

STRONGER COMMUNITIES & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY BOARD

10 JANUARY 2023

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(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. (*present until 7.25pm).

Apologies:

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

Councillor D Howell – Cabinet Member (Communities & Leisure).

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

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

Sgt Mark Heard (West Midlands Police).

Report authors/witnesses in attendance:

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

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

Tracey Vaccarezza (Solihull MBC – Sustainable Travel Officer).

Lauren Beach (Solihull MBC - Finance Manager for Economy & Infrastructure)

Andrea Santer (Solihull MBC - Finance Manager for Public Health).

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

External Witnesses in attendance:

Ryan Forrester (West Midlands Fire Service – Solihull Station Commander).

Peter Allington (West Midlands Fire Service – Road Casualty Reduction Team Lead).

Cabinet Members in attendance by invitation:

None.

Other Elected Members in attendance by invitation:

Councillor K Thomas.

1. DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST AND CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None received.

2. QUESTIONS AND DEPUTATIONS

Cllr K Thomas introduced Louise Whillock, a coordinator of the Lyndon Ward Community Street and Speed Watch Team who made a deputation to the Board. In summary, the deputation highlighted:

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- Experiences of conducting Speed Watch over the past 3 years.
- The operational details of how Speed Watch was undertaken in the Lyndon Ward, who participated in those events and the typical locations.
- Residents interaction with Speed Watch volunteers; sometimes positive and encouraging; sometimes less so.
- The challenges around undertaking Speed Watch at the best times and in the correct locations (i.e. to monitor traffic speeds during the shift changes at Jaguar Land Rover).
- Residents could often give recent examples of excessive speeds on their residential roads at night.
- It was not unusual for Speed Watch to record vehicles travelling in excess of 45 mph in a 30 mph zone (the fastest speed recorded being above 60 mph).
- Despite being highly visible, Speed Watch had no apparent effect on vehicle speeds during the times they were undertaken. Drivers did not seem to care and, in some cases, directed abuse towards the Speed Watch volunteers.
- Abuse from some speeding drivers and frustrated local residents towards the Speed Watch volunteers had led to a decline in the enthusiasm for undertaking Speed Watch activities.

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 two meetings held on 16 November* and 29 November 2022 (*public and private Minutes).

RESOLVED

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

4. ROAD SAFETY STRATEGY FOR SOLIHULL 2017-30 – UPDATE REPORT

In attendance: Paul Tovey (Solihull MBC - Head of Highway Management); Ryan Forrester (West Midlands Fire Service – Solihull Station Commander); Peter Allington (West Midlands Fire Service – Road Casualty Reduction Team Lead); and Tracey Vaccarezza (Solihull MBC – Sustainable Travel Officer).

The Board considered a detailed report and presentation which provided an overview of the Council's Road Safety statutory duty together with the range of services, supported by key Partners, that contributed to reducing the number of road traffic collisions in Solihull.

The report also explained the current strategies, delivered through the Road Safety Partnership, working both at regional and local level. Casualty reduction performance data was also submitted together with the Strategy's delivery action plan and key priorities.

Prior to the start of the meeting, West Midlands Fire Service (WMFS) had showcased how they used Virtual Reality headset technology to provide immersive learning videos to support the road safety education agenda. The Council's Sustainable Travel Team had also displayed a number of road safety educational resources for Members to view.

The Board was invited to review the latest position and make any recommendations to the Partnership and the Cabinet Member (Environment & Infrastructure) for the next coming years within the strategy period (2017-2030).

