15. Apologies

No apologies for absence were received.

16. Declarations of Interests of Members in Contracts and Other Matters and Restriction on Voting by Members

No declarations of interests were made in addition to those already confirmed by Members in the Register of Members’ Interests.

17. Minutes

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 02 October 2014 be approved as a correct record.

18. 18-24 Youth Unemployment Update

Consideration was given to the latest unemployment and youth unemployment data for the District (Item 4.1 – 4.2 of the Official Minutes of the Council).

Glenn Watson, Planning & Economic Development Services Manager, circulated for Members’ reference a copy of the most recent data up to 31 October 2014, which detailed:

- Overall unemployment (Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) claimants) for Cannock Chase District was 1.4%, down from 1.5% in September. The Staffordshire rate was 1.1%, down from 1.4% in September.
- Youth unemployment (18-24 year olds claiming JSA) for Cannock Chase District was 2.9%, down from 3.5% in September. The Staffordshire rate was 2.2%, down from 2.4% in September.
The Chairman commented that at the last meeting, a query was raised as to whether other avenues could be explored about how to monitor unemployment in the District other than just using the JSA data.

The Planning & Economic Development Services Manager replied that JSA data was used as it was reliable and readily available, however monitoring of Employment Support Allowance (ESA) data was also being considered.

Cllr. Gamble queried how much the data was affected by those who undertook agency work rather than permanent employment.

The Planning & Economic Development Services Manager replied that such workers would not be included in the unemployment data, as even though their work was often short-term, they were still classed as being in employment.

RESOLVED:

That the latest overall and youth unemployment figures for the District be noted.

19. Local Transport Issues

Cannock Chase Integrated Transport Strategy (CCITS) Update

Clive Thomson, Commissioner for Transport and the Connected County, Staffordshire County Council (SCC), was in attendance for this item.

Clive Thomson delivered a presentation on the CCITS, which covered:

- SCC priority outcomes;
- 2011 Census data – mode of travel to work in Cannock Chase District and England;
- Comparative travel to work data between the 2001 and 2011 Census’ for the District which showed:
  - Travel by train had increased by 58%;
  - Travel by bus, minibus or coach had decreased by 24%;
  - Driving a car or van had increased by 21%;
  - Passenger in a car or van had decreased by 17%;
  - Travel by bicycle and on foot had increased by 2% and 3% respectively.
- Eastern Way Dualling;
- A5 Air Quality Management Area (AQMA);
- Rugeley Horse Fair;
- Churchbridge Pinch Point Scheme;
- Chaseline Electrification;
- Public Transport;
- Walking and Cycling;
- Public Bus Network Statistics;
- Transport Budgets (Countywide);
- Vision for Transport and Principles.

In respect of the Chaseline electrification, Cllr. Holder queried with Clive Thomson if he was aware that the MP for South Staffordshire had publicly requested that the line speed be restricted through that constituency so as to reduce the noise effects of residents living by the railway line.
Clive Thomson replied that he was not aware of this request, but the electric trains to be operated on the line would be quieter than the existing diesel powered services, so noise levels would be reduced anyway.

Cllr. Alcott commented that regular meetings had been held in recent years regarding the Chaseline, to which the MP for South Staffordshire had been invited, but had never attended. Additionally, South Staffordshire Council did not provide any funding to Centro to support the operation of rail services throughout its area, unlike Cannock Chase Council.

It was agreed that the District and County Council should continue to press jointly for the delivery of the line-speed upgrade at the earliest date.

Cllr. Gamble queried if the existing platforms at Cannock, Hednesford and Rugeley Town rail stations would be long enough to accommodate the new electric trains.

Bob Phillips, LEP Consultant, replied that this raised general issues about the standard of facilities at these stations, and that continued pressure would need to be put on Network Rail and London Midland to ensure stations were upgraded as part of the electrification project.

The LEP Consultant queried what the best approach was for the Council to try and secure funding for transport improvements given that the route to do this had changed.

Clive Thomson replied that SCC still had £3.6m of funding to deliver the ITSs across the County, as well as funding for road maintenance. Funding was also available from the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and the Growth Fund for major projects, and from the Department for Transport (DfT). In terms of submitting bids, it was important to assemble the ‘right’ data to ensure that strong and viable bids could be developed.

Clive Thompson offered support from the County Council for scheme and bid development for transport priorities within the CCITS, albeit that this would be subject to the availability of resources at the County Council and the agreement of the portfolio holder.

The Planning & Economic Development Services Manager requested an update on the Strategic Bus Network Review which had been raised at previous meetings.

Clive Thomson replied that due to recently undertaken and future planned projects, a review in Cannock would not commence until after September 2015, although no timescale had yet been planed.

Cannock Chase Bus Network Strategic Review
Dan Flanagan (General Manager Cannock and Stafford), Andy Percy and Craig Allen from Arriva Midlands were in attendance for this item.

