

# **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & MANAGED GROWTH SCRUTINY BOARD**

**18 January 2021**

## **MINUTES**

Present: Councillors: M Parker (Chairman), J Ryan (Vice-Chairman), M Brain, T Hodgson, D Howell, M McLoughlin, W Qais, P Thomas, C Williams and A Mackiewicz

Members In Attendance: Councillor Ian Courts, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Portfolio Holder for the Economy

Councillor K Grinsell, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Adult Social Care

Councillor A Mackiewicz, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Climate Change, Planning and Housing

Officers: Perry Wardle, Assistant Director, Growth & Development  
Ruth Tennant, Director of Public Health & Commissioning  
Sangeeta Leahy, Assistant Director, Public Health  
Lauren Beach, Finance Manager  
Nick Laws, Senior Public Health Specialist  
Mark Andrews, Head of Planning Design & Engagement  
Beverly Hill, Technical Development Officer  
Paul Rogers, Democratic Services

### **1. APOLOGIES**

No apologies for absence were received.

### **2. DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY OR CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of pecuniary or conflicts of interest were received.

### **3. QUESTIONS AND DEPUTATIONS**

No questions or deputations were received.

### **4. MINUTES**

The Economic Development and Managed Growth Scrutiny Board:

#### **RESOLVED:**

To agree the Minutes arising from the Economic Development and Managed Growth Scrutiny Board meeting held on 19 November 2020 as an accurate record.

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### **5. MTFS UPDATE - BUDGET STRATEGY 2021/22 - 2023/24**

The report was presented to the Scrutiny Board by the Finance Manager.

The purpose of the report was to seek comments on the budget proposals identified for 2021/22 to 2023/24 within the Climate Change, Planning and Housing and Growth and Infrastructure Delivery Cabinet Portfolios, to go forward to the Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board meeting scheduled for 8 February 2021 and to Full Cabinet on 11<sup>th</sup> February 2021.

Members were advised that the focus of the budget strategy had been on reset and recovery in light of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Budget Strategy Group had agreed to recommend the realignment of budgets within the Children's and Skills and Economy and Infrastructure portfolios at a cost of £4.050M per annum from 2023/24. The Council was drawing down on some of its Reserves during this period and continued to address both Covid related and none-Covid related pressures.

Members attention was drawn to Appendix B of the report, which detailed the Councils proposed Fees and Charges for 2021/22, all of which had been set in light of the fiscal pressures the Council was facing and taking account of the current and forecast inflation.

Having received the presentation, Members raised the following questions, which in summary included the following matters:

Councillor Howell referenced the detail within the report which highlighted additional investment earmarked for the climate change and economic development agendas respectively and questioned whether the proposed restructure in these service areas provided an opportunity for greater co-ordination of work across both services with the additional investment provided. It was confirmed that this was the intention arising from the restructure.

Councillor McLoughlin made reference to Appendix A of the report, specifically to the pressures on Waste Services and changes to co-mingled waste recycling and property growth and queried whether property growth in the borough would not off-set this pressure. Officers confirmed that council tax and business rates through property growth would off-set the pressure.

In reference to pressures detailed in Appendix A, Councillor Williams queried why in terms of waste disposal for the Bubbenhall site why there was such a variance in forecasting between 2020/21 and 2021/22. Members were advised that cost pressures arose from transferring waste across different sites for processing, which was subject to additional operational charges.

Councillor Parker questioned the impact on the Council's budget planning from the loss of dividends and related business rates from Birmingham Airport.

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Members were advised that the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) had been fully updated to reflect these pressures.

Having considered the report, the Economic Development and Managed Growth Scrutiny Board:

### **RESOLVED:**

- (i) To note the budget pressures and mitigating actions detailed in Appendix A to the report;
- (ii) To note the budget proposals detailed within the report; and,
- (iii) To note the Schedule of Fees and Charges proposed for 2021/22 as detailed in Appendix B to the report.

## **6. CLEAN AIR STRATEGY & AIR QUALITY MONITORING ANNUAL UPDATE**

An overview to the report was provided by the Senior Public Health Specialist.

Members were informed that the Council continued to develop engagement initiatives with schools within the borough to raise the air quality agenda, that the electric vehicle charging infrastructure in the borough was under review and that the Council's Walking and Cycling Strategy and Infrastructure Plan had been taken to public consultation from which a number of areas had been identified for further improvement and development.

