

**STRONGER COMMUNITIES AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY
BOARD - 20 January 2021**

STRONGER COMMUNITIES & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY BOARD

20 JANUARY 2021

(VIRTUAL MEETING)

MINUTES

Present: Councillor R Grinsell (Chairman); Councillors S Ashraf MBE, J Butler, C Buxton-Sait, J Fairburn, P Hogarth MBE, Mrs A Mackenzie, M Parker and M Wilson.

Apologies:

None.

Report authors/witnesses in attendance:

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

Alan Brown (Assistant Director – Highways & Environment).

Lauren Beach (Economy and Infrastructure Finance Manager).

Paul Tovey (Head of Highway Management).

David Keaney (Traffic Manager).

External Witnesses in attendance:

Inspector Sharon Jones (West Midlands Police).

Cabinet Members in attendance by invitation:

Councillor Mrs A Rolf – Cabinet Member (Stronger & Safer Communities) and Chair of the Safer Solihull Community Safety Partnership.

Councillor J Tildesley – Cabinet Member (Leisure, Tourism & Sport).

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

Other Elected Members in attendance by invitation:

None.

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations on interest.

2. QUESTIONS AND DEPUTATIONS

There were no questions or deputations.

3. MINUTES

The Minutes of the last (virtual) meeting held on 4 November 2020, was submitted for review and approval.

RESOLVED

That the Minutes from the meeting held on 4 November 2020 be agreed as a correct record.

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4. MTFS UPDATE - BUDGET STRATEGY 2021/22 - 2023/24

In attendance: Mrs Alison McGrory (Assistant Director – Communities & Partnerships); Alan Brown (Assistant Director – Highways & Environment); Lauren Beach (Economy and Infrastructure Finance Manager); Councillor Mrs A Rolf – Cabinet Member (Stronger & Safer Communities); Councillor J Tildesley – Cabinet Member (Leisure, Tourism & Sport); and Councillor K Hawkins – Cabinet Member (Environment & Highways).

To Board considered a detailed report which set out the budget proposals identified for 2021/22 to 2023/24 within the Environment and Highways; Leisure Tourism and Sport; and the Stronger and Safer Communities Cabinet Portfolios.

Officers reported that the focus of the budget strategy this year had been on reset and recovery in the light of the wide-ranging impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Cabinet Portfolios had not been asked to propose savings to meet a corporate target but instead had identified options for mitigating service pressures. These had been considered by the Budget Strategy Group at their three meetings held in October and November 2020. The budget proposals had also been shared with all Members at a seminar in December 2020.

Each individual Scrutiny Board this month was now being asked to consider, in detail, the proposals which related to the Cabinet Portfolios within their remit. The Board was advised that in developing the budget proposals for review by the Budget Strategy Group, the directorate leadership teams had worked with the Cabinet Portfolio Holders to establish the scale of the pressures and identify mitigating actions within each service area. The detailed indicative budgets for the services relating to this scrutiny board were submitted and considered together with an overview of the projected reserves position.

As part of the Council's fees and charges policy, the charges levied by the Council needed to be approved annually as part of the budget setting process. A schedule of fees and charges within the remit of this scrutiny board was also submitted and considered. Officers advised that the fees and charges took into account the guidance set out in the Council's policy and had been reviewed in the light of the pressures faced by the Council and with reference to current and forecast inflation.

As a result of the report, the following questions and observations were noted:

- 2021/22 Fees and Charges for Leisure Centres and Libraries - the Chairman and a number of Members stated that, having regard to the ongoing impact of Covid-19 and future economic recovery, they were pleased to see the proposed 2021/22 fees and charges for the Council's leisure centres and libraries, particularly, with little or no increase.
- 2021/22 Fees and Charges for Car Parks – the Board welcomed the proposal not to increase car parking charges and appreciated that this would help with Solihull's economic recovery.
- Leisure Centre Fees and Charges (Swimming) – the Board sought further comment as to why the Borough's two leisure centres had different fees for this individual activity. Officers advised that fees and charges were benchmarked against similar service provision available locally.
- Bulky Household Waste Collections – the Chairman considered that greater promotion of this service should be undertaken to (i) increase potential income and (ii) reduce the potential for fly tipping.
- Reduction in Car Parking Income – the Board sought additional clarification for the ongoing pressure highlighted in the report between 2020/21 and 2023/24.

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Officers advised that prior to the Covid-19 pandemic it had already been recognised that car park usage had reduced, thus reducing income. This year, car park usage had reduced considerably owing to Covid-19 and it was envisaged that there would be a long-term shift in people's behaviour that would have an effect on future car park usage and reduced future income (i.e. continued working from home and greater shopping online). This had been taken into account in future forecasts. The Board was also advised of the method of accounting for income loss recovery claims.

