

Minutes of the Highways and Environmental Services Select Committee

Thursday, 4th January, 2024 at 6.00 pm
In Committee Room 2, The Council House, Priory Road, Dudley

Present:

Councillor E Lawrence (Chair)
Councillor P Miller (Vice-Chair)
Councillors D Borley, K Denning, P Dobb, P Drake, I Kettle, J Martin and K Westwood.

Dudley MBC Officers:

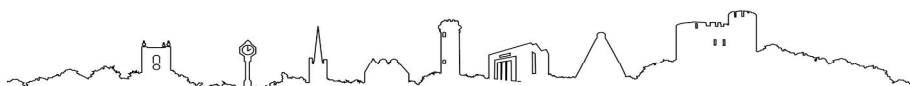
N McGurk (Acting Service Director – Neighbourhood Delivery), N Lissimore (Transport Strategy Manager), J Deakin (Head of Waste and Fleet Operations) and K Taylor (Senior Democratic Services Officer).

Also in Attendance:

Councillor D Corfield (Cabinet Member for Highways and Environmental Services)
Councillor C Bayton (Shadow Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Environment)

27 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received on behalf of Councillors K Casey and A Lees.



28 **Appointment of Substitute Member**

There were no substitute Members appointed for this meeting of the Committee.

29 **Declarations of Interest**

No member made a declaration of interest in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct.

30 **Minutes**

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 27th November, 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed.

31 **Public Forum**

No issues were raised under this agenda item.

32 **Dudley Highway Network Performance and Road Safety**

The Acting Service Director – Neighbourhood Delivery and Transport Strategy Manager gave a detailed presentation on an overview of the Dudley Highway Network Performance, Major Scheme Development and Road Safety, including National Data and Trends, Economic Impact and Local Data. It was suggested that Members may wish to undertake more in-depth scrutiny in relation to road safety at a future meeting if deemed appropriate.

Members were provided with statistical data on the annual traffic mileage by vehicle type in Dudley between 1993 and 2022 which identified a year-on-year growth in each year between 2011 and 2019. It was noted that a sharp decline was observed in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic, with traffic levels increasing during 2021 and 2022, however levels still remained lower than before the pandemic.

It was noted that the INRIX (a leading international provider of real-time traffic information, transportation analytics, and connected driver services) 2022 Global Traffic Scorecard had identified that all urban areas within the UK top 10 experienced increases in traffic congestion and delays during 2022, with London reaching above their 2019 pre-COVID level. This resulted in the typical driver losing 80 hours due to traffic congestion. It was noted that Birmingham was ranked fourth out of ten with a loss of 73 hours which accumulated into £646 cost per driver and £346m cost to the city. Although data was not available for Dudley specifically, it was anticipated that the figures would be comparable to Birmingham.

An overview of the traffic congestion experienced throughout the Borough on an average weekday was provided which highlighted significant congestion during the evening. The information allowed the Local Authority to identify the top 20 traffic delay hot spots across the Dudley Highway Network which were categorised into the following to help reduce congestion:

- Green – Locations in the pipeline and under development with both indicative funding and allocated funding confirmed in areas including A4123 Corridor; A456 Manor Way / Grange Road and A4123 Birmingham New Road / Sedgley Road.
- Amber – Locations that were affected by ongoing highways works in areas including A459 Castle Hill due to the Metro Construction Impact and A458 Colley Gate, Cradley due to a recent traffic signal upgrade.
- Red – Locations that had been identified for a future programme. Funding opportunities would be explored in areas where the Levelling Up Funding Bids were unsuccessful such as A458 Lye High Street.

It was noted that locations such as Stourbridge Ring Road, A491 Hagley Road/Ham Lane, A459 Kent Street - Burton Road, Upper Gornal and A459 Halesowen Road, Netherton would be investigated for network efficiency gains.

Reference was made to the five-year capital funding that had been agreed as part of the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement awarded by Transport for West Midlands for local transport investment. The funding created two significant five year pipelines namely, Local Network Improvement Plans and Maintenance settlements totalling £1,760,400 and £4,486,100 per annum, respectively.

It was reported that phase two had commenced in delivering the installation of the cycle infrastructure along the A4123 Birmingham New Road from Tipton Road Junction to Castle Road Junction.

