

**STRONGER COMMUNITIES AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY
BOARD - 9 March 2022**

STRONGER COMMUNITIES & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY BOARD

09 MARCH 2022

(HYBRID MEETING)

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Mrs D Holl-Allen MBE (Chairman). Councillors M Brain, D Gibbin, M Gough (substitute), B Groom, M Parker, S Sheshabhatte, W Qais (Vice-Chairman) and M Wilson.

Apologies:

Councillor P Hogarth MBE.

Neeraj Malhotra (Deputy Director of Public Health).

Report authors/witnesses in attendance:

Ruth Tennant (Director of Public Health and Commissioning).

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

Alan Brown (Assistant Director – Highways & Environment).

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

Andrea Santer (Finance Manager for Public Health Directorate).

External Witnesses in attendance:

None.

Cabinet Members in attendance:

Councillor Mrs A Rolf – Cabinet Member (Stronger & Safer Communities).
[virtual attendance]

Councillor Mrs K Grinsell – Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member (Leisure, Tourism & Sport).

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

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 OF THE LAST MEETING

The Minutes of the last (hybrid) meetings held on 6 January and 16 February 2022, were submitted for review and approval.

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RESOLVED

That the Minutes from the meetings held on 6 January and 16 February 2022, be agreed as a correct record.

4. CABINET PORTFOLIO PRIORITIES - UPDATE - STRONGER & SAFER COMMUNITIES

In attendance: Councillor Mrs A Rolf – Cabinet Member (Stronger & Safer Communities) [virtual attendance]; and Mrs Alison McGrory (Assistant Director – Communities & Partnerships).

The Board considered a detailed report which set out the progress towards the 2021/22 priorities for the above Cabinet Portfolio together with an insight into the future priorities for 2022/23. The contents of the report was taken as read.

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

- For the provision of library services within the Borough, the Board asked if volunteers had now been permitted to return to support service delivery. Officers confirmed that volunteers had returned and were again being used within Solihull's libraries.
- The Board also noted the reported fall in library usage as asked what was being done to encourage greater future usage, particularly community group usage, and potentially extending opening hours. Officers highlighted the current work ongoing with community groups and the development of a (service recovery) plan for each library. The current work with Kingshurst, Olton and Dickens Heath libraries were all highlighted as detailed examples of the proactive work being undertaken regarding aligning opening hours with demand, improvements to community space provision and future options for service delivery etc.
- In relation to the continued reduction in licensing income, the Board asked for further information as to why. Officers highlighted that owing to the effects of the pandemic, there had been a reduction in licensing applications. It was expected that normal application levels would eventually return. This income scenario was being seen across the country and was not limited to Solihull.
- The report highlighted that Solihull was becoming more prominent as a location for the support, relocation and resettlement of new communities, asylum seekers and refugees. In response to their enquiry for further supporting information, the Board was advised by Officers that this had been an emerging (and growing) picture over the last 12 months and two resettlement officers had now been recruited to specifically support that work. Several working examples were given where the Council had provided support over that period.
- The Board noted the potential increased demand on Solihull's Bereavement Services given that Birmingham City Council had now closed Yardley Crematoria on a Monday and were advised by Officers that there was some increased demand now being seen on Solihull's facilities as a consequence.

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RESOLVED

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

- (i) Welcomes the progress made on the priorities for 2021/22; and
- (ii) Notes the future priorities for 2022/23.

5. CABINET PORTFOLIO PRIORITIES - UPDATE - LEISURE, TOURISM AND SPORT

In attendance: Councillor Mrs K Grinsell – Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member (Leisure, Tourism & Sport); Ruth Tennant (Director of Public Health and Commissioning); and Sadie Walker (Senior Public Health Manager – Leisure and Physical Activity).

The Board considered a detailed report which set out the progress towards the 2021/22 priorities for the above Cabinet Portfolio together with an insight into the future priorities for 2022/23. The contents of the report was taken as read.

