



Economic Growth Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held at County Hall, Colliton Park,
Dorchester, Dorset, DT1 1XJ on Wednesday, 24 January 2018

Present:

Ray Bryan (Chairman)
Cherry Brooks, Andy Canning, Jean Dunseith and Jon Orrell.

Members Attending

Deborah Croney, Cabinet Member for Economy, Education, Learning and Skills
Daryl Turner, Cabinet Member for Natural and Built Environment.

Officers Attending: Mike Harries (Corporate Director for Environment and Economy), Matthew Piles (Service Director – Economy), Andrew Martin (Service Director - Highways and Emergency Planning), Andy Smith (Assistant Head of Finance), Kate Tunks (Transport Planning Team Leader), John Alexander (Senior Assurance Manager), Doug Gilbert – (Advisor - Children’s Services), David Northover (Senior Democratic Services Officer) and Heather Lappin (Group Finance Manager).

Also attending

Hilary Trevorah – Chief Executive of Dorset Association of Parish and Town Councils.

(Note: These minutes have been prepared by officers as a record of the meeting and of any decisions reached. They are to be considered and confirmed at the next meeting of the Committee to be held on **Monday, 26 March 2018.**)

Apologies for Absence

44 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Jon Andrews, Spencer Flower, Peter Hall, Margaret Phipps and David Shortell.

As this was the final meeting Andy Smith would be attending before retiring from the County Council, the Chairman, on behalf of the Committee, took the opportunity to thank him for his contributions to the Committee over the years and wished him every success for the future,

Code of Conduct

45 There were no declarations by members of disclosable pecuniary interests under the Code of Conduct.

Minutes

46 The minutes of the meeting held on 16 October 2017 were confirmed and signed.

Matter arising

Arising from minute 37, the Committee were being given the opportunity to nominate a member to be appointed to serve on the Brexit Advisory Group.

Resolved

That Councillor Cherry Brooks be appointed to serve as the Committee’s representative on the Brexit Advisory Group.

Public Participation

47 There were no public questions received at the meeting in accordance with Standing Order 21(1).

There were no public statements received at the meeting in accordance with Standing Order 21(2).

Update on "Working Together Highways" Initiative

48 The Committee considered a report and received a presentation from the Service Director, Highways and Emergency Planning updating on progress being made with the "Working Together Highways" initiative - a partnership arrangement with the Dorset Association of Parish and Town Councils which was designed to enable individual parishes and towns to contribute towards and undertake routine highways maintenance works for themselves. The presentation was designed to show how the initiative was working in practice; what, if any, obstacles there were; what part each was playing; how this was being co-ordinated; was it achieving what it was designed to do; and was it delivering on its outcomes.

This approach was based on the fact that the highway's service routine maintenance funding could now only provide for the delivery of a basic and fundamental service that would fulfil its statutory obligations and ensure the safety of the highway network by that means. It also recognised that local communities had a considerable knowledge on what assets they had, where these could be found and what was needed for them to function as they should. Such knowledge was invaluable in communities being given the choice to determine for themselves where they considered their priorities to be and what benefits would be gained. This initiative also gave local councils the opportunity to undertake works in excess of those able to be done by the County Council, so that enhancements could be made if desired, with the costs of these being borne by the town or parish council's precept budgetary provision.

A consultation exercise into this initiative had been widely publicised in the summer of 2016 and had generated considerable interest from the majority of parishes whom the DAPTC represented. Officers confirmed that this offer had also been extended to those parishes which were not aligned to the Association, ensuring all had the scope to partake if they so wished, with interest being shown by them too. Access to a specialised webpage for parish and town councils to be able to identify the maintenance needs in their parish, had been made available to all.