The Transport Strategy Manager referred to the Local Transport Plan developed by Transport for West Midlands which focussed on 6 Big Moves including Behaviour change; Walk, wheel, cycle and scoot; Accessible and inclusive places; public transport and shared mobility, safe, efficient and reliable network and green transport revolution.

It was noted that the Local Authority was required to consider the Bus Service Improvement Plan and Cycle Infrastructure Design (LTN 1/20) when developing designs to allow continued investment in transport. It was acknowledged, however, that Dudley's Highways Network was constrained and therefore a sensible and balanced approach was needed during scheme development.

The conditions set out within the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement Letter required the Local Authority to promote modal shift from cars to public transport, walking and cycling and to further the objectives of the national bus and cycling strategies, including ambitious bus and cycling priority measures. It was noted that Active Travel England worked collaboratively with the Department for Transport and managed funding for dedicated walking and cycling initiatives and challenged failure by withholding funding for failure to meet standards.

Reference was made to the development of plans for multiple site specific and corridor-based transport schemes which required Department for Transport compliant business cases in accordance with the new West Midlands Combined Authority Single Assurance Framework governance processes before funding could be released. An extensive consultation exercise with Cabinet Members, Ward Members, Members of the Public and wider stakeholders would also be imbedded in scheme development.

Members were also advised that the Dudley Local Plan and an updated Transport Strategy was in development with national and regional objectives embedded. The importance of Member support was emphasised in moving forward taking into account some potentially difficult choices to be made.

The Acting Service Director – Neighbourhood Delivery then provided an overview of road safety and in doing so referred to the statutory duty of the Local Authority to promote and improve road safety by undertaking studies into collisions arising out of the use of vehicles on roads and take measures considered appropriate in order to prevent such collisions on both existing and new roads.

Reference was made to the six engineering measures adopted by the Local Authority including traffic calming and reallocation of road space. It was noted that improved pedestrian facilities that were suitable and useable was essential in order to promote active travel.

It was noted that 60% of Dudley Borough schools had adopted a 20mph speed limit as part of the Safer Routes to School programme. It was anticipated that 100% would be completed by 2025.

Members were advised of the National Road Safety Scheme of the Year Award achieved by Dudley Council in 2022 recognising the innovative use of an intelligent junction warning sign that could be tailored to the specific junction. This scheme had been implemented in Oakham Road, Dudley which had seen a dramatic reduction in injury collisions with none recorded since the work was completed.

The significant number of requests received and undertaken by the Road Safety Team was acknowledged. It was noted that the Local Authority had completed five safety schemes during 2023 with a further four schemes in progress which was expected to be completed by the end of the financial year.

The need to improve communication in particular promoting schemes that were progressing in design stages was mentioned. Further work was being undertaken in developing the first Road Safety Strategy for Dudley to evidence current projects and future planning. It was noted that 18 schemes had been planned for next year and were currently being designed to be implemented in the next financial year.

The Acting Service Director – Neighbourhood Delivery reported on the extensive Road Safety Education initiatives provided by the Local Authority including road safety training, tailored road safety presentations for all age groups delivered in schools and community settings and partnership working to enable targeted campaigns throughout the year.

It was recognised that although implementing engineering measures would work in areas, this was impacted at times upon motorists' behaviours and driving and the priority was emphasised in ensuring roads were safe for pedestrians and drivers.

The Acting Service Director – Neighbourhood Delivery also referred to the School Streets Initiative and the proposed trial of the temporary road closure within a school street during drop-off and pick-up times.

Following the presentation of the report, Members had the opportunity to ask questions make comments and responses were provided, where necessary, as follows:-

- a) Councillor K Denning, although welcomed the presentation and data sets, shared his disappointment that the presentation given had not been included in the agenda pack or circulated prior to the meeting and considered that this significantly impacted his ability to prepare pertinent questions in advance of the meeting. Councillor J Martin supported the comments made and suggested that this had not met the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and concurred that this approach should not be repeated moving forward.

The Chair acknowledged comments made and shared the reasoning why the presentation was not previously shared and undertook to consider accessible formats moving forward.