Other initiatives and strategies that were being undertaken to both support and deliver the cleaner air agenda within the borough included the Net Zero Action Plan (in progress), Tree Planting Project (objective of planting 25,000 trees in the borough), supporting delivery of the Council's Climate Emergency Statement and the related Communication Plan (under review).

Following the Scrutiny Boards consideration of the Clean Air Strategy and Air Quality Monitoring Annual Update in 2019, Members were invited to suggest other diffusion tube monitoring sites within the borough. Appendix 2 to the report detailed the locations of alternative sites put forward, with a commentary and rationale for not having selected those sites proposed. A total of 22 sites were currently monitored (25 including the school site monitoring programme).

Appendix 3 to the report detailed the 2019 and 2020 NO<sub>2</sub> monitoring results and were advised that no site had currently exceeded NO<sub>2</sub> limits as at month 12 of monitoring.

Having received the presentation, Members of the Scrutiny Board raised a number of related questions, which in summary included the following matters:

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Councillor McLoughlin sought confirmation that no distance adjustment was now used for data compilation purposes and that all diffusion monitoring tubes were sited on facades in compliance with DEFRA guidance. Officers confirmed that this was the case.

Councillor McLoughlin queried whether any data had been received from the Transport and Highways service to correlate the reductions in readings between 2019 and 2020 in light of the reduction in vehicle movements during the C-19 pandemic period. Officers advised that they would clarify if any such information could be supplied by the Transport and Highways service.

With reference to Council's the tree planting programme, Councillor McLoughlin noted that the type of tree species planted, location of planting and tree maturity all had an impact on the type and extent of benefits planting brought to an environment, which in turn inferred that a net loss of trees would have a detrimental impact on air quality. As such, Councillor McLoughlin referenced a site detailed in the Local Plan which contained a substantial number of trees on the site and noted that it would be a matter of concern in the event that they were removed as a consequence of development of the site.

Councillor Howell sought confirmation as to whether the same sites would be monitored in 2021 and whether the Laboratory was operational. Members were informed that owing to restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, the monitoring locations used in 2020 would also be used for 2021. Members were also advised that diffusion monitoring tubes had been positioned on site from May 2020 and that data was still being collected. The Laboratory had closed for one month during 2020, but was fully operational again as at this time.

Councillor Howell referenced Appendix 2 to the report and noted that it was disappointing a number of suggested monitoring sites put forward had not been chosen and questioned whether they would be re-visited in 2021. Officers confirmed that this would be the case for those site deemed to be most suitable for monitoring. Suggestions for new sites had again been sought from Members. Members were advised that householders consent was required for the siting of diffusion monitoring tubes on facades and Members support acting as intermediaries with householders over potential sites would be welcomed by Officers.

Councillor Qais questioned when engagement and communication would recommence with residents and communities in support of the Clean Air Strategy and Air Quality Monitoring programme and where would the focus of attention be placed specific to local communities in respect of poor air quality. The Scrutiny Board was advised that the relaunched public engagement and communications initiatives would involve digital platforms, engaging with community groups, review of pollution levels in the home environment, modal shift and related national campaigns over a two months period. The Council

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would also engage directly with schools in the borough to raise awareness of the respective campaigns and Council strategies.

The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Adult Social Care advised the Scrutiny Board that the Action Plan Summary would be revisited to review its short, medium and long term plans around schools. Traffic volume / movements and public transport passenger numbers would continue to be monitored. Particular attention would be paid to air pollution within the home environment and the associated messaging to residents through the Councils Communications Team.

Councillor Hodgson noted that with regard to the public transport network there had been substantial reductions in passenger movements, but that it was expected to see them grow equally quickly once out of lockdown, as was the case before Christmas 2020. Consequently, messaging and engagement around modal shift was important, particularly in relation to support for campaigns such as Young Lungs and the School Streets Campaign to support change in outlook and behaviours. Consequently, Members requested of the Senior Public Health Specialist that monitoring data from the Transport and Highways service was provided for reference to the Public Health Team and Steering Group.