The presentation detailed what type of maintenance work could be – and was being – undertaken; how this was being done; what this entailed and who was involved. How contractual agreements would be managed was outlined as well as what necessary legal obligations needed to be fulfilled so that these arrangements complied with governance standards. How risk was assessed, as well as how volunteers could be recruited and managed and what the relationship was for their supervision by County Council employees – at no charge to them - were all detailed as part of the presentation. This clearly demonstrated the County Council's commitment to the initiative.

The means of identifying opportunities to supplement the County Council's operations were outlined, with four commissioning options being available to parishes as a means of progressing matters. Option 4 – Parish/Town Councils entering into an Agency Agreement with the County Council – had proven to be the most popular, beneficial and practical option for those who had already committed to the scheme. The process for reaching agreement on this was outlined. What maintenance could be done, by whom and by what means was explained as part of the option appraisal process.

The presentation gave a sense of indicative outputs in terms of typical works that could be undertaken, typical costs for these and typical hours required to do said tasks. Those Councils which had signed up to the scheme, or were in the process of

signing up, were shared with the Committee together with what works that had agreed to undertake. It was confirmed that some of the towns that had signed up had made arrangements of with adjoining parishes to undertake minor routine works on their behalf as the town council had the capacity to do so.

There was some concern expressed that standards had been seen to lapse but the reason for this was understood as savings had to be made. However there was an acknowledgement that there was a strong case for continued investment to maintain the quality of the road network to avoid future deterioration - i.e invest to save. Given what the initiative was designed to do, members considered that the reasoning for this should be more readily explained to local communities and the wider public to ensure they were familiar with that message.

On this the Committee considered it beneficial establishing a Policy Development Panel on Highway Maintenance Management to assess what was being done; how it was being done; what the priorities were and; what, if any, improvements could be made. It was considered that this was an opportune time to look again at this in light of there being a new code of practice. Likewise, comparisons were made with other highway authorities to establish how the County Council was performing, with details of this being provided to members. Whilst highway maintenance was fundamentally a revenue issue, capital investment had a bearing on what level of maintenance was necessary and, on that basis, it was agreed that the Dorset LEP should be invited to any meeting where the fabric of the network was being assessed on what capital implications there were.

Given that such an exercise had been undertaken in the recent past, the Panel would be provided with some context as to the reasoning for the decisions previously taken and the basis on which those decisions were made so that a more meaningful assessment could be made on what needed to be done.

The Chairman was of the view that emphasis should be given to ensuring that all Dorset MP's fully advocated the need for sufficient funding to be made available for the delivery of necessary services, with highway maintenance seen to be a priority.

Hilary Trevorah complemented the Service Director's presentation in being able to provide a perspective on behalf of the parishes on how the partnership arrangements were working and what benefits this working relationship brought. The issue of how Dorset MP's supported sufficient funding provision could be raised at a DAPTC management meeting during 2018.

The Committee were pleased to see how successful this initiative was proving to be and that the partnership arrangements with local communities to identify and meet their specific needs was a positive approach being taken. They thanked Mrs Trevorah for the contribution she had made to their understanding.

Resolved

That the progress being made to date with the Working Together Highways Initiative be endorsed and that a Policy Development Panel on Highway Maintenance Management be established to review what arrangements were in place and how applicable these were to meet the needs going forward, with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman – whose suggestion it was - being nominated to serve on this, with up to three other members to be determined in due course.

Reason for Decision

To ensure that a successful collaborative arrangements between the County Council and local communities was established in relation to the delivery of minor highway maintenance activities.

Application of the Local Transport Plan

49 The content of the report by the Service Director Economy on the application of the Local Transport Plan, what it was designed to achieve and the means by which this was to be done was considered by the Committee. The Plan was designed to target where improvements were most beneficial and would achieve the most and the means by which this could be delivered.

How the LTP worked in practice between the three highway authorities of Dorset County, Bournemouth Borough and the Borough of Poole was seen to be an exemplar of what could be achieved by collaborative working arrangements. The LTP continued to prioritise safety measures, as well as the practical means of applying transportation measures, with emphasis being placed on active travel schemes to support better health outcomes and transport schemes to support economic growth outcomes.