- b) Councillor K Denning referred to the new traffic crossing and average speed cameras installed on Birmingham New Road between Dudley Canal Trust and Priory Road, and whilst acknowledging that traffic had slowed down, queried what other measures could be implemented to further improve road safety.
- c) Reference was made to the temporary one lane traffic restrictions for both directions in Castle Hill, Dudley and the impact this would have on the congestion and regeneration around the Town Centre and surrounding roads.

- d) Councillor K Denning welcomed the ambition of all Dudley Borough Schools adopting the 20mph speed limit but queried how this would be achieved for schools that were located near busy roads such as Bishop Milner Catholic College.
- e) Although welcoming the School Streets Initiative, Councillor K Denning suggested that improvements were needed in educating motorists given the delays that were likely to occur once streets were temporarily closed. He therefore queried what measures could be implemented by the Council and whether staggered start times for Dudley employees had also been considered.
- f) In responding to comments made by Councillor K Denning, the Transport Strategy Manager welcomed the safety measures implemented on the Birmingham New Road and acknowledged the restrictions introduced around Castle Hill, Dudley which were adopted to facilitate works safely to the Midland Metro Extension. Further consideration was also being undertaken to support regeneration within the Town Centre.

The Acting Service Director – Neighbourhood Delivery confirmed that the Local Authority had been successful in being awarded powers to enforce a range of driving offences by the Department for Transport in order to improve road safety, tackle congestion and improve air quality, with initial locations being identified. With regard to the 20mph speed limit around schools, it was confirmed that the temporary restrictions would only apply during peak school times. A review of the pilot on the School Streets Initiative would also be undertaken to consider whether this was acceptable moving forward. It was also agreed that changing behaviours and educating children at schools was essential to ensure road safety. It was suggested that as an organisation, it had adapted well to hybrid working, however further consideration could be given to staggering operational shift times in order to try and alleviate traffic congestion during peak times.

- g) The Cabinet Member for Highways and Environmental Services thanked officers for the excellent presentation and overview given and acknowledged comments made by Members. It was stated that the presentation was intended to give a detailed oversight of work undertaken and to allow Members the opportunity to consider including a further in-depth scrutiny in the future work programme. Reference was made to the dramatic improvements to areas including Oakham Road, Dudley and the reduction in the number of collisions since the introduction of the intelligent junction warning sign. The significant improvements along the A4123 commuter route throughout the Black Country designed to encourage more people to walk, cycle or use public transport was also mentioned.
- h) Councillor D Borley welcomed the presentation given and referred specifically to the traffic delay hot spots throughout the Dudley Highway Network which was likely to increase further and therefore queried what measures would justify the need to implement further steps in order to reduce traffic congestion. He also supported the need for speed enforcement and excessive penalties in order to send a clear message to potential perpetrators.

In responding, the Transport Strategy Manager confirmed that a criterion would need to be met in order to allocate funding for schemes on a local level with initial consideration needed to sustainability modes. The difficulties associated with reducing two-lane traffic lanes to one within a constrained highways network was referred to and that a balanced approach was needed to ensure there was no detriment to the existing infrastructure.

The Acting Service Director – Neighbourhood Delivery emphasised that despite measures being implemented, traffic congestion would continue and that the nature of Dudley's Highways was difficult to quantify, therefore it was necessary to maximise skills and resources in order to improve and implement all aspects in accordance with criteria.

- i) With regard to the School Streets Initiative, Councillor D Borley referred to the planned pilot for roads near Peter's Hill Primary School which was welcomed by residents. He also suggested that the Thorns Primary School should be considered due to the premises being located on the Thorns Road, Quarry Bank, taking into account the ongoing safety concerns that had been raised.

- j) Further to comments made by Councillor D Borley, Councillor J Martin queried whether there was any pressure by the Local Authority in maintaining traffic flow in a safely manner against the need to work within the limited resources available.
- k) Reference was made to a statement within the Government's Transport Decarbonisation Plan in relation to taking steps in order to avoid a "*car-led recovery*". Councillor J Martin queried whether this would impact traffic flow and whether this would be deemed acceptable by users. He also queried whether the proposed measures were anti-motorist and counter productive for business recovery and potentially impact visitors to the Borough financially.
- l) Councillor J Martin also requested an update on the Local Authority's position in relation to traffic enforcement. He considered that fines should not be given in order to change behaviour however in some circumstances acknowledged that harder enforcement was needed for those that break the law and caused tragic consequences. It was anticipated however that the introduction of fines could be negatively received by members of the public in particular those that were commuting to work and that the success of the scheme would be determined by the outcomes.

