

**Minutes of the Communities and Growth Scrutiny Committee
Monday 21st July, 2025 at 6.00 pm
In Committee Room 2, The Council House,
Priory Road, Dudley**

Present:

Councillor R Priest (Chair)

Councillor D Roberts (Vice-Chair)

Councillors H Bills, E Cobb, B Collins, S Edwards, I Kettle, T Russon, P Sahota, I Sandall and D Stanley

Dudley MBC Officers:

N McGurk (Group Director - Communities and Growth), A Razzaq (Director of Legal, Compliance and Assurance/Monitoring Officer) and K Taylor (Senior Democratic Services Officer).

Also in attendance:

Councillor D Corfield (Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods) and Councillor S Phipps (Cabinet Member for Economy and Infrastructure)

A Dewhirst (LGA Peer Member) – Observing

M Smith (Local Democracy Reporter)

1 Comments of the Chair

The Chair welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the Communities and Growth Scrutiny Committee and referred to the importance of ensuring that scrutiny was effective and focused on significant issues.

The Chair welcomed and emphasised the need for Cabinet Members to attend meetings relevant to their portfolios. It was proposed that any agenda items that required Cabinet Member input be deferred if the relevant Cabinet Member was unable to attend.

Members were reminded to avoid discussing individual casework during meetings and instead to focus on the content of the reports by making informed recommendations, where appropriate.



The Chair also welcomed A Dewhirst to the meeting in his capacity as LGA Peer Member who had supported the Scrutiny Chairs during the agenda setting process.

2 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors J Clinton and M Webb.

3 **Appointment of Substitute Members**

It was noted that Councillors B Collins and T Russon had been appointed as Substitute Members for Councillors M Webb and J Clinton, respectively, for this meeting of the Committee only.

4 **Declarations of Interest**

Councillors I Kettle and D Stanley declared a non-pecuniary interest in relation to Agenda Item No. 7 (Misalignment of Tracks – Verbal Update) as both were members of the West Midlands Combined Authority – Transport Delivery Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

5 **Public Forum**

There were no questions raised under this agenda item.

6 **Programme of Meetings and Business Items for 2025/26**

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Legal, Compliance and Assurance/Monitoring Officer on the programme of meetings and items of business for consideration by this Scrutiny Committee during 2025/26. A copy of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules (including the Committee's Term of Reference) was appended to the report submitted.

The Director of Legal, Compliance and Assurance/Monitoring Officer referred Members to the Effective Scrutiny Development Session held on 9th July, 2025 with particular focus on key considerations needed by Members with regard to work programming and the value of reviewing the Forward Plan in terms of Cabinet decision making.

Members asked questions, made comments and responses were provided where necessary as follows: -

- a) Councillor P Sahota recommended that a list providing a breakdown of the functions within the Communities and Growth Group would be beneficial to the Committee for clarity on the key areas that could be scrutinised by the Committee.

Reference was also made to the proposed scrutiny agenda item on Anti-Social Behaviour, in particular that in order to provide effective scrutiny, Members should be advised of performance data and what measures were being implemented by the Local Authority to improve service delivery; reduce silo-working across directorates and working with Community Residents Groups.

Councillor P Sahota further commented on the additional resources awarded by Central Government to all Council's for the repair of roads and to fill potholes. It was considered essential for Members to receive assurance that the additional funding would address the issues in Dudley.

- b) In responding to comments made, the Group Director - Communities and Growth referred to the position of the recruitment process as part of the senior management restructure and in doing so confirmed that once appointed, the new Directors under the Communities and Growth Group would attend future Scrutiny Committee meetings and undertook to circulate details of service areas and key officers within the Communities and Growth Group to the Committee for information and clarification.
- c) Councillor I Kettle welcomed the opportunity to scrutinise economy growth within Dudley and encouraged briefings from people with an economist background to gain an understanding of Dudley's status. Concerns were also raised concerning local community activities being restricted by public liability insurance and that this needed to be addressed to help support communities.

In responding, the Director of Legal, Compliance and Assurance/Monitoring Officer emphasised the importance of scrutiny by understanding the desired overall outcome by the Committee. It was confirmed that work was being undertaken to develop guidance on effective scrutiny including formulating work programmes and being a critical friend. The Director of Legal, Compliance and Assurance/Monitoring Officer acknowledged the comments made regarding public liability insurance and would review further, if necessary.

The Chair suggested that the issues surrounding community activities and public liability insurance could be discussed at the meeting in October, 2025 and form part of the support for Friends Groups agenda item. With regard to obtaining expert opinions on agenda items, it was intended that external experts, partners and stakeholders would be invited to comment on specific agenda items as appropriate during the year.