- Business Rates Windfall – the Board asked for a view on the level of confidence in the business rates windfall for the current financial year and if this had been affected by the pandemic. Officers advised that the 2020/21 forecast had not been adversely affected as businesses were able to claim business rate reliefs and Officers were confident that this would enable the topping-up of reserves. For future years, Officers advised that there was an element of risk although they had continued to account for those windfalls on a one-off basis. However, those windfalls would not be allocated into the budget until there was certainty that they would be received.
- Business Rates Retention – the Board sought clarification that Solihull was included in the regional pilots of 100% business rates retention. Officers advised that Solihull was part of the pilot.
- £2.250M Forecast Windfall – the Board noted that the Budget Strategy Group had agreed to endorse the use of £2.250M of the forecast windfall funding to top-up the reserves in the Children's Services and Skills; and Economy and Infrastructure Portfolios. Members asked for the further information as to the individual breakdown for each and were advised that Appendix A of the report provided a detailed breakdown of Covid and non-Covid related pressures. Further detailed information, not available at the meeting, could be circulated separately outside of the meeting for Members information.
- Defective Brown Bins – the Board sought further information as to how this had been accounted for in the budget setting process. Officers advised that as part of the MTFs, an assumption had been made that the Council would manage to conclude the ongoing legal case successfully, accepting that there was still current high risk associated with that assumption.
- Tell Us Once – the Board sought confirmation that Solihull used this national service. Officers confirmed that Tell Us Once was used within Solihull Council (Registrars) to notify a number of service areas (at a single point of contact) of a residents/family change of circumstances when registering a death.
- Strategic Environment Contract – the Board sought further information as to the potential costs to the authority due to uplifts to the contract arising from service growth due to the increase in properties from new residential developments. Officers advised that during the life of the current contract, a further £231k had been added for waste and recycling collections and a further £75k for street care.
- The Core Theatre – the Board asked if there were any plans to move to some form of online theatre/film provision in the future, particularly to maximise income opportunities given the evident behaviour changes owing to the pandemic. Cllr Tildesley, Cabinet Member (Leisure, Tourism & Sport) advised that there were no current plans to provide an online broadcast from the theatre at the present time. Cllr Tildesley reaffirmed his commitment to providing excellent cultural services to the Borough as soon as council services could return to any form of normality. Cllr Tildesley also highlighted the publication, this week, of a cultural report for Solihull that had been undertaken by Sampad Arts to support the delivery of cultural services in Solihull. Once available, the report would be shared with Members.

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- Operation of Leisure Centres (Deed of Variation) – the Board sought further comment on the financial implications of the current contractual arrangements triggered by Covid-19. Officers advised that the outcome of the ongoing pandemic would determine any future clarity regarding the contract financial model. Financial losses were being mitigated by the receipt of government relief and the future use of reserves.

The above observations and recommendations of this Scrutiny Board would go forward to the Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board and Full Cabinet during February 2021.

The Board extended their appreciation to Officers in compiling the proposed budget and acknowledged what must have been an extremely challenging year for them.

RESOLVED

The Board **UNANIMOUSLY** made the following **RECOMMENDATIONS** to the **Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board** and **Full Cabinet**:

That, subject to the preamble above, the Board:

- (i) Acknowledges the pressures and mitigating actions set out in Appendix A to the report;
- (ii) Supports the schedule of fees and charges proposed for 2021/22, as attached at Appendix B to the report; and
- (iii) Supports the indicative budget proposals outlined in the report at Appendix C.

5. SPEED ENFORCEMENT IN SOLIHULL - A NEW APPROACH

In attendance: Alan Brown (Assistant Director – Highways & Environment); Paul Tovey (Head of Highway Management); David Keaney (Traffic Manager); Councillor K Hawkins – Cabinet Member (Environment & Highways); and Inspector Sharon Jones (West Midlands Police).

The Board was invited to (i) consider a detailed report which set out an overview of the current practice; and (ii) discuss moving forward towards a new, partnership led, approach to speed and traffic enforcement within Solihull. To complement the report, Officers also delivered a PowerPoint presentation to highlight the key objectives of the report.

It was anticipated that the report would facilitate a discussion regarding the setting of 20mph speed limits on the local road network in Solihull and, in turn, future policy making. The approach would also facilitate information sharing on behalf of the Police and the Highway Management Team in respect of current priorities and levels of service.