In responding, the Acting Service Director – Neighbourhood Delivery stated that the areas consulted on were largely governed by Highways Legislation and that it was part of the Local Authority's criteria to consider whether these continued to be fit for purpose. Road safety for all was paramount and the introduction of the enforcement powers was considered a deterrent to users.

- m) It was also noted that a School Street Initiative pilot was also proposed around The Brook Primary School, Brierley Hill.
- n) Councillor J Martin welcomed the proposal to undertake further scrutiny in relation to road safety.

- o) In responding to comments made with regard to congestion, the Cabinet Member for Highways and Environmental Services acknowledged that a significant reduction in traffic congestion was not anticipated however the focus was to offer additional and improved pedestrian facilities such as cycling lanes. He also considered the enforcement powers to be a deterrent. Reference was made of the work undertaken with 'RoadPeace', a national charity for road crash victims, providing information and support services to people bereaved or seriously injured in road crashes.
- p) Councillor J Martin referred to a previous consultation undertaken in relation to the banned right turn located at the Northfield Road, Netherton junction, in particular that the option to install a controlled signal was rejected due to expenditure, however it had been agreed that fines would be issued to drivers that continued to drive through banned turns. He therefore queried why fines were preferable rather than investing in additional traffic calming measures.

In responding, the Cabinet Member for Highways and Environmental Services emphasised that the Local Authority was not focused on penalising motorists and that there were more funding options available now to consider alternative measures. Although acknowledging comments made, it was considered that enforcement was justified in certain areas.

- q) Councillor P Dobb referred to the traffic restrictions and poor road markings located in Castle Hill, Dudley and the significant impact this caused to traffic congestion in particular during peak times. Concerns were also raised on the lack of consultation of the introduction of the one-way traffic system introduced in Ednam Road, Dudley between The Broadway and Priory Road.

In responding, the Cabinet Member for Highways and Environmental Services confirmed that media releases and communications were circulated following confirmation of the Traffic Regulation Order.

- r) In referring to the statistics in the INRIX 2022 Global Traffic Scorecard which identified that the typical driver in the UK lost 80 hours due to traffic congestion last year, Councillor I Kettle suggested that consideration should be given to the excessive average number of vehicles driven within each constituency each week and the need to travel for employment.

- s) In responding to a request by Councillor P Drake for an update on the ongoing car parking issues near train stations, the Transport Strategy Manager referred to regular meetings that were undertaken bi-monthly with the Transport for West Midlands who were responsible for train station car parks. Statistics identified that areas such as Stourbridge Car Park were underutilised, however it was accepted that Coseley Train Station was reaching a critical point and would therefore continue to be monitored. The number of Traffic Regulation Orders within the vicinity of Coseley Train Station was acknowledged, and it was noted that Transport for West Midlands would be reviewing their existing Park and Ride Strategy. Various options could be considered moving forward including the disposal of assets or additional park and ride capacity being explored.

The Chair thanked officers for the presentation given and the informative discussions undertaken during the meeting.

Resolved

- (1) That the information contained in the presentation on an overview of the Dudley Highway Network Performance, Major Scheme Development and Road Safety, be noted.
- (2) That a presentation on road safety together with a review of the draft Road Safety Strategy be submitted to a future meeting of the Select Committee.

33 Corporate Quarterly Performance Report – Environment Directorate – Quarter 2 (1st July, 2023 to 30th September, 2023)

A report of the Acting Service Director – Neighbourhood Delivery was submitted on the Quarter 2 Corporate Quarterly Performance report of the 2023/24 financial year covering the period 1st July, 2023 to 30th September, 2023, which was aligned to the new 3-year Council Plan. Further data relating to the directorate service delivery was included as appendices to the report submitted, focusing on the Environment Directorate.

Members had the opportunity to ask questions make comments and responses were provided, where necessary, as follows:-

- a) Councillor K Denning referred to the breakdown of the number of Fly-Tip Investigations undertaken by ward during Quarter 2 in particular that the highest number of fly-tips having been reported were located in the Brierley Hill area, and queried what strategies were in place to reduce those areas that were impacted the most.