- d) The Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods assured Members of his wish for transparency and commitment to scrutiny during the year. In response to comments made regarding road repairs, the Cabinet Member confirmed that details of repairs undertaken over the last two years, as part of the Council's proactive repair and maintenance programme had been published on the Council's website.
- e) In responding to a question raised by Councillor D Stanley concerning the proposed agenda item on Road Repairs/Drain Cleaning, the Group Director - Communities and Growth clarified that there was no difference between drain cleaning and gully emptying and undertook to amend the title of the report for clarification.
- f) In responding to a further question by Councillor D Stanley concerning the proposed scrutiny of unadopted roads, the Chair in recognising issues in this area across the Borough, confirmed that the purpose of the item was to review the existing policy and make any additional recommendations, if appropriate.

Councillor D Stanley expressed caution in setting any precedents in this area.

- g) Following further discussion, it was agreed that reports on Regeneration Projects; External Grant Funding (which could be combined with Regeneration Projects) and an update on Stalled Sites across the Borough be included in the programme of business for 2025/26.

The Director of Legal, Compliance and Assurance/Monitoring Officer confirmed that any levelling up funding to be determined by the Cabinet would be included on the Forward Plan, therefore, he encouraged Members to review the Plan and identify any forward levelling up funding which, if necessary, may require further scrutiny.

Resolved

- (1) That the report on the programme of meetings and potential items of business for this Committee, be noted.
- (2) That the Group Director - Communities and Growth be requested to amend the title of the report on Road Repairs / Drain Cleaning scheduled for November 2025, taking into account the comments made during the meeting.
- (3) That the following items be included in the programme of business for 2025/26:
 - Regeneration Projects
 - External Grant Funding for Regeneration
 - Update on Stalled Sites across the Borough
- (4) That, subject to resolution (2) and (3) above, the Committee confirm the programme of business as outlined in paragraph 4 of the report submitted, subject to the need for flexibility to reflect any changes that might arise during the municipal year.
- (5) That the Director of Legal, Compliance and Assurance/Monitoring Officer, following consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair, be authorised to make all the necessary arrangements to enable this Committee to undertake its programme of scrutiny work during the 2025/26 municipal year.
- (6) That the terms of reference for the Communities and Growth Scrutiny Committee, as set out in the Scrutiny Procedure Rules appended to the report submitted, be noted.

- (7) That the Group Director - Communities and Growth be requested to circulate details of service areas and key officers within the Communities and Growth Group to the Committee for information.
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7 **Parking Strategy**

The Committee considered a report of the Group Director – Communities and Growth on an overview of any proposed future strategy for parking in the Borough.

In introducing the report, the Cabinet Member for Economy and Infrastructure referred to the addendum to the report submitted, which had been circulated prior to the meeting, confirming that in addition to the development of the future parking strategy, consideration would also be given to the introduction of a half an hour charge of 50p. It was acknowledged that the implementation of the new parking tariffs in October 2024 had assisted with the Council's financial position, although there was still a need to balance budgets moving forward to replenish reserves. The Council remained committed in supporting towns and businesses and identifying ways in which car parks could help support town centres.

It was noted that the development of the strategy was estimated to cost in excess of £210K and would take 6-12 months to develop, and a further 6-12 months for implementation. It was further noted that it was unlikely that the resources would be identified mid-year, therefore further consideration would need to be given during the budget setting process to identify any budget growth.

Members asked questions, made comments and responses were provided where necessary as follows: -

- a) Councillor H Bills referred to parking payment machines that were calibrated to set fares and sought clarification on the proposed new tariffs for 30 minutes and 1-hour durations. Reference was also made to enforcement and Councillor Bills encouraged strict guidance and the need for reasonableness in enforcement.

In responding, the Cabinet Member for Economy and Infrastructure confirmed that the recent announcement focused on the introduction of a half an hour charge of 50p, however, further consideration would be given to implementing an hourly charge of £1. The charges would be considered as part of a wider review of fees and charges in the autumn which would also include a consultation with both the public and local town centre businesses. Feedback would be sought in the meantime of the proposed tariffs.

The Group Director – Communities and Growth provided an overview of the Parking Enforcement contract undertaken by an external provider, NSL. It was advised that the contract was based on the length of time and the number of enforcement officers required instead of the number of parking charging notices issued. NSL was one of two of the market sector leaders and the support provided, including traffic regulation audits, ensured Dudley was operating at the national average. Since the commencement of NSL, the Local Authority were able to access vital data it needed to consider future strategies.