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

- The report made reference to future deconditioning as a result of the pandemic; i.e the loss of physical, psychological, and functional capacity due to inactivity which could occur rapidly in older adults and in those with long-term health conditions. Members asked for further information on that issue and were advised by the Portfolio Holder that there would be a clear focus over the next 12 months to get people active again and a number of physical activity programmes and volunteer initiatives were ongoing to support that. It was also anticipated that the Commonwealth Games would act as a catalyst to encourage physical activity this year. Officers also advised that future communications were important to publicise the activities and events and to help rebuild confidence in those clinically vulnerable residents whom might not have ventured out of their homes for some considerable time and now wished to rebuild their confidence and physical and mental health.
- Members noted from the report that affordability may be a challenge, with people continuing to be financially impacted, longer-term, by the pandemic with some residents potentially not in a financial position to engage in regular physical activity. Officers were asked what was being done to encourage participation from those hard to reach groups to become and remain physically active. Officers advised that 90% of the Solihull on the Move Programme was free of charge and the ongoing sustainability of initiatives such as this were very important. Examples were also given as to how links with the voluntary and community sector were being formed to lead some of the activities and maintain their delivery, going forwards, (so not everything in those Programmes would need to be Council-led and a longer-term community infrastructure would remain).
- The report highlighted that the Solihull Active Team continued to work to the Solihull on the Move framework, a Borough-wide programme that supported people across the Borough to be active. In partnership with British Cycling, four community cycling hubs had now arrived in Solihull parks; Run-Through had delivered a successful half marathon in the town centre and twelve outdoor table tennis tables had been installed in six park locations for community use. Members asked for further

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information on that aspect of the report and were advised that work was ongoing with TfWM for additional cycling facilities which would also replicate the cycling hubs, subject to the outcome of their tendering exercise. Work was also underway to secure additional outdoor and indoor table tennis tables.

- Members highlighted the commitments within the report for physical activity initiatives within the Boroughs parks and open spaces and asked if any of the initiatives would be extended to the Olton Ward. Officers advised that all of the Borough's parks would be included and mapping exercises were undertaken to identify what types of activity were best suited to the local infrastructure of the park and open space and also the future sustainability of any events and initiatives based around the known community and voluntary group support.
- Members asked what the intended approach was for physical activity initiatives where electoral wards did not specifically have a park, but did have smaller public spaces such as playgrounds which might lend themselves to local improvements to encourage greater usage and physical activity (the Silhill Ward was given as an example). Officers undertook to speak to colleagues within the Council's Public Realm Team following the meeting to examine what future opportunities were available in those scenarios.

RESOLVED

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

- (i) Welcomes the progress made on the priorities for 2021/22; and
- (ii) Notes the future priorities for 2022/23.

6. CABINET PORTFOLIO PRIORITIES - UPDATE - ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE

In attendance: Councillor K Hawkins – Cabinet Member (Environment & Infrastructure); and Alan Brown (Assistant Director – Highways & Environment).

The Board considered a detailed report which set out the progress towards the 2021/22 priorities for the above Cabinet Portfolio together with an insight into the future priorities for 2022/23. The contents of the report was taken as read.

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

- The Portfolio Holder highlighted from the report that, as part of the Boards 2022/23 Work Programme, a review of the Council's road safety partnership and future priorities and service delivery would be welcomed. Members welcomed the suggestion as a potential scrutiny topic for 2022/23.
- Members highlighted that the new Strategic Environment Contract would begin on 1 April 2022, and asked if that would mitigate some of the effects of the recent vote from the current Amey workforce to pursue industrial action. The Portfolio Holder advised that he hoped the picture would become clearer over the next week and was unable to provide any further information at this stage.