The Committee were informed about how transport improvement schemes were prioritised; what the LTP funding delivered; and the major achievements of the 2014-17 and the key priorities of the 2017-2020 LTP Implementation Plans respectively. Emphasis was being placed on reducing the need to travel; urban air quality /transport solutions and green technologies. There was working with Clinical Commissioning Groups, focussing on public health in ensuring there was opportunities for every individual to be able to play their part in contributing to society. The work being done in collaboration with Sustrans warranted special mention in delivering sustainable transport solutions where practicable.

Emphasis was also being placed on education and working within schools in instilling healthy transport practices amongst students. Housing allocation and supply was integral to what could be achieved and had a bearing on what transport solutions could be delivered. The travel to work area in the south east conurbation had implications for all three highway authorities.

The Committee were pleased to see that the health agenda was being actively promoted. With reference to Weymouth, improvements were being targeted at strategic junctions and key hubs to ensure that sustainable methods of transport could be achieved and the Weymouth Masterplan and the Western Dorset Growth Strategy would have a bearing on the means for this to be realised. South Western Railways has a part to play in the ability for cycle provision on their trains and links were being made to ensure this could be delivered. Similarly, the Growth Deal funding took into account how to better deliver sustainable transport solutions.

The Chairman was pleased that community led initiatives – such as that recently agreed Traffic Regulation order at Regulatory Committee for a 20 mph zone in Iwerne Minster – could be fulfilled, wherever practicable, and showed what could be achieved with some thought.

The way in which footway conditions were assessed and managed and how maintenance of the these was addressed was explained. A particular issue raised was the condition of a footway, on a school route, adjacent to A31 near St Leonards. Officers confirmed the importance of road safety education in encouraging children to walk to school where they could and what bearing this had on the health and wellbeing agenda and that they should have adequate means of them being able to so. Given this they would investigate the matter drawn to their attention.

The Service Director - Economy explained that the LTP was designed to look at

transportation needs holistically, so that the most beneficial solutions could be found as necessary. It was recognised that the needs of urban transport differed markedly from that which the rural areas required. An Integrated Transport Focus Day was being held on 26 February to allow discussion on this by interested parties.

The Committee recognised the importance of an integrated parking strategy between the County and Borough/District councils, in order to sustain and deliver managed parking in practice to cover on-street and off-street provision. The LTP provided the means for this to be delivered and formed the basis for how this could be achieved. The pilot scheme established for Dorchester through the Dorchester Transport and Environment Plan (DTEP) was seen to be a good basis for other schemes in market towns, given the collaborative working across all their tiers of local government to achieve this.

The Committee considered that, where practicable, generating income from sponsorship of highway, and County Council, assets should be pursued as there appeared to be considerable opportunity to do this. The Service Director-Economy confirmed that much success had already been realised from doing this and had proved beneficial in terms of income generation. He was pleased to say that current roundabout sponsorship attracted some £150,000 per annum, with a dedicated team identifying opportunities to make further gains where possible, with any rationalisation of local government in Dorset providing greater opportunities still.

The Committee were pleased to see what practical achievements could be made from the collaborative working of the LTP and that the priorities identified were ones which met the County Council's own corporate outcomes and aims.

Recommendations

- 1) That the LTP and Corporate Plan outcomes be approved as a method of prioritising the local transport projects to be delivered in Dorset.
- 2) That the transport project areas identified in the Service Director's report be approved.

Reasons for Recommendations

The LTP priorities have been previously agreed and are fixed in the LTP 2011. The Corporate Plan 2017 outcomes have been added to ensure alignment with the County Council's aims and objectives, with particular reference to health, physical activity and economic growth. The types of projects being delivered meet these priorities and outcomes.