- b) In responding to a question raised by Councillor D Roberts concerning the proposed parking tariffs and how this would impact users that attended appointments such as dentists/opticians in Town Centres that exceeded 30 minutes, the Cabinet Member for Economy and Infrastructure commented that it was the users responsibility to ensure that payment for parking was purchased for the amount of time needed. He confirmed that parking was still available for all day, and that the proposed one-hour payment of £1 was still less than the current minimum payment of £1.80 for two hours. Feedback would be pursued from town centre businesses as to whether the proposed 30 minutes tariff was considered appropriate.
- c) Reference was made to the initial screening document that had been mentioned within the report, and it was clarified that in terms of a parking strategy coming forward, there would be the requirement of an equality impact assessment, however, ongoing consideration of the impact on all protected characteristics would continue during the early phase of development of a parking strategy and subsequent implementation.

- d) In responding to a question raised by Councillor S Edwards concerning parking enforcement profits, the Group Director – Communities and Growth confirmed that NSL was paid by an agreed contractual rate of the entirety of the length of the contract and that there was no sharing of parking charging notices values. Any additional fees gained would be returned to the service area only.
- e) With regard to the lack of resources and capacity currently available, Councillor S Edwards queried whether the suggested £210k would be utilised in recruiting additional staff to develop and implement the parking strategy and whether the proposed implementation date of two years was separate to the introduction of the new parking tariffs.

In responding, the Cabinet Member for Economy and Infrastructure confirmed that the £210k would be utilised to gather data and evidence and undertake the necessary governance processes, including consultation. Consideration would need to be given to using external providers due to existing employees working to capacity in their roles, however, it was reiterated that budget growth would need to be identified in order to deliver a new parking strategy. It was also confirmed that the parking strategy was a separate process to the car parking tariff charges which was part of an annual review of fees and charges.

It was noted that evidence data on income generation from individual car parks and information collected by NSL would be utilised to help inform sustainable decisions moving forward.

The Group Director – Communities and Growth reiterated that external expertise may be required in developing a parking strategy and that consideration would need to be given to the current car parking provision; auditing of traffic regulation orders across the Borough and moving traffic enforcement, which overall was a significant and extensive amount of work. The delivery of the strategy would be aligned with the work undertaken by the Council, such as adopting road markings to indicate parking restrictions.

- f) In responding to a further question from Councillor S Edwards concerning the use of Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) cameras in council owned car parks, the Cabinet Member for Economy and Infrastructure advised that legally local authorities were not permitted to enforce car parks using methods such as ANPR cameras other than individual civil enforcement officers issuing notices in person. The Cabinet Member for Economy and Infrastructure however considered these regulations to be outdated and in the event of a change in law, commented on the possibility of working with other providers such as libraries, leisure centres and local businesses to subsidise public car parking.
- g) In responding to a question raised by Councillor P Sahota concerning the introduction of residents' permits, the Cabinet Member for Economy and Infrastructure referred to previous consultations and confirmed that any permit would incur charges. However, consideration would need to be given to the suitability of residents parking permits in areas across the Borough and whether reviewing traffic regulation orders such as yellow lines to control any dangerous or anti-nuisance parking would be more appropriate. It was hoped that at some point the Local Authority would be able to offer residents parking permits in appropriate locations, including those that do not have access to off road parking and terraced streets, subject to available resources and enforcement.
- h) In responding to a question raised by Councillor T Russon concerning the installation of on-street electric charging points, the Cabinet Member for Economy and Infrastructure confirmed that a number of on-street electrical vehicle charging points had been installed across the Borough as part of a government funded programme. Reference was also made to the challenges and difficulties faced by Enforcement Officers.
- i) With regard to on-street parking charges, the Cabinet Member for Economy and Infrastructure confirmed that there were no plans to introduce on road car parking charges, however, it was emphasised that work was needed to ensure on street traffic regulation orders were consistent with car parks. The Group Director – Communities and Growth also emphasised the need for both accessible parking bays and pedestrian accessibility.

- j) Councillor I Sandall referred to the 293% income increase following the implementation of the new parking tariffs in October 2024 and the decrease in the number of overall tickets issued as car park users had changed their parking behaviours following the removal of 2 hours free parking. It was evident that vehicles were being parked on private and pub car parks and neighbouring streets. Councillor Sandall queried what monitoring was being undertaken for off street parking.

In responding, the Cabinet Member for Economy and Infrastructure commented that it was the responsibility of private owners to regulate their car parks and therefore it would be difficult for the Local Authority to monitor misuse. The need to look at all traffic regulation orders across the borough to ensure they were consistent and appropriate was mentioned.

