

**STRONGER COMMUNITIES AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY  
BOARD - 14 March 2023**

**STRONGER COMMUNITIES & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY BOARD**

**14 MARCH 2023**

**(HYBRID MEETING)**

**MINUTES**

Present: Councillor W Qais (Chairman); Councillors M Carthew, B Donnelly, A Feeney, B Groom, P Hogarth MBE, J O'Nyons, S Sheshabhattar and Mrs G Sleigh.

Apologies:

None.

Report authors/witnesses in attendance:

Alan Brown (Solihull MBC - Assistant Director – Highways & Environment).

Mrs Alison McGrory (Solihull MBC - Assistant Director – Communities & Partnerships).

Gary Palmer (Solihull MBC – Group Manager Policy & Engagement).

Emma Tinsley-Evans (Solihull MBC – Team Leader Planning Policy).

Katie Johnson (Solihull MBC - Senior/Development Officer - Policy & Delivery).

Paul Tovey (Solihull MBC - Head of Highway Management).

James McNeil (Solihull MBC - UTMC / CCTV Senior Engineer) [Virtual attendance].

Austin Rodriguez (Solihull MBC – Head of Housing & Communities).

Neeraj Malhotra (Solihull MBC – Deputy Director of Public Health).

Sadie Walker (Solihull MBC - Senior Public Health Manager – Leisure and Physical Activity).

External Witnesses in attendance:

None.

Cabinet Members in attendance by invitation:

Councillor D Howell – Cabinet Member (Communities & Leisure) [Virtual attendance].

Councillor K Hawkins – Cabinet Member (Environment & Infrastructure).

Councillor K Grinsell – Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member (Partnerships & Wellbeing).

Other Elected Members in attendance by invitation:

Councillor J Tildesley (St. Alphege Ward).

Councillor S Gethen (St. Alphege Ward).

**1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor W Qais and Councillor B Groom both declared non-pecuniary conflict of interests in the report relating to the summary and assessment of bids for funding from the neighbourhood proportion of the Community Infrastructure Levy (specifically

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Langley Primary School). Both Councillors withdrew from the meeting for the duration of that agenda item (Councillor P Hogarth MBE having taken the Chair).

### **RESOLVED**

That, the Declarations of Interest be noted and recorded.

## **2. QUESTIONS AND DEPUTATIONS**

Councillor S Gethen attended the meeting in relation to the summary and assessment of bids for funding from the neighbourhood proportion of the Community Infrastructure Levy and spoke in support of the proposed allocation of funding to the Malvern Park play area improvements.

### **RESOLVED**

That, the contents of the Deputation be noted.

## **3. MINUTES**

The Chairman invited the Board to receive, for approval, the Minutes of the last meeting held on 10 January 2023.

### **RESOLVED**

That, the Minutes be agreed as a correct record without discussion or any matters arising.

## **4. CABINET PORTFOLIO PRIORITIES - UPDATE**

In attendance: Councillor D Howell – Cabinet Member (Communities & Leisure) and Councillor K Hawkins – Cabinet Member (Environment & Infrastructure).

The Board considered two detailed reports and updates in respect of the current and future priorities for the Communities & Leisure; and the Environment & Infrastructure Portfolios.

Having considered the reports, the Board asked the following questions of the Portfolio Holders and/or made the following observations:

### Communities & Leisure

- Cllr P Hogarth MBE highlighted the tourism and high streets aspect of the report and sought further detail on the potential future use of the former M&S store in Mell Square to strengthen the viability of that part of the town centre. Cllr Howell advised that she was not able to confirm the future use of that site but reassured the Board that the Council, as landlord, would seek to make the best and most appropriate future use of that site and its occupancy.

### Environment & Infrastructure

There were no questions or points of clarification arising from the Portfolio Holders report.

### **RESOLVED**

- (i) That, the contents of the two reports be received and welcomed; and

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- (ii) That, the potential topics for inclusion of the Board's 2023/24 Work Programme as highlighted within the reports be received.