Officers also highlighted that the report provided an opportunity for the Board to feed into the review process at an early stage in order to help achieve the overarching road traffic casualty reduction targets set out in the Council's Road Safety Strategy 2017 to 2030.

The Board's recommendations resulting from the above would be fed into the Environment & Highways Cabinet decision-making process at a later point in the year.

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The views of the Board were requested in respect of a number of specific questions pertaining to 20mph speed limits and potential new ways of working for speed enforcement. The following questions and observations were noted:

Speed Limits

- Members welcomed this aspect of the overall Review and highlighted that excessive traffic speeds were regular Ward issues raised with them by local residents.
- The report highlighted that feedback on the current use of 20mph speed limits within Solihull had been mixed and Officers were asked for further local evidence to support their introduction. Officers highlighted a similar picture from a number of local authorities where 20mph speed limit zones had been introduced. The Board was advised that as a benefit of lowering the speed limit, collisions were likely to be less severe rather than eradicating collisions completely. The DfT's own data also indicated that general compliance with 20mph speed limits was poor.
- The safety of children was a clear priority and the use of 20mph speed limits around school sites particularly, was supported. The Board highlighted the potential usefulness of additional roundel signage on the carriageway surface where permissible. Officers highlighted the significant number of school locations in Solihull and the small number of those sites which currently had 20mph speed limits in force. The Board was further advised of the use of carriageway roundel markings for speed limits and the regulatory requirements surrounding their use (i.e. they could not be used in areas with part-time variable speed limits). Officers also highlighted the strict regulatory signage requirements for 30mph speed limits.
- Members reiterated that traffic congestion and inconsiderate parking was a factor to consider for road safety initiatives in and around school sites, in addition to new 20mph speed limits.
- The Board also highlighted the importance of highway signage being maintained in good order and kept unobscured. Member's perception was that poorly maintained highway markings, such as demarcation linings, had a negative effect on road safety. Officers were also requested to review the Council's decluttering policy for highway signage to ensure that historical signage/markings which had not been reinstated had not had a negative effect on road safety thereafter. In this year's Resources and Priorities Plan, soon to be considered by the Cabinet Member for Environment & Highways, more funding was being added to the carriageway marking and maintenance budget which would address that concern going forwards.
- Members questioned if it was feasible to set key performance indicators to measure the success of 20mph speed limits and to help draw comparisons within Solihull. Officers advised that KSI data (killed or seriously injured) was utilised as there was an acknowledged under-reporting for minor, damage-only, collisions. On average, there were now 45 KSI's each year which was a continued annual reduction in comparison with data taken from across the last three decades. A bi-annual review of all roads was also undertaken to inform future road safety priorities to the Cabinet Member for consideration. Additionally, some school sites were prohibitive to the introduction of 20mph speed limits due to their individual locations and network constraints.
- The Board asked what the Council's current stance was on physical traffic calming features; if they were still proven to be effective; and what new alternatives there were. Officers advised that a number of engineering measures were still available for use although speed limit proposals were typically brought

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forward as a separate individual review. The “low traffic neighbourhoods” initiative was being considered for some areas within Solihull and work around that would also be brought forward in the coming months.

- The Board also asked what investment was being made to ensure the overall journey to school was safe beyond the 20mph zones to ensure child pedestrian casualties were as low as possible. Additionally, Members asked if any pilot schemes had been undertaken and were advised that eight schools within Solihull currently had schemes in operation for either permanent or part-time 20mph speed limits. Officers advised that evidence showed that the beginning and end points of school arrival and departure times tended to be the periods where traffic speeds were the most critical from a road safety point of view as traffic congestion was not at its peak and some drivers did not expect to encounter child pedestrians. 20mph speed limits tended to become self-enforcing as congestion levels increased closer to the actual school start and finish times where child pedestrian activity was more concentrated and visible to drivers.
- The Board highlighted the issue of inconsiderate parking around schools, which when tackled, resulted in traffic speeds increasing as the removal of parked cars facilitated higher speeds by default.