The Head of Planning Services advised Members that there was a golden thread within the Local Plan, which supported the Council's climate change, bio-diversity and air quality objectives as well as supporting attainment of net-diversity gains on development sites. Members were also advised that the Council had in place an urban tree replacement programme to compensate for tree loss attributable to any site development and a dedicated tree planting programme.

Councillor Ryan noted that it was challenging to effectively engage and communicate with schools and their pupils. Councillor Ryan requested that future reports to the Scrutiny Board included detail addressing how schools were informed and involved in the Councils Air Quality Monitoring Programme and related activities.

Councillor Ryan noted that with regard to locations of air quality mesh units detailed in the report, data for Marston Green relating to PM 2.5 and PM10 was supplied from 1/7/19 to 27/1/20 only due to technical reasons and queried why this continued to be the case after one year. Moving forward, Councillor Ryan requested that in future a comprehensive spreadsheet be made available to the Scrutiny Board, which detailed periodic, year on year data arising from the air quality diffusion monitoring sites across the borough, both for ease of reference and to facilitate review of progress in reaching the Council's air quality objectives. Councillor Ryan also noted that integrity and transparency of the supporting data was vital to move forward the air quality agenda in Solihull. In summary, Councillor Ryan stated that it was vital to engage with schools within the borough, work in partnership with local communities and to ensure the

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integrity of the air quality monitoring data if the Council was to deliver its air quality objectives across the borough.

The Senior Public Health Specialist responded that in terms of consultation with schools, the Council was working closely with schools in addressing the clean air agenda, with a number of initiatives and consultations earmarked to support behaviour change and modal shift. In respect of data monitoring and integrity of information, Members were assured that the delivery and provision of air quality data for the borough would be meaningful and delivered with integrity for Members and residents of Solihull.

Councillor Parker sought further confirmation pertaining to the lorry park arrangements located at Birmingham airport and of the related air quality monitoring arrangements for the site. Members were advised that the site was officially operational from 1/1/21, with vehicle movements to and from the site relatively low at this time. There had been no significant or associated issues reportedly arising for the local road or motorway network. Officers further advised that the site had been visited in December 2020 with a view to identifying an AQ monitoring site, the location of which would be confirmed imminently.

Having considered the report, the Economic Development and Managed Growth Scrutiny Board:

### **RESOLVED:**

- (i) To note the progress against delivery of the actions within the Clean Air Strategy as agreed at Cabinet on 7<sup>th</sup> February 2019;
- (ii) To note the update on the local monitoring data for both nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter:
- (iii) If possible, to obtain from the Transport and Highways Service transport data for those areas with diffusion tube monitoring sites in place;
- (iv) To Recommend to the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Climate Change, Planning and Housing to continue air quality monitoring and data capture for all current sites within the borough, irrespective of the level of pollution currently reported;
- (v) To Recommend to the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Climate Change, Planning and Housing continue to use the Air Quality Monitoring Site locations from 2020 in 2021;
- (vi) To request of the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Climate Change, Planning and Housing that all steps are taken ensure the integrity and comprehensiveness of the Council's air quality data when subject to scrutiny and review;

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- (vii) To Recommend to the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Climate Change, Planning and Housing that a comprehensive database/spreadsheet is developed to capture and present all annual Air Quality Monitoring data taken from across the borough;
- (viii) To Recommend to the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Climate Change, Planning and Housing that the Council continues to develop working relationships with schools in the borough through the sharing of air quality data and making air quality promotional materials and campaigns school friendly; and,
- (ix) To request from the Technical Data Officer detail pertaining to the last 12 months of air quality monitoring data when available.

### **7. WORK PROGRAMME**

Having considered the report, the Economic Development and Managed Growth Scrutiny Board:

#### **RESOLVED:**

- (i) To receive the following reports at the Scrutiny Board meeting scheduled for 18 March 2021:
  - The Council's Approach to Inclusive Growth
  - Solihull Town Centre Energy Network Update Report
  - Draft SCH Delivery Plan 2021/22
  - Work programme
- (ii) To receive the following report at the Scrutiny Board meeting scheduled for June/July 2021 (meeting date and other reports tbc):
  - Obstructions to New Housing Provision and Securing Land Supply in Solihull

The Economic Development and Managed Growth Scrutiny Board meeting closed at 7:49 p.m.