### **5. SUMMARY AND ASSESSMENT OF BIDS FOR FUNDING FROM THE NEIGHBOURHOOD PROPORTION OF THE COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY**

[Councillor P Hogarth MBE having taken the Chair for the duration of this item]

In attendance: Gary Palmer (Solihull MBC – Group Manager Policy & Engagement); Emma Tinsley-Evans (Solihull MBC – Team Leader Planning Policy); and Katie Johnson (Solihull MBC - Senior/Development Officer - Policy & Delivery).

The Board considered a detailed report and presentation which provided an overview and update on the Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy (NCIL). The views of the Board was sought in respect of the draft allocations for funding with recommendations being made to the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Communities & Leisure later in this month.

In addition to the report, an update note was circulated that increased the number of bids recommended for approval and funding.

Officers reported that 21 bids had been received and, following their assessment against the agreed scoring matrix (and based on the funding available in each Ward), it was proposed that 14 bids be now recommended for funding approval. A total of £402,404 of NCIL funding was available. The revised report proposed that a total of £242,437 be recommended for allocation this year with £159,967 'rolling over' for future bidding in 2023/24.

Councillor S Gethen attended the meeting and spoke in support of the proposed allocation of funding to the Malvern Park play area improvements.

Having considered the report, the Board asked the following questions and/or made the following observations:

- Cllr J O'Nyons welcomed the sentiments contained within the deputation and the proposed allocation of funding to the Malvern Park play area improvements.
- Cllr A Feeney highlighted Castle Bromwich Ward and the limitations on CIL funding in parished areas of the Borough. Cllr Feeney asked how might applications be considered for applications that originated from within a ward, but outside of a parish boundary (e.g. such as a theoretical application relating to Lanchester Park). Officers advised that CIL funding would be available via the normal application process for such a location. Officers did, however, highlight that as little development took place in Castle Bromwich, the CIL funding pot was slow to accumulate and become available. As an alternative, other community funding possibilities could be explored on a case by case basis in areas of the Borough where the generation of CIL funds was very limited.
- Cllr M Carthew welcomed all of the proposed allocations and particularly the revised report that recommended funding to Langley Primary School. Cllr Carthew also sought further detail on bidding thresholds and why no bids featured in 2022/23 in the Lyndon and Elmdon Wards. Officers advised that individual ward CIL funds needed to reach in excess of £10k before applications for CIL funding were open.

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- Cllr P Hogarth MBE stated that it was unfortunate that in the Silhill Ward, £64,760 was unallocated for 2022/23 as no bidding applications had been submitted. Officers confirmed that this sum would now roll forward to 2023/24.

### RESOLVED

That, the Board **UNANIMOUSLY** makes the following **RECOMMENDATIONS** to the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Communities & Leisure:

That, subject to the observations and comments recorded in the preamble above, the Board:

- (i) Notes the current position for allocating NCIL funds in 2022/23;
- (ii) Supports the proposed 14 bid allocations for 2022/23 as detailed within the revised report (a total of £242,437); and
- (iii) Supports the sum of £159,967 rolling-over to the 2023/24 bidding year.

## 6. CCTV REVIEW

In attendance: Paul Tovey (Solihull MBC - Head of Highway Management) and James McNeil (Solihull MBC - UTMC / CCTV Senior Engineer).

The Board considered a detailed report and presentation that provided an update and overview of the Council's Public Realm, Traffic Management and Car Park CCTV systems. The report also included a commentary on the benefits of providing the service, the current condition of the assets and potential options for future service delivery.

In readiness for their consideration of the report, the Board had the opportunity to visit the Council's Urban Traffic Control Centre and Transport for West Midlands (TfWM) Safer Travel Team and Regional Control Centre.

Having considered the report, the Board asked the following questions and/or made the following observations:

- The Chairman welcomed the existence of the current service provision, its value to the public realm, traffic management and overall general borough security. It was considered critical that the service was maintained going forwards and, where viable, coverage potentially extended to parks and public play areas.
- Cllr P Hogarth MBE echoed the sentiments of the Chairman and added that the contents of site visits undertaken, particularly, to Transport for West Midlands (TfWM) Safer Travel Team and Regional Control Centre was very impressive and gave huge reassurances towards public community safety. Cllr Hogarth also recalled a recent RTC which had been witnessed via the CCTV network and had prompted the rapid mobilisation of emergency and network repair support services. Cllr Hogarth supported the service being maintained and, where viable, improved and extended to other areas as deemed appropriate.
- Cllr G Sleight stated that the current service was invaluable and that it should continue to be invested in over the coming years.

