

FULL COUNCIL

7 JULY 2020

REPORT OF CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT & HIGHWAYS

1. COUNCIL UPDATE REGARDING ENVIRONMENT & HIGHWAYS

1.1 Purpose of Report

To advise Members that decision making sessions were held on 28th May 2020 and 23rd June 2020, covering CPH Environment & Highways.

1.2 Background

1.2.1 This report highlights some of those decisions which have been made, but not all. Members wishing to view all decisions made can find these at <http://eservices.solihull.gov.uk/mgInternet/mgListCommittees.aspx?bcr=1>

1.2.2 Attached to this report is a list of decisions made.

1.3 Decisions – 28th May 2020

1.3.1 COVID19 – Emergency Walking & Cycling Measures

1.3.2 I was asked to comment on the draft COVID19 Active Travel Strategy and consider implementing an emergency programme of cycling and walking measures to aid social distancing and access to local employment spaces, schools and retail facilities.

1.3.3 I approved, subject to successfully securing Government funding, the implementation of 22 temporary cycling and walking schemes (detailed in the report appendices) and further agreed that the schemes would be subject to further consultation where appropriate. Scheme 18 (relating to the closure of Knowle High Street) is subject to further consultation. I shall receive a further update on these temporary measures at my Decision Session in September 2020.

1.3.4 Lastly, I agreed that Officers would consult opposition spokespersons prior to the implementation or changes to any temporary measures.

1.3.5 Parking Services – COVID19 Update

1.3.6 Having received an update on the Council's Parking Services and the special arrangements considered necessary during the lockdown period and to support the Council's recovery plans and priorities, I approved the continued suspension of all parking charges in the Council's managed car parks and on-street parking bays.

1.3.7 I noted the summary of measures taken to support customers, stakeholders and partners during this unprecedented period. I further noted the current situation in respect of Abandoned Vehicles, Civic Parking and Bus Lane enforcement services.

1.3.8 I agreed to receive a further update report at the scheduled Decision Session in July (or in June 2020) if circumstances require this.

1.3.9 Decisions – 23rd June 2020

1.3.10 The current Strategic Environment Contract, delivered by Amey, ends on 31st March 2022. A report was presented to Cabinet in October 2019 and gave options for the future provision of the services, either by retendering the contract or establishing a Local Authority Company. Cabinet opted to retender the contract.

1.3.11 I received a report seeking approval of the Procurement Strategy for the new Contract, which I was content to do.

1.4 Good News and Issues of Interest

Streetcare Services – Covid-19

1.4.1 I am pleased to report that we have continued to operate and deliver our frontline Streetcare services throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, which has proven invaluable in ensuring our streets have remained clean, green and well maintained for our communities. At a time when people have been restricted to their homes and immediate local environment, it has never been more important to make sure we undertake the basics like grass cutting and litter picking and this is commendable.

1.4.2 Parks and Open Spaces- Covid-19

1.4.3 Members will be aware that our parks have experienced some incredibly busy periods during the lockdown and members will have seen in the press the high levels of littering and dumped waste as a result. However, Officers working with our contractor Amey have increased resources and responded very quickly to littering incidents, cleaning and returning our parks to their high quality condition very quickly. Moving forward I know Officers are monitoring the situation closely and will continue to respond in the right way to these issues.

1.4.4 Fly Tipping

1.4.5 Members may have seen reports of increased fly tipping in the national press. Officers in Solihull have been monitoring this closely and whilst we are seeing marginal increases in some areas, they are not significant and not similar to those being seen across other areas of the country. Officers continue to monitor this situation closely and continue to investigate fly tips and where possible undertake enforcement activities.

1.4.6 Waste and Recycling

1.4.7 I am pleased to report that all services are now operating normally, however operational changes have been made because of increased tonnages across all service areas. To reduce the number of crew members in the recycling vehicles (pre Covid-19, some rounds were operating with four crew members) two additional vehicles have been mobilised to facilitate social distancing. Officers will review our options regarding this and how to enable the crews to work safely in the long-term.

1.4.8 Members will be aware the Household Waste Recycling Centre re-opened on 18 May (vehicles which use a permit to access the site were allowed in on 1 June). Due to restrictions to facilitate social distancing, it takes longer to pass through the site, which is leading to longer queue times. Site signage and site staff advise site users of the estimated waiting time; however most residents have elected to queue to use the site, despite the waiting times.

1.4.9 Within the site, the new layout is working well with social distancing being achieved and residents adhering to the revised instructions. Since the site opened there has only been one incident of note with a member of the public being abusive to staff, which is positive, given that c. 5,000 visitors have used the site since it re-opened.

1.4.10 It is acknowledged that some authorities have booking systems for their site; however these sites tend to be in areas where queues would have a significant detrimental impact on local businesses and the public highway. With the exception of the first few days of opening this has not been the case at Bickenhill and staff ensure that access to the neighbouring businesses is kept clear at all times. We will continue to monitor the site use but anticipate that we will see a reduction in use as more lockdown measures are lifted.

1.4.11 Highways Infrastructure

1.4.12 Members will be pleased to note that a THANK YOU NHS' lining close to Solihull Hospital was completed in May and received very positive feedback from Councillors and local groups, businesses and residents.

1.4.13 Asset Management

1.4.14 I am pleased to advise Members that during lockdown the team, supported by Balfour Beatty, has continued to operate fully, through changing processes and procedures. Subsequently, the carriageway resurfacing programme is progressing ahead of schedule; the total programme budget (£1.9m) has been committed and programmed. All works are scheduled to be completed by August 2020.

1.4.15 The team were successful with a DfT Challenge Fund bid for £2.1m to carry out works on the Borough's unclassified network. The work will be completed this year, providing improvements across 40 roads. The funds have also enabled us to undertake additional drainage projects across the Borough.

1.4.16 The team has also secured a further £68,000 from the Pothole Fund.

1.4.17 Flood Risk, Drainage and Tanker Services

1.4.18 During lockdown, the in-house Tanker Services Team, has continued to carry out cesspool and septic tank emptying for residents and businesses who are not connected to the main foul sewer network. The team has also continued with the cyclical cleansing of our network of 40,000 highway gullies and associated pipework, as well as supporting the stencilling of temporary markings in our local centres, parks and outside our schools, to support public messages around social distancing.

1.4.19 Street Lighting

1.4.20 The Council's Street Lighting team has continued work during lockdown, using single man working practices to roll out LED lighting on the road network. Over 93% of our street lights are now LED and 76% of our entire street lighting assets (lights, lit signs and bollards) are now LED, way above the national average of 46%.

1.5 **Future Decisions**

At future Decision Sessions I shall consider

- DfT Challenge Fund 2020
- Review of emergency walking and cycling measures