scrutiny Officer presented the report which provided an overview of the

Panel's scrutiny and work planning process. Members noted the suggested work plan priorities proposed by the equivalent scrutiny Panel in the last administration (as set out in the approved minutes) and the Chair then set out his initial thoughts on areas of focus going forward, inviting feedback and suggestions from Members. Feedback included the proposed establishment of a number of Panel steering groups focusing on topics including the following council services and policies: waste services; the Bus Service Improvement Plan; the Active Travel Strategy; Customer Services Strategy implementation; capital schemes and major projects; communications and community engagement; path to Net Zero; community safety; and Council finance.

Other comments included the overriding need to carefully plan and prioritise panel activity, aligning the work plan with departmental work programmes and the Panel's capacity to deliver.

The Chair concluded discussions by confirming that the work plan would now be worked up taking this discussion into account and agreed to circulate a draft for discussion ahead of the next Panel meeting on 30 November 2023.

TCC 5 WESTLink Services and 3-Month Review

In introducing the item, the Chair emphasised his support for this innovative service, noting that this was the first of its type in the wider city region. He added that Members' comments today would feed into the current review of the service. He also noted that, whilst there had been positive feedback from the public, the service had needed to be mobilised quickly and there were some ongoing challenges.

The Principal Transport Planning Officer and the Services Manager for Passenger Transport presented the report which outlined the first three-month review for the WESTLink service together with a summary of the public feedback following its introduction. They emphasised, whilst public feedback had largely been positive, negative feedback that had been received mainly concerned service reliability issues, a symptom of driver shortages facing bus services nationally. Other concerns included some issues around bus stop location and expected journey times. Officers were investigating these with the contractor and were considering opportunities around more effective demand and capacity management such as using fares and/or the bus application/phone service to more intelligently shape and integrate the types of journeys sought by passengers.

Members sought and received clarification on the following:

- the importance of feeding back to passengers in order to promote better public understanding and confidence in the service going forward;
- how to respond to customer demand for both scheduled and demand responsive elements of the bus service? - Officers explained this could be better incorporated into the user application but there had not been time to do so by launch. More data on customer preferences was needed to more effectively inform further development of the service and a passenger survey was being developed with the Combined Authority;
- officers provided additional passenger data on total journeys on the service so far,

- numbers during peak periods, and which areas used the service most (the southern zone was significantly busier than other zones in the district);
- where were driver shortages having most impact? – the problems were mainly at the Bristol depot though the impacts were felt across the area; and
- issues around arrival times and integration with other bus and rail services – officers confirmed that work was underway with current providers: to improve arrival estimates (ie taking into account traffic conditions); to explore fare opportunities around the “day rider” ticket for instance; and to improve information around interchange opportunities.

Concluded: that Members’ feedback be provided to officers in the form of the minutes.

TCC 6 Finance report – Medium term financial plan (MTFP)

The Head of finance presented the report summarising the Council’s proposed process and timeline to ensure delivery of the medium term financial plan for the period 2024 to 2028 and draft revenue budget for the 2024/25 financial year, providing an opportunity for the Panel to discuss and consider how the communication and engagement aspects of the Plan should be delivered and also how the MTFP process should be aligned with the policy and scrutiny function.

In discussion Members commented as follows:

- the need for scrutiny to have a longer-term horizon – beyond the current financial year; balancing routine scrutiny of key decisions with establishing a space for scrutiny involvement in policy development around issues of real interest to residents;
- the focus of the Panel needed to be around the budget and how the Council engaged and communicated budget options and choices;
- the need to engage with scrutiny and residents as early as possible in the process, effectively integrating this early engagement into the process going forward.

Concluded: that the report be received and that Members’ feedback be provided to officers in the form of the minutes.

TCC 7 Climate Emergency Action Plan update and progress report

The Climate Emergency Project Manager presented the report setting out a progress update on the actions of the Climate Emergency Strategy and Action Plan. Members noted that the North Somerset area emissions data would be released at the end of July 2023 and would be reported to full Council in September 2023.

In discussing the report, Members sought and received clarification on the following:

- adaption resilience around the highway network (gullies and drains) appeared to be worsening - officers agreed noting that whilst the larger amount of data now available meant that it was possible to better target intervention, ultimately funding continued to be a significant constraint. They emphasised however that, from a climate perspective,

communications were key: the Council had an important role as an enabler (eg encouraging use of water butts) and could make a difference.

- Large numbers of potholes by comparison with other countries which seemed to better maintain their roads – officers referred again to funding constraints across the UK, necessitating a patch-and-mend approach. There was recognition that more needed to be done on longer-term asset management but that this needed to be considered in the round with active travel and climate adaption policies. Officers suggested a Panel inquiry day as a possible approach to exploring this further. Members also noted that an all-Member briefing was being planned on road maintenance which would cover these issues.
- Is the Council on track to meet the 2030 net zero deadline? – officers emphasised that much was outside the Council’s direct control and more investment would be needed locally for the target to be met. Recent studies showed that legislative levers would be required and local authorities were not yet empowered to deliver locally.
- Business travel in the area was the main challenge – officer reported that 40% of emissions came from transport with latest data showing an increasing trend. The Council needed to lobby businesses with clear messaging both informing and upskilling the sector.

In bringing discussions to a close, the Chair agreed that more focussed consideration of these issues by the Panel would be required going forward.

Concluded:

1. that the Panel re-endorse its support for the Council's commitment to achieving net zero carbon by 2030 through the actions described; and
2. that the Action Plan information on carbon emissions of council own estate be noted.

Chairman