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- Cllr A Feeney asked for further detail on the current criteria for service allocation and coverage positions, giving Smith's Wood Ward (a priority policing zone) as an example. On the basis of the information provided in the report, there was no apparent public realm CCTV in that area. Officers advised that the current report covered the Council's own CCTV system covering, in the main, much of south Solihull. Working in parallel with that was the large CCTV infrastructure maintained and operated by Solihull Community Housing. That system covered much of the north of the Borough, inclusive of tower blocks, public realm and door monitoring services. Officers also confirmed that the placement of CCTV was done via an evidence based appraisal and a business case approach to demonstrate that CCTV was most likely to be effective. Officers also drew Members attention to the Council's own private town centre fibre network which was very cost effective to the service. Once CCTV provision was provided beyond the extent of that private network, service (5G) communication costs became very expensive and that then became a key consideration given the current financial pressures.
- Cllr S Sheshabhattar welcomed the report and the current service provision, particularly the wide extent of coverage with the northern and southern areas of the Borough and the siting criteria having regard to crime and ASB mapping. Officers added that no capital funding existed for CCTV service operation and maintenance, only revenue funding. Capital funding would need to be sought for new sites and appropriate bid/grant applications made where applicable. All current CCTV was located at fixed sites (rather than mobile), although the Council's UTCC did have a small number of mobile units that could be deployed, as necessary, for traffic management purposes. Public realm mobile cameras had been withdrawn from service in recent years. Officers undertook to establish the reasons for this withdrawal with colleagues from the Public Realm Team outside of the meeting.
- Cllr B Groom asked what potential opportunities existed for additional/external funding for CCTV provision. Officers advised that some alternatives to capital funding might exist although the ongoing (5G) communication costs were the key consideration in any future expansion of the service. The Board was also advised that CCTV was not always the best solution to e.g. crime and ASB in some locations as the provision of CCTV just displaced the issue and did not tackle the underlying cause.
- Cllr M Carthew sought further detail on the extent of the Council's current private fibre network and was advised that it was limited to the main town centre curtilage; everything beyond that boundary was/would have to be served on a public (but secure) 5G network.

### **RESOLVED**

That, the Board **UNANIMOUSLY** makes the following **RECOMMENDATIONS** to the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Environment & Infrastructure:

That, subject to the observations and comments recorded in the preamble above, the Board:

- (i) Welcomes the current extent of the CCTV service provision, acknowledging its importance towards, particularly, community safety and traffic management;

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- (ii) Supports the continued investment in (and retention of) the CCTV service;
- (iii) Supports, where financially viable to do so, operational upgrades to the current infrastructure (e.g. analogue to digital equipment); and
- (iv) Supports, where financially viable to do so, the inclusion of parks and play areas within the extent of CCTV coverage.

### **7. SOLIHULL VCSE STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT**

In attendance: Austin Rodriguez (Solihull MBC – Head of Housing & Communities) and Councillor D Howell – Cabinet Member (Communities & Leisure).

The Board considered a detailed report and presentation that provided an overview and update of the progress being made in creating a strategic assessment of the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sectors within Solihull.

Councillor D Howell, Cabinet Member for Communities & Leisure, highlighted the importance of the work being undertaken and commended the intentions of the VCSE Strategic Assessment to the Board.