Following further discussion, the Group Director of Communities and Growth undertook to provide a breakdown of the number of overall tickets issued since October, 2024.

- k) Following comments made concerning the detrimental effect on footfall within Town Centres, the Cabinet Member for Economy and Infrastructure suggested that a wider discussion on Town Centres, including opportunities for investment, be considered at a future meeting.
- l) Councillor I Kettle referred to the significant financial impact to people that paid for parking to commute to work each day and commented on the poor maintenance of Council owned car parks. Councillor Kettle queried whether it was appropriate to implement parking charges before repair works were undertaken.

Councillor I Kettle also referred to his recent experience with a faulty car parking meter machine in Stourbridge which would not accept coins. With regard to enforcement by NSL, Councillor Kettle also queried whether the company used escalating fines following the issuing of penalty charge notices.

In responding, the Cabinet Member for Economy and Infrastructure confirmed that people could use Council owned car parks during their commute to work, however, would encourage people to purchase a season ticket to reduce costs. The comments made regarding the condition of car parks was acknowledged, which was considered a consequence of the period during the two hours free parking and reduction in resources. It was reported that some investment had taken place in certain car parks with serious parking surface issues. It was anticipated that it would take some time to regenerate the resources to invest in car parks, given the level of maintenance required, in particular multi-storey car parks.

With regard to the faulty machine, it was confirmed that the maintenance of the machines was the Council's responsibility and that the management of penalty charge notices processing was carried out by Council officers to ensure impartiality between the issuing of tickets and any appeals process. It was confirmed that fines could be paid within 14 days at a discounted rate, which would increase to the full amount should the fine not be paid within this period. An overview of the appeals process was also provided. It was reported that since the introduction of NSL, it was evident that more people were paying their fines within the 14 days.

The Group Director of Communities and Growth undertook to investigate the issues surrounding the parking machine at Stourbridge Train Station, as raised by Councillor I Kettle during the meeting.

- m) Councillor D Roberts sought clarification as to whether consultation would be undertaken with businesses across Dudley looking at implications arising from the implemented car parking charges, as part of the parking strategy. Reference was also made to the 293% increase in income generation and Councillor Roberts queried what this figure amounted too and whether it would be reinvested back into car parks or infrastructure.

In responding, the Cabinet Member for Economy and Infrastructure confirmed that feedback from local communities, businesses and representative groups would form part of any consultation exercise. In advance of the statutory consultation as part of the annual fees and charges review, it was hoped that thoughts and feedback would be gathered from the business community on the proposed 30-minute and one-hour tariffs.

The Group Director of Communities and Growth undertook to provide a financial breakdown of the 293% income increase following the implementation of the new parking tariffs in October, 2024.

With regard to reinvestment from income generation, it was noted that this was currently utilised within the highways service on road repairs and traffic regulation order requests. It was anticipated that any investment into car parking maintenance would take some time given the number of years with no income and the condition of some of the car parks was acknowledged. The Group Director – Communities and Growth encouraged Members to report any concerns relating to car parks or significant safety defects through the appropriate Council's procedures for investigation.

- n) Councillor E Cobb concurred with comments made concerning users parking vehicles on private car parks and streets, including schools, and the impact to local businesses following the introduction of parking charges and queried what feedback had been received from businesses to date.

In responding, the Cabinet Member for Economy and Infrastructure confirmed that he had not received much feedback from businesses, however in his role as Director of Halesowen BID, he was aware of the concerns that businesses had in terms of car parking charges. The charges were introduced at a time of financial difficulty within the Council, and as the position was improving, it was appropriate to consider alternative tariffs to bring them to a level that was more consistent with other local authorities in order to improve footfall within town centres.

- o) In responding to a question raised by Councillor D Stanley, it was noted that free parking was available at the park and ride sites at Stourbridge Junction, Coseley, Lye and Rowley Regis train stations. It was confirmed that no proposals had been made to transfer the ownership of those car parks or introduce parking charges.
- p) The Chair queried whether the timeframe of the reintroduction of the two-hour parking charge and proposed parking strategy was appropriate and requested clarification of the proposed implementation of the strategy. Reference was also made to the School Streets Initiative which was piloted amongst three primary schools and the Chair sought clarification on the success and inclusion of the programme within the strategy.

In responding, the Cabinet Member for Economy and Infrastructure reiterated that the financial position of the Council last year necessitated the need to secure additional income to continue delivering the services within the Highways Department. Measures would continue to be adopted, including spending controls, therefore the implementation of a parking strategy would need to be part of a balanced budget going forward. It was anticipated that subject to approval of resources within the 2026/27 budget, delivery of work underpinned by the strategy would commence from the 2027 financial year onwards.