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- The Board highlighted some of the engineering measures currently in place across the Borough to facilitate cycling (i.e. Armadillo cycle lane separators) and highlighted that several other locations across the Borough would benefit from similar treatments. The Portfolio Holder reaffirmed his commitment to future sustainable travel and model shift. Additionally, Members asked what work was being done to change attitudes and promote cycling (and walking). The Portfolio Holder advised that much work was ongoing at regional level to promote sustainable travel, over and above cycling and walking.
- The report also highlighted the Council's commitment to plant 250,000 trees and Members asked if that number was likely to be extended, taking into account existing mature trees that may be lost due to natural causes etc. The Portfolio Holder confirmed that annual tree planting targets were being met (25,000 per year) and acknowledged the importance of the issue highlighted. Members also highlighted that in some Wards, lost trees on the public highway had still not been replaced. Officers invited any known locations to be reported outside of the meeting for investigation.
- The Board noted from the report that further reductions/changes to parking demands within the town and other retail centres across the Borough were evident and asked what work was being done to assess and explore future options for the use of those facilities. The Portfolio Holder advised that existing car park assets were being monitored although no decisions would be taken until the demand for car parking became clearer and the current effects of the pandemic lessened.
- Members highlighted the perceived loss of income in road tax due to the growing number of electric vehicles and the effect on future road maintenance budgets. The Board also questioned if the Council had a clear strategy for EV charging point provision, particularly within residential areas with high density housing and where that provision might be funded from. Officers referred the Board to the Council's EV Strategy which sat within the Climate Change, Planning and Housing Portfolio and led on those work-streams.
- The Board also highlighted the typical disruption associated with planned works on the highway network and the associated day to day management of those permitted works. Members suggested that it would be useful to issue guidance to all Ward Councillors to allow them to respond to complaints from residents as and when they arose. Officers highlighted the value and success of the permit scheme for highway works and confirmed that the fines levied to the utility companies was reinvested into that service. The suggestion of guidance being issued to Ward Councillors would also be followed up by the Council's Highway Permits Team. Officers also highlighted that the current permit scheme may be a beneficial topic for scrutiny to review in 2022/23 as part of their future Work Programme.

RESOLVED

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

- (i) Welcomes the progress made on the priorities for 2021/22;
- (ii) Notes the future priorities for 2022/23;

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- (iii) Notes the two potential topics from this Portfolio for the 2022/23 Scrutiny Work Plan (review of the road safety partnership - future priorities and service delivery; and a review of the highway works permit scheme).

7. SOLIHULL ON THE MOVE - PROGRAMME UPDATE

In attendance: Ruth Tennant (Director of Public Health and Commissioning); and Sadie Walker (Senior Public Health Manager – Leisure and Physical Activity).

The Board considered a detailed report which invited them to review the current position of the Solihull on the Move Programme. Members were invited to review and comment on the position statement and the individual core components of the programme delivery schedules.

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

- The reported highlighted that the Commonwealth Active Communities Programme was a key component of Sport England's legacy plan. The Board asked for further information as to how the Council was listening to communities and responding to their priorities, motivations and aspirations. Officers advised that focus groups would be the main source of information, together with resident's groups and local surveys to inform the direction of the project in the long-term.
- Members also asked if the Solihull on the Move Programme linked with other key initiatives such as the Council's Air Quality Strategy; and associated cycling and walking strategies. Officers confirmed that those linkages existed and conversations were already taking place.
- In supporting the content of the Programme, the Board asked how its outcomes would be measured and what the expected success might look like in reality, particularly in those areas where previous initiatives had not had as much impact as the Council would have liked. Officers advised that initial monitoring would be undertaken using baseline data from individual participants and the Board was given examples as to how that measurement would happen in practice. Future 6 and 12-month follow-up reviews would also take place. All monitoring would utilise a formal evaluation framework.

RESOLVED

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

- (i) Notes the current programme update for Solihull on the Move; and
- (ii) Agrees to receive a further update in 12 month's time as part of the Boards 2022/23 Work Programme.

8. LEISURE CENTRE OPERATIONS & PANDEMIC RECOVERY UPDATE

In attendance: Ruth Tennant (Director of Public Health and Commissioning); and Sadie Walker (Interim Senior Public Health Manager – Leisure and Physical Activity).

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The Board considered a detailed report which invited them to review the current position of the leisure centre operations and pandemic recovery. Members were invited to review and comment on the position statement and the individual core components of the proposals for service recovery.

In addition to the report, the Board received additional supporting information pertaining to financial implications which put some of the information contained within the report into context. The information was deemed to be confidential (exempt information) as defined by virtue of Paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, and was therefore considered at the end of the meeting where the press and public were excluded.

No questions or observations arose from the public part of this agenda item.

RESOLVED

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

- (i) Notes the current position of the leisure centre operations and pandemic recovery; and
- (ii) Agrees to receive a further update in September 2022, as part of the Boards 2022/23 Work Programme.

9. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED

That, the press and public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting as the information contained herein is defined as exempt information by virtue of Paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act - Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

(The meeting concluded at 7.15 pm)