Having considered the report, the Board asked the following questions and/or made the following observations:

- The Chairman welcomed the report and reaffirmed the importance of Solihull's voluntary and community sector.
- Cllr B Groom highlighted the usefulness of having the baseline data that would inform the content of the strategic assessment as it continued to be developed. Charities, often referred to as micro-charities, were highlighted and Officers were asked to consider within the strategic assessment what assistance could be afforded to them to ensure they remained sustainable and what additional skills might need to be offered to support their trustees, given the valuable work they undertook within local communities.
- Cllr P Hogarth MBE stated that the number of charities appeared to be growing and concern was expressed that there may be a perception of too much duplication in the work undertaken by them. Officers were also asked how the overheads of charities and the salaries of their senior staff were scrutinised. Officers acknowledged that competition between charities was an issue and future collaboration between them would be encouraged. In terms of salaries, these varied by the size of the charity itself. No large charities were registered in Solihull and it was not envisaged that any paid salaries within the smaller, Solihull-based, charities would give rise to any concerns.
- Cllr M Carthew highlighted the reported trends where charities were typically located and asked for further detail on the perception that they were sited near to large retail centres and/or other commercial areas. Officers advised that more work was needed to understand these trends in terms of why a charity chose a specific area to base itself over another.
- Cllr P Hogarth MBE highlighted the value of charities directly associated with major businesses within Solihull, such as Birmingham Airport's

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Community Trust Fund. Officers reaffirmed the community value of these and how they added value to VCSE overall.

- Cllr S Sheshabhattar acknowledged the value of the voluntary and community sector and highlighted the typical age groups that participated in charity activities. It was suggested that the strategic assessment should seek to encourage greater participation and volunteering from a wider age group, particularly 25-34yrs. Officers noted the concerns and highlighted that participation from this age group was a challenge nationally.

### **RESOLVED**

That, subject to the observations and comments recorded in the preamble above, the Board:

- (i) Welcomes the current progress towards the development of the VCSE Strategic Assessment (as at v1.0); and
- (ii) Agrees to consider (v2.0) of the VCSE Strategic Assessment in 12 months time as part of the Boards 2023/24 Work Programme.

## **8. SOLIHULL ON THE MOVE PROGRAMME UPDATE**

In attendance: Neeraj Malhotra (Solihull MBC – Deputy Director of Public Health); Sadie Walker (Solihull MBC - Senior Public Health Manager – Leisure and Physical Activity); Alan Brown (Solihull MBC - Assistant Director – Highways & Environment) and Councillor D Howell – Cabinet Member (Communities & Leisure).

The Board considered a detailed report and presentation that provided an overview and update of the initial phase of the Solihull on the Move Programme.

As part of the consideration of the report, Councillor D Howell, Cabinet Member for Communities & Leisure highlighted and commended a range of activities provided through the Programme.

Having considered the report, the Board asked the following questions and/or made the following observations:

- Cllr A Feeney sought further detail as to how the Programme utilised the Boroughs public rights of way and, particularly, what work was undertaken to ensure they remained accessible and unobstructed to encourage residents to use them. Officers confirmed that scheduled maintenance and clearing was undertaken along public rights of way and public footpaths. Members were encouraged to report any known locations which required additional attention outside of the cyclical maintenance regime.
- Cllr P Hogarth MBE highlighted the “Ping! Solihull” activities provided by the Programme and stated that care needed to be taken regarding the siting of table tennis locations to avoid causing any hindrance to shoppers, particularly the elderly. Officers highlighted the work that had been done with the management team of Mell Square Shopping Centre and confirmed that monitoring was regularly undertaken at the indoor table tennis facility in that location. The Board was advised that feedback from the use of that location would be sought to establish if any concerns were evident.

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- Cllr B Groom welcomed the report and, particularly, the community sports and physical activity grant programme. Cllr Groom also asked how the Programme supported individuals wishing to participate alone in sport and physical activity as opposed to the initiatives that had been organised for groups. It was suggested that the Programme should also publicise safe running and cycling routes for lone participants, especially unaccompanied women. In response, Officers highlighted the work currently undertaken to promote walking, running and cycling and acknowledged the views given as being particularly relevant during the Winter months.
- The Chairman asked for further detail regarding the maintenance of table tennis equipment utilised through the Programme and was advised that a core budget was in now in place for that specific activity and others contained within the Programme.

**RESOLVED**

That, subject to the observations and comments recorded in the preamble above, the Board:

- (i) Welcomes the current progress towards the delivery of the Solihull on the Move Programme during 2022/23.

(The meeting concluded at 7.30pm)