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

- Cllr J O'Nyons highlighted that the data presented confirmed that road safety had continued to improve in Solihull over the last two decades, and particularly since 2000. Officers were asked how Solihull's data compared with other local authorities across the region and how successful 20 mph speed limits had been. The Head of Highway Management advised that Solihull performed very well in comparison with the rest of the West Midlands. Solihull currently had the lowest casualty rate in the region, and at one stage, Solihull had the fourth lowest casualty rate in England. Later this year, several post-implementation surveys would be undertaken to evaluate the effectiveness of 20 mph speed limits. Officers highlighted that longer term benefits were evident over time as more schemes were introduced, and drivers became more accustomed to lower speed limits around areas such as schools.
- Cllr A Feeney commented that all wards within Solihull had their own local issues arising from vehicle speeds. Referring to his appointment as a Solihull MBC member representative on the West Midlands Police and Crime Panel, Cllr Feeney drew attention to a request made to the WM Police and Crime Commissioner to bring a future strategic report on all aspects of regional road safety to that Panel with particular input from the Police perspective. Of concern was the perceived lack of consequences to some speeding motorists, particularly those identified through Speed Watch who would only receive an advisory letter. Additionally, the WM Police and Crime Panel had discussed the effectiveness of partnership arrangements between the Police and local authorities to ensure projects such as new safety camera sites were not unduly delayed, and funding streams identified. Reference was also made to the HS2 Road Safety Fund proposed schemes for 2022 to 2024. Cllr Feeney highlighted the three proposed A452 gap closures (initial study) and expressed concern that doing so would contribute to higher vehicle speeds in those locations. The proposed B4118 Water Orton Road traffic calming scheme was, however, supported. The importance of ongoing education was emphasised to change driver behaviour and the 30 mph wheelie bin sticker initiative needed to be monitored and updated in residential areas that now had 20 mph zones to avoid confusion. The Head of Highway Management acknowledged all the points raised.
- Cllr B Groom highlighted the road casualty data taken over the last 3-year average and asked if the effects of the pandemic (i.e. reduced road usage) had been factored into future decision making. Additionally, the education of younger people was highlighted together with the importance of having effective outreach initiatives in place to target particularly the 17 to 25 year old age group. The Head of Highway Management confirmed the effect of the pandemic had been taken account of in trend analysis. The Strategy period was 2017 to 2030, and there was still a number of years, post-pandemic, for data collection to recover and to evaluate what effect changes in daily routines (e.g. more people now working from home) had on future road safety statistics.
- Cllr S Sheshabhattar asked for further clarification on the triggers for local speed analysis (and the correct reporting channels for residents); how e-scooters were factored into the Strategy; the process to set up new Speed Watch areas; and what role CCTV played in road safety. The Head of Highway Management advised that there were many publicised options for residents to report local road safety concerns, one of the most visible being the "Report-it" function on the homepage of www.solihull.gov.uk. Requests were reviewed bi-annually to evaluate trends which were then taken forward as appropriate. Officers also highlighted that a lot of collisions were not caused by excessive vehicle speeds but, in fact, poor vehicle maintenance, weather conditions, driver impairment (including medical episodes). In terms of e-scooters, Officers reported that they were an emerging form of powered

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transport so they were treated the same as a motor vehicle and governed by motoring legislation, albeit it was not lawful to ride one on the public highway (outside of an official trial-site) as owners could not obtain insurance for them. Safety legislation and safety equipment also needed to be clarified and implemented. Regarding the use of CCTV, the Head of Highway Management advised that new technologies such as ANPR average-speed cameras were expensive to install and operate, albeit there were now several locations within Solihull where this type of equipment was now installed. Officers highlighted, particularly, new changes in legislation for moving traffic contraventions which would utilise CCTV enforcement and the business case for Solihull that was currently being developed.

- Cllr P Hogarth MBE highlighted the age profiles of motorists most at risk of being killed or seriously injured (or causing harm to a third party) and in doing so, drew attention to the A34 Stratford Road being of particular concern regarding vehicle speeds along the main retail section. The Head of Highway Management advised that the new safety cameras (operational from Monday 16 January 2023) from the Marshall Lake Road junction to the M42 were expected to have a significant effect on vehicle speeds. The Heart of Shirley did not lend itself well to that type of speed enforcement and Officers highlighted existing solutions such as physical traffic calming and engineering measures that were already in place. In response to a separate question, the Board was advised that the length of M42 motorway network within the Borough boundary was also included within Solihull's overall collision data.
- Cllr G Sleigh asked for further detail regarding the multi-agency road safety exercises and how the locations for those events were identified; the scope for greater use of wheelie bin stickers to highlight local speed limits; and the use of passively safe lamp columns. The Head of Highway Management explained that the latter (including some signage columns) were designed to absorb the energy from a collision and lessen the risk of serious injury to the driver and passengers. The wheelie bin stickers initiative was managed by the Police and current allocations had been done as part of previous Community Speed Watch exercises. MARSO exercises were planned around spacious locations on key parts of the network where a high number of vehicles could be taken off the highway for inspection.
- Cllr M Carthew drew attention to a reference to the permanent vehicle activated sign in Olton Hollow (2010) and sought confirmation that it was either no longer there or inoperable. Traffic calming schemes, such as in Berkswell Village, were perceived to have been successful and Officers were asked if there was any scope for some of the design elements of those former schemes to be replicated elsewhere (e.g. Dovehouse Lane) to lower vehicle speeds and make initiatives to encourage cycling more viable. Additionally, confirmation was sought of cross-boundary working with neighbouring authorities. The Head of Highway Management confirmed that vehicle activated signage had now moved from that location in Olton. Good results had also been seen from the traffic calming measures in Berkswell which were considered appropriate and sympathetic to a rural village environment. The Board noted that not all traffic calming designs and engineering measures were suitable to all locations. Cross-boundary coordination was undertaken at regional level and strong working relationships existed between Birmingham, Coventry and Warwickshire.
- Cllr B Donnelly highlighted the valuable work of the Community Speed Watch volunteers and urged other locations to come forward and participate in the initiative. Cllr Donnelly also drew attention to the importance of good standards of road maintenance to avoid injury to road users and pedestrians. Examples were given of problems associated with works on the highway when, in some instances, that caused a perceived risk to road users due to poorly designed/managed roadworks. The use of road markings using intelligent/new technology was also highlighted and clarification sought on their application and use. The Head of Highway Management