In responding, the Head of Waste and Fleet Operations confirmed that it was evident that the issues in Brierley Hill predominately related to residential and commercial waste on the High Street. It was noted that the Local Authority would be undertaking duty of care checks within areas in order to identify the perpetrators.

In responding to a further query from Councillor K Denning, the Head of Waste and Fleet Operations undertook to discuss with the Head of Planning to emphasise the need to allocate sufficient and safe places for waste disposal once applications had been submitted for larger developments including houses in multiple occupation (HMO).

The Cabinet Member for Highways and Environmental Services referred to the significant increase in fines faced by fly-tippers which sent a clear and strong message to perpetrators. Reference was also made to Dudley's 'You've Been Shamed' campaign on the Dudley Council website displaying images collected from Closed-Circuit Television systems of fly-tipping perpetrators.

- b) With regard to fly-tipping, Councillor D Borley referred to the ongoing work in Lye in order to mitigate the number of investigations and incidents including reminding landlords of their responsibilities and options available and installing appropriate signage within the vicinity in consultation with the Assistant Team Manager, Neighbourhood Services and West Midlands Police.
- c) In responding to a question raised by Councillor D Borley relating to PI. 1499 - % municipal waste land filled, the Head of Waste and Fleet Operations confirmed that other waste that had been prioritised over the Household Waste and Recycling Centre waste by the operator of the Energy from Waste controls was associated to other contractors. Members were advised however that the Energy from Waste contractor had been requested to consider receiving more waste from the Household Waste and Recycling Centre over other commercial waste which was expected to reduce the outturn moving forward.

- d) Following a suggestion made by Councillor D Borley, the Head of Waste and Fleet Operations undertook to consider the reduction of the allotted slot time at the Household Waste and Recycling Centre to allow for additional appointments to be made available.
- e) In responding to a question raised by Councillor I Kettle in relation to PI.2390 - % of gullies cleansed as per annual programme, the Cabinet Member for Highways and Environmental Services confirmed that fixed penalty notices for the offences of fly-posting also included graffiti.

The Acting Service Director – Neighbourhood Delivery confirmed that the reduction in the number of gullies cleansed during Quarter 2 resulted from the in-house tanker being unavailable for approximately six weeks due to a technical breakdown. Further investigation would be undertaken to address the delays; however assurance was given that work was now progressing. It was also noted that the target percentage had doubled compared to last year and it was important to recognise that ambitious targets had been implemented and were being met.

- f) Councillor J Martin referred to the historic issues of machines being un-operational for extended period of times, and emphasised that Elected Members and residents expected a longer and sustainable solution.

In responding, the Acting Service Director – Neighbourhood Delivery acknowledged comments made and confirmed that the cleansing of gullies had not been undertaken for a period of time due to financial constraints. It was accepted that a vehicle being unavailable for six weeks was unacceptable and assurance was given that this was not a regular occurrence. Further consideration was being given to the type of vehicles that would be included in the fleet and it was expected that changes would be made over the next 12 months.

Resolved

- (1) That the information contained in the report submitted, and as reported at the meeting, on the Quarter 2 Corporate Quarterly Performance report of the 2023/24 financial year covering the period 1st July, 2023 to 30th September, 2023, be noted.

- (2) That the Head of Waste and Fleet Operations be requested to emphasise the need for sufficient and safe places for waste disposal once applications had been submitted for larger developments with the Head of Planning.
 - (3) That the Head of Waste and Fleet Operations be requested to consider the reduction of the allotted slot time at the Household Waste and Recycling Centre to allow for additional appointments to be made available.
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34 **Highways and Environmental Services Select Committee Progress Tracker and Future Business**

It was noted that an update on Delivering the Neighbourhood Approach would be considered for inclusion on the agenda for the next meeting of the Select Committee in March, 2024.

Resolved

That the Highways and Environmental Services Select Committee Progress Tracker and Future Business, as outlined in the report, be noted.

35 **Questions Under Council Procedure Rule 11.8**

There were no questions to the Chair pursuant to Council Procedure Rule 11.8.

The meeting ended at 8.15pm

CHAIR