Speed Enforcement and New Future Ways of Working

- The Board highlighted that enforcement was a key part of road safety and asked what enforcement resources were available at school start and finish times where 20mph speed limits were in force at present. West Midlands Police advised that enforcement activity (by them) was undertaken on an evidence-based approach and Police attention was directed toward problematic locations specifically. Additionally, the Chairman sought clarification as to where such evidence would need to be received from and was advised that complaints from any origin (i.e. Councillors, residents or the schools themselves) would be considered and could be sent to either the Police or the Local Authority. The Police were also thanked for their support following the introduction of the School Streets initiative and the second phase, going forwards.
- The Chairman highlighted that the use of mobile camera enforcement was quickly publicised by residents via social media in his particular Ward which tended to dilute the impact of the enforcement exercise being undertaken.
- The Board supported the retention of obsolete GATSO camera housings and signage as long as they were in a safe condition to remain in situ. The perception from a number of Members was that they still caused the majority of motorists to be aware of their vehicle speeds at those individual locations.
- The Board commended the continued use of the average speed cameras which they perceived to be very effective in reducing vehicle speeds. Officers were asked if any additional funding streams were available to provide coverage to a greater number of locations. Members were advised that the HS2 Road Safety Fund could potentially include schemes such as average speed cameras. The intentions of that Fund was to create a legacy for road safety.
- Locations for new average speed camera sites were submitted by Members, such as the A34 (Stratford Road, Shirley) together with the suggestion that dummy equipment could also be used to increase coverage at minimal cost. Officers advised that all current (and historically obsolete) sites were live and dummy locations had never been used in Solihull.
- In terms of costs, the establishment of the three current average speed camera sites amounted to £250k, including the setting up of the back-office function.

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Officers advised that there was presently a funding gap for the ongoing maintenance costs which needed to be addressed going forwards with the aim that they became self-funding. The establishment of additional new sites would amount to tens of thousands of pounds with exact costings being determined by the individual locations and the number of carriageway lanes of traffic needing enforcement. Officers estimated that the establishment of a new site on the A34 (a dual carriageway) would be nearer £100k. The Board supported the A34 as a future priority site.

- The Board commented on the Prolaser enforcement and asked how many PCSO's were able to undertake those duties in addition to uniformed Police. West Midlands Police advised that an estimated three Officers, per policing team, were trained to use the Prolaser equipment. Further training to increase capacity had been hindered recently owing to Covid-19.

Educational Activity including Speed Aware

- Members considered that driver behaviour was the overriding issue that needed to be addressed via ongoing and future campaigns with a variety of audiences. Officers drew attention to the current educational campaigns to support road safety and explained how they were delivered.
- The Board welcomed the current and future Speed Aware Programme and highlighted several additional preferred poster designs for future use. These were (utilising red wherever possible in the artwork to signal danger), "speed kills"; "its 30 for a reason"; "20 is plenty" and "slow down – drive like your kids live here". The Board also asked if any research had been undertaken locally or regionally as to which poster campaign worked best. Officers advised that the current poster campaign had been used in Solihull for some years and there was a desire to refresh it and make it more visible to road users. The Board also supported the use of digital flashing signage to support this particular campaign where appropriate.

Other Considerations

- The Chairman asked if, in addition to all the initiatives covered in the report, optical illusion road markings and/or different coloured road surfaces had been considered for use in Solihull which gave the perception of a narrowing carriageway in an attempt to reduce vehicle speeds. Officers advised that, in their professional opinion, such markings and colourings had a very minimal effect on reducing vehicle speeds as drivers soon became familiar with them. In terms of engineering solutions to avoid the need for ongoing enforcement, physical traffic calming measures had proved to be the most effective at certain locations.

RESOLVED

That, subject to the comments and views recorded in the preamble above, the Board **UNANIMOUSLY** made the following **RECOMMENDATIONS** to the **Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Environment & Highways**:

Speed Limits

- (i) That the Board supports the use of 20mph maximum speed limits at the suggestion location types as set out in the report. The Board particularly acknowledges their

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importance in the vicinity of school sites where local road networks allow for their use;

- (ii) That, subject to regulatory signage compliance, Officers be requested to consider the use of painted carriageway roundels to give new speed limits maximum visual impact upon implementation; and
- (iii) That Officers review the Council's current approach to signage and road marking de-cluttering to ensure that this policy does not have a detrimental effect on road safety;

Speed Enforcement and New Ways of Working

- (i) That the Board supports the proposed review of the existing Average Speed Camera sites and those sites being maintained where evidence still exists; the development of a future regional approach as detailed within the report, and; to keep an element of flexibility within that initiative to move to new locations where evidence of similar road safety concerns exist;
- (ii) That the Board supports the proposed review of Mobile Enforcement sites;
- (iii) That, noting the financial implications of maintaining obsolete GATSO camera housings and associated signage, the Board highlights their perceived ongoing contribution to road safety. In that regard, the Board supports their retention on a site-by-site basis where it is safe and viable to do so;
- (iv) That the Board supports the ongoing use of Prolaser, Police-led, enforcement and encourages the Police to ensure that they have a consistent number of trained Officers across each Ward to perform that type of enforcement; and
- (v) That the Board supports the ongoing Speed Aware Programme, utilising the suggested preferred poster campaigns as set out in the preamble above.