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advised that Category 1 defects on the highway (regardless of asset ownership) would be guarded and repaired/made safe within a couple of hours. Intelligent road studs were activated by approaching vehicles and whilst the costs of that apparatus were high, they were being used at some locations in Solihull which benefited from that type of technology.

- Cllr P Hogarth MBE drew attention to the Seven Star Road/Lode Lane junction and stated that the signalling at that junction should be reviewed to make that junction safer. The Head of Highway Management highlighted the regulatory and physical limitations at that location which hindered the design and implementation of further carriageway and signalling refinements.
- The Chairman referred to the hotspot locations for road traffic collisions (with injury) and asked for the current data for those trends. The Head of Highway Management confirmed that the indicative data within the Strategy was for 2013 to 2015 (i.e. to accompany the publication of the Strategy in 2017). Updated data could now be provided and circulated following the meeting, although it was anticipated that the Borough hotspots would remain the same. Regarding the single site analysis data and in response to a question to clarify elements of the appendices, the Chairman was advised that for the 2022/2023 schemes, part of that collision analysis indicated that some analysis had either been completed (or were soon to be), and other analysis indicated that schemes were not viable but would be kept under review. The Head of Highway Management confirmed that collision data and trend monitoring was undertaken continuously, and action taken were data and trend analysis indicated a need to do so.

RESOLVED

That, the Board **UNANIMOUSLY** makes the following **RECOMMENDATIONS** to the Solihull Road Safety Partnership and the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Environment & Infrastructure:

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

- (i) Welcomes the progress made towards road casualty reduction at this stage in the Strategy period;
- (ii) Acknowledges the importance of effective Partnership working in road casualty reduction at both regional and local levels;
- (iii) Acknowledges the high value of community-based initiatives such as Speed Watch. In doing so, the Board encourages new groups of volunteers to come forward to maintain the future viability of those exercises; and
- (iv) Endorses all ongoing and future work to promote casualty reduction via effective and timely educational events and targeted campaigns, particularly working with young people and higher risk groups to make the road network safer for all users.

5. **MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (MTFS) UPDATE – BUDGET STRATEGY 2023/24 – 2025/26**

In attendance: Lauren Beach (Solihull MBC - Finance Manager for Economy & Infrastructure); Andrea Santer (Solihull MBC - Finance Manager for Public Health); Alan

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Brown (Solihull MBC - Assistant Director – Highways & Environment); and Neeraj Malhotra (Solihull MBC – Deputy Director of Public Health).

The Board considered a detailed report setting out the budget proposals identified for 2023/24 to 2025/26 within the Communities & Leisure; Partnerships & Wellbeing; and Environment & Infrastructure Cabinet Portfolios as recently endorsed by the Budget Strategy Group.

The report outlined a forecasted budget position for those Portfolios, the pressures identified over the period up to 2025/26, together with the actions proposed to mitigate against them. The key pressures highlighted within the report included:

- Leisure Centres income and costs.
- Funding for the Employment and Skills Team.
- Car parking income.
- Strategic Environment Contract (SEC) costs.

Officers reported that the main proposals to mitigate against those pressures included:

- Renegotiation of the Leisure Centres contract.
- Strategic review of future Employment and Skills offer.
- Review of street lighting.
- Review of Communities & Partnerships Division.

The report drew attention to risks relevant to the Portfolio's budget position including the operation of Leisure Centres; continuity of external funding; cost of trees within the public realm; and new requirements on waste disposal.

Additionally, the report highlighted the forecast funding gaps for the period from 2023/24 to 2025/26, as reported to the Budget Strategy Group and the Members Budget Seminar. A fourth meeting of the Budget Strategy had been scheduled for later this month to consider the updated position following the conclusion of some outstanding matters.

Each individual Scrutiny Board, this month, was now being asked to consider the budget proposals which related to the Cabinet Portfolios within their remit. Included within the report were details pertaining to portfolio-specific considerations insofar as pressures and proposed mitigations; key risks relevant to the budget proposals; and a schedule of fees and charges proposed for 2023/24 for services provided by the above three Cabinet Portfolios.