Outcomes Focused Monitoring Report, January 2018

50 The Outcomes Focused Monitoring report - as at January 2018 - set out progress against the 2017-18 Corporate Plan. The report provided relevant data on the population indicators within the prosperous outcome and:-

- performance measures - by which the County Council could measure the contribution and impact of its own services and activities on the outcomes
- risk management information - identifying the current level of risks on the Corporate Risk Register that related to outcomes and the population indicators

The Committee were being asked to make an assessment of current progress and to identify any priorities for further investigation. Attention was drawn to productivity and how there was scope for improvement to this. The suppression of wages and what this meant for standards of living in certain areas of deprivation in the county – parts of Weymouth being one - was acknowledged. Typically the commercial vibrancy of seaside towns was influenced by seasonal trade, employment and attractions. What scope there was for this to be addressed and improvements made was discussed. Officers recognised those areas in particular need and confirmed that action was

being targeted so that issues could be addressed through the skills agenda. From this, improvements could be made, with scope for social mobility being actively pursued through this means. Moreover, Government funding had been allocated to 12 identifiable “Opportunity Areas” countrywide – socially deprived regions that would benefit from a funding injection to meet particular needs. The Committee considered that there could be a good case made for socially deprived wards within Weymouth being included in such designated areas, with evidence supporting this, and efforts should be made for this to be actively pursued. The County Councillor for Weymouth Town agreed to play his part in ensuring that the Melcombe Regis Board had some input into this. He was also keen to promote what attributes Weymouth had, asking that consideration be given to promoting wave and tidal power and the benefits this could bring.

From the report it could be seen that the condition of county roads had slightly deteriorated and this could be attributed to the reduction of road maintenance funding available. In reducing the need for travel could have a reduction on the abrasion of the road network and, in turn, maintenance needs would not be so great.

Turning to Children’s Services, Doug Gilbert outlined the performance of attainment levels amongst pupils, how these had been assessed and what might be done to see improvements being made. A contributing factor to this was the way in which nationally grading had been changed – in going from an alphabetical to numerical system - which was not necessarily conducive to comparison. Moreover, how Ofsted had “raised the bar” in now adjudging the performance of schools was also reflected in the performance standards being shown. The County Council had a part to play in ensuring employers, especially small businesses, understood the changes to the grading levels and took this into account when job applications were being made. Ways in which the Dorset LEP could become more engaged in what the skills agenda had to offer was felt to be critical to its success. Efforts would be made for their involvement to be reinvigorated. Similarly schools had an integral part to play in ensuring that children had the right skills to be able to access future opportunities and that they were aware of what options were available to them.

The Committee asked to be updated on a regular basis on what improvements – or otherwise - were being made. This should remain a focus for all that the Committee did, as skills underpinned any success that was able to be achieved. Any funding opportunities should be identified wherever possible, with what other authorities were doing being used as basis for what Dorset could do. This would ensure Dorset was in the best position possible to meet what lay ahead.

Resolved

- 1) That the evidence of Dorset’s position with regard to the outcome indicators in Appendix 1 of the report be noted; and:
- 2) that the issues and opportunities identified in the above text be actively pursued, where possible and practicable.

Reason for Decision

The 2017-18 Corporate Plan provides an overarching strategic framework for monitoring progress towards good outcomes for Dorset. The Overview and Scrutiny Committees provide corporate governance and performance monitoring arrangements so that progress against the corporate plan can be monitored effectively.

Work Programme

- 51 The opportunity was taken to assess the Work Programme and decide what needed to be considered and scrutinised in the upcoming months. The Chairman encouraged all members to contribute items to the programme as they saw fit. Topics identified for the next meeting included “Green Infrastructure “ and The Industrial Strategy” – with

the Dorset LEP's involvement in this.

It was also considered beneficial that, looking ahead, economic development teams across Dorset strengthened their collaborative working arrangements for the benefit of all.

Noted

Questions from Councillors

52 No questions were asked by members under Standing Order 20 (2).

Meeting Duration: 10.00 am - 12.10 pm