Educational Activity

- (i) That the Board supports ongoing and targeted educational activity and awareness to promote road safety to all user groups, especially child pedestrians.

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6. SAFER SOLIHULL PARTNERSHIP REVIEW

In attendance: Mrs Alison McGrory (Assistant Director – Communities & Partnerships) and Councillor Mrs A Rolf – Cabinet Member (Stronger & Safer Communities) and Chair of the Safer Solihull Community Safety Partnership.

The Board was invited to consider a detailed report regarding the outcomes, to date, of a Review of the Safer Solihull Community Safety Partnership and to seek the Board's views on a proposed new Governance Framework and a potential reset of the Board's crime and disorder scrutiny function, going forwards, to complement those arrangements.

In addition to the report itself, Officers also delivered a PowerPoint presentation to highlight the key objectives of the report.

Officers emphasised that it was important that there were clear lines of accountability for each of the statutory Partners at a senior level and that there was clear oversight and challenge by Elected Members. In order to achieve this, the report set out a number of proposed changes to the existing formal governance process.

As a result of the report, the following questions and observations were noted:

- In supporting the overall principles, the Chairman highlighted that the Review brought about the opportunity to reset the Board's Crime and Disorder Scrutiny function to ensure that all Strategic Partners were held to account equally. To date, the community safety performance of the Police tended to be the main focus of much of the Board's attention.
- Moving forwards, the Board considered that each Strategic Partner should have measureable individual community safety targets within the new structure. From a scrutiny perspective, those targets could be reported to the Board at the beginning of each Municipal Year and the Board could then undertake performance monitoring and robust challenge at agreed points during the ensuing year. The Board considered that this would be a more effective means of scrutiny instead of Partnership updates on key activities as was the current model. Officers supported the suggested approach which would ensure all Strategic Partners demonstrated their "added value" to Safer Solihull Partnership, rather than reporting on the regular work of their individual organisations by default.
- The Board supported the proposed new framework and highlighted that there was an opportunity to strengthen links to other groups to better deliver the Partnerships priorities and have clearer accountability and commitment. Members also sought clarification as to what budget, if any, had been appropriated to the new proposed arrangements going forwards. Officers highlighted the importance of the links to the two Safeguarding Boards within the Framework and the ongoing work to clarify those linkages. In terms of the individual groups that reported into the Safer Solihull Strategic Board, work was also in hand as part of the Review to fully understand their work and achievements to ensure clear and measureable outputs.
- The Board also highlighted the importance of streamlining the governance arrangements so the role and purpose of each group within the Framework was relevant and obvious; and that clear pathways of communication resulted.
- Officers also highlighted that the Review sought to re-establish the links between the Strategic and Delivery arms of the Partnership to ensure clear accountability.

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Councillor Mrs A Rolf – Cabinet Member (Stronger & Safer Communities) and Chair of the Safer Solihull Community Safety Partnership highlighted her support for the Review and the potential reset for the Boards Crime and Disorder Scrutiny function.

RESOLVED

That, subject to the comments and views recorded in the preamble above, the Board **UNANIMOUSLY** made the following **RECOMMENDATIONS** to the **Safer Solihull Partnership** and the **Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Stronger & Safer Communities**:

- (i) That the Board supports the Governance Framework Review outcomes, to date, for the Safer Solihull Community Safety Partnership and the proposed new Governance Framework as set out in Appendix B to the report;
- (ii) That the Board supports the proposal to use the Review as an opportunity to “reset” the Boards statutory Crime and Disorder Scrutiny function;
- (iii) That each Strategic Partner be set individual targets, in consultation with this Board, to enable their individual “added value” to the Safer Solihull Partnership to be measured throughout the year; and
- (iv) That this Board receives the final report at the conclusion of the Review process for information.

7. WORK PLAN 2020/2021

The Board received its draft Work Programme for the remaining meeting in 2020/21. The following observations for the Board’s March 2021 meeting was noted:

- Councillor J Tildesley – Cabinet Member (Leisure, Tourism & Sport) indicated that he would be in a position to bring forward a, post-lockdown, update for the Council’s Cultural Services; and
- Strategic Environment Contract 2020 Key Performance Indicators - Alan Brown (Assistant Director – Highways & Environment) advised that due to the current stage of the competitive procurement of the new contract, this item would need to be removed from the Work Programme (as it would not be permissible for the Board to influence the KPI’s).

RESOLVED

That the Board’s remaining Work Programme for 2020/21 be received and agreed.

(The meeting ended at 8.30pm)