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

- Cllr B Donnelly highlighted any increase in fees and charges for leisure centres may be a false economy and may cost more in the long run due to the perceived longer-term negative effects on health if fees and charges were prohibitive to residents wishing the access physical activity and exercise. Officers were asked if this scenario had been considered and what measures were in place to mitigate against it. The Deputy Director of Public Health confirmed that increases had been considered as sensitively as possible and the concessionary prices were unchanged* [***please refer to post-meeting note below**]. A pricing differential remained between Tudor Grange Leisure Centre and North Solihull Sports Centre to take account of differing demographics and levels of deprivation. The Board was also advised that the operating costs for the leisure centres was extremely high and the energy crisis had added further significant budget pressures. Usage and footfall profiles were being actively monitored and the availability of some service offers (e.g. the health suite and spa) were being tailored around times of peak demand each day to help reduce energy consumption.

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- Cllr A Feeney asked what consideration had been given to fees and charges relating to Bereavement Services. The Finance Manager for Economy & Infrastructure advised that this service area fell outside of the scope of this Scrutiny Board, being the responsibility of the Resources Cabinet Portfolio. By way of a general update, Officers advised that the pressures on that service (relating to the impact of the energy crisis) were being considered corporately. Fees and charges for that service area were proposed to increase in 2023/24, in line with inflation.
- Cllr M Carthew highlighted the benefits of LED lighting and waterless technology in leisure centre facilities which were considered environmentally friendly and could contribute to budget savings via lower energy consumption. The Deputy Director of Public Health confirmed the use of LED lighting already which was a single element of a suite of ongoing initiatives to reduce energy consumption at both leisure centres.
- Cllr G Sleigh referred to the UK Central Programme and asked for a further update on the funding allocations. The report highlighted that the West Midlands Combined Authority had indicated that the funding required to fully deliver all the projects within the Programme was unlikely to be available as originally envisaged. The Finance Manager for Economy & Infrastructure advised that feasibility work was continuing on the list of projects for Solihull and, as part of taking those business cases forward, alternative sources of funding would be sought where required and bids progressed.
- Cllr S Sheshabhattar asked for an update on funding for parking displacement and confirmation of which budget heading it would fall within. The Assistant Director for Highways & Environment confirmed that the Parking Displacement Programme still fell within the Environment & Infrastructure Cabinet Portfolio and a budget of £50k had been allocated to that programme for 2023/24.
- Cllr P Hogarth MBE welcomed no proposed tariff increases to the fees and charges within the Borough's car parks for 2023/24. This was considered vitally important to protect the Borough's retail trade, ensuring Solihull remained competitive with retail centres within neighbouring authorities, and supporting the ongoing post-pandemic economic recovery.
- The Chairman highlighted the new requirements for the disposal of domestic seating and asked what additional budget pressures this might cause. The Assistant Director for Highways & Environment advised that domestic seating to be disposed of would now need to be broken apart and incinerated (rather than landfill) to remove the risk of pollutants being released into the environment. The Council was currently negotiating contractual disposal costs and once agreed, it was anticipated that the disposal of this type of bulky waste would become much more expensive to the authority. Officers flagged this as a potential risk at this stage in the budget setting process and advised that at some point in the coming year, additional funding would need to be identified. Officers also assured the Board that the current level of fees and charges for bulky household waste collections was still reasonable, taking account of this specific emerging issue.

The above observations and recommendations of this Scrutiny Board would now go forward to the Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board and Full Cabinet during February 2023.

[Post-meeting note: Following the meeting, an inaccuracy in an answer given to Members questions was realised. In response to a question about the increase in Leisure Centre fees and charges, the Deputy Director of Public Health erroneously advised that the concessionary prices were unchanged. The concessionary prices were increasing in line with inflation, and this was confirmed on pages 111-114 - Appendix B(i) - of the published agenda. Board Members were alerted to this inaccuracy on 11 January 2023, and no additional comments or concerns have been received.]

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RESOLVED

That, the Board **UNANIMOUSLY** makes the following **RECOMMENDATIONS** to the Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board and Full Cabinet:

That, subject to the observations and comments recorded in 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 2023/24, as attached at Appendix B to the report; and
- (iii) Supports the indicative service budget proposals for 2023/24, as outlined in the report at Appendix C.

6. WORK PROGRAMME 2022/2023

The Boards most recent Work Plan was submitted for information.

RESOLVED

That, the Board notes its remaining Work Plan for 2022/23, as submitted.

(End time 7.45pm)