With regards to the School Streets Initiative, it was reported that although the project had some barriers in delivery, it did appear to be extremely effective in helping to address significant parking problems in certain locations. It was confirmed that the programme was a limited trial from the government of powers awarded to Local Authorities, that were similar to Moving Traffic Regulation enforcement powers and therefore, would not be included within the strategy at the present time. Any extension to the moving traffic offences would require a cost benefit analysis. It was suggested that feedback on the School Streets Initiative be provided alongside the next scheduled item concerning parking for information.

- q) Councillor S Edwards referred to the car parking issues surrounding Russell's Hall Hospital and the neighbouring streets; the possibility of residents permits and the potential for residents reporting misuse of parking using automation processes was also suggested.

In responding, the Cabinet Member for Economy and Infrastructure welcomed the possibility of introducing resident permits however emphasised that these needed to be correct and appropriate for the area with consideration given to available off-road parking and nearby amenities that may cause issues.

(At this juncture, the Cabinet Member for Economy and Infrastructure declared a non-pecuniary interest as an employee of Russell's Hall Hospital)

It was confirmed that Russell's Hall Hospital provided free parking for their staff members, and enforcement tickets for traffic or parking violations could only be issued in person by a Civil Enforcement Officer.

- r) Councillor S Edwards also referred to the notice of motion on parking charges which would be considered by Full Council in October, 2025.

Resolved

- (1) That the report on the proposed future strategy for parking in the Borough, be submitted.
 - (2) That the current position on parking provision within the Borough, be noted.
 - (3) That the need for investment in the development of a future parking strategy, be acknowledged.
 - (4) That the Director of Legal, Compliance and Assurance/Monitoring Officer be authorised to formulate recommendations for consideration by the Committee. The agreed recommendations are set out in the Appendix to these minutes.
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8 Misalignment of Tracks – Verbal Update

The Committee received an update by the Group Director – Communities and Growth on the issues identified on the service road to the Very Light Rail and underlying power cables which were at a level which would prevent the completion of the metro works. It was confirmed that West Midlands Combined Authority had reviewed a funding line for the Dudley Metro interface works which delivered City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement funding. Designs were currently being completed, and assurance was given that there were no costs for the Council associated with these works.

In responding to questions raised by Members, the Group Director – Communities and Growth confirmed that the repair works was not expected to delay completion of phase one of the Metro development, and it was anticipated that with any project any additional costs would incur above the original budget for this phase of works.

It was noted that a recent news article confirmed that Transport for West Midlands announced that the project was on target for trams to be running to Dudley Town Centre by Christmas, 2025.

Resolved

That the update on the misalignment of tracks be noted.

9 **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 8.12pm

CHAIR

Agenda Item No. 6 – Parking Strategy Recommendations

- (1) With regards to the Equality Impact Assessment - There needs to be meaningful engagement with external stakeholders.
- (2) The Parking Strategy should be all encompassing in respect of affecting businesses, accessibility, pollution and any necessary wider powers. Within certain areas there should also be the consideration of parking permits
- (3) The Parking Strategy should also seek to ascertain whether there is the possibility of monitoring the impact of off-street parking near pay and display car parks. The Group Director and Portfolio holder acknowledged the need to look at wider TRO/nuisance issues and resident parking permits within the scope of this point.
- (4) That the Group Director of Communities and Growth be requested to provide a breakdown of the number of overall tickets issued since October, 2024.
- (5) That the Chair and Vice-Chair, in consultation with the Group Director of Communities and Growth, consider scheduling a separate meeting to undertake a wider discussion on Town Centres including opportunities for investment.
- (6) That the Group Director of Communities and Growth investigate the issues surrounding the parking machine at Stourbridge Train Station, as raised during the meeting.
- (7) That the Group Director of Communities and Growth be requested to provide a financial breakdown of the 293% income increase following the implementation of the new parking tariffs in October, 2024.
- (8) That an update on the feedback on the School Streets Initiative be provided alongside the Parking Strategy Agenda Item scheduled for 26th January 2026.
- (9) That the current position on parking provision within the Borough be noted.
- (10) That the need for investment in the development of a future parking strategy be acknowledged.
- (11) That the Committee recommend that a Task and Finish Group to consider the draft Parking Strategy be established in the 2026/27 Municipal Year, subject to approval during the budget setting process.
- (12) That the Notice of Motion on Parking Charges to be considered by Full Council in October, 2025 be noted.