Dan Flanagan provided the following update on bus services in the District:

- Significant investment had been delivered into the fleet of Cannock buses;
- Reliability of older vehicles had improved alongside the recent introduction of the new ‘Sapphire’ services operating on route numbers 1, 2 and 2A;
• The Sapphire buses had been introduced with the aims of clawing back ‘lost’ customers and encouraging car uses to commute by bus instead, by highlighting the provision of wi-fi and plug points on board. They were also more user-friendly thanks to the introduction of on-board voice and screen announcements of bus stop approaches.

• Service changes:
  o A review of services operating in Cannock had not been undertaken for a number years, and a recent VOSA compliance check found there were reliability issues on buses operating on routes 31, 32 and 33. As a result of this, the decision was taken to withdrawn route 32 from service;
  o A new route 34 was then introduced which had generally been well received by those affected by the loss of route 32. Additionally, talks had been undertaken with Sainsbury’s based at the Orbital to secure additional morning services on route 34, and extra evening services in the period up to Christmas;
  o In respect of the Cannock to Stafford (and vice-versa) corridor, services were not coping with the volume of college and university students using the route during term-time, so 4 double-decker buses had been secured from the Tamworth depot, which had resulted in a much improved service being delivered;
  o As reliability had now improved, the focus has been switched to improving punctuality on all routes, which was a problem across the entire Midlands area, but the Western area in particular.

Cllr. Holder raised concern about the lack of communication to passengers regarding the withdrawal of route 32 and the introduction of route 34, specifically raising that there was a 6-8 weeks gap between these changes, and that no explanation had been given as to why it happened.

Dan Flanagan replied he accepted that communications regarding this had been poor, but unfortunately due to low patronage and the resources available, continued support for the 32 route was not feasible. Going forward, it was intended that network reviews would be undertaken across the year and regular meetings be held with the Council to help improve the services offered.

Cllr. Holder queried what the Council could do to help deliver information to passengers when route/service changes were likely to take place.

Dan Flanagan replied that in respect of route 34, it had been showing week-on-week growth in passenger numbers, but there was a need to ensure this route was viable for the long-term.

Cllr. Gamble requested that proper services be operated along Church Hill and Littleworth Road in Hednesford, as a lack of evening services meant that people using Hednesford rail station to access areas such as Prospect Village had to walk the entire way.

Cllr. Alcott then raised the following points:
  • Pleased to see that the Cannock depot had been redeveloped and new routes/buses introduced by Arriva as promised two years ago;
  • Between 2001-2014 there had been a vast reduction in the number of
services and routes operated, which had caused many difficulties for residents (reductions which the Council were not consulted on);

- A request had been put forward by letter from the Newlife Foundation to seek an improvement in public transport provision in and around Hemlock Way to help support the recruitment and retention of employees and volunteers based in that area;

- Concerned about the reduction in frequency of services which presently link to Cannock hospital. Location of nearby bus stops should also be reviewed in order to provide easier access for patients.

The LEP Consultant commented that the involvement of the Newlife Foundation and Sainsbury’s showed that organisations were willing to participate in the Strategic Review, so it may well be worthwhile seeing if the process could be accelerated. Arriva replied that they too were keen to do a ‘back to basics’ review of the Cannock Chase network.

Clive Thomson replied that the review was important and commercial operators needed to be encouraged to take risks on changing resources etc.

On the CCITS priority of improving public transport services to employment hubs, Clive Thompson commented that public transport options to the i54 site were being explored for implementation from April 2015.

The Planning & Economic Development Services Manager commented that Amazon had also demonstrated a need for bus service provision to be in place in order to support employment opportunities.

Dan Flanagan replied that the current Amazon contract was due to end on 27 December, but negotiations were underway to seek an extension into at least the new year. Furthermore, there were a number of duplicate services in operation for the Amazon contract, with Arriva sub-contracting a number of services to National Express.

The Planning & Economic Development Services Manager queried if there was enough capacity on the services to enable Cannock residents to use them and whether scheduled stops were in place.

Dan Flanagan replied that there was enough capacity and scheduled stops were in place, details of which could be circulated to Members.

The LEP Consultant requested that Arriva’s response to the Newlife letter should also be circulated.

RESOLVED:

That:

(A) The District and County Council should continue to press jointly for the delivery of the Chaseline line-speed upgrade at the earliest date; and work collaboratively to secure improvements to the District’s stations on the Chaseline service alongside the electrification investment.
(B) The District Council seek the support of the County Council for scheme and bid development of the priority transport projects within the CCITS.

(C) The District Council seek a commitment from both the County Council and Arriva for an early review of bus services in the District and that this review takes account of the growing willingness of employers to engage with public transport operators.

(D) Arriva provide the Planning & Economic Development Services Manager with the information referred to in the discussion for circulation to Members, and that he should also be provided with their comments on the issues raised by Newlife to facilitate a comprehensive response to the company.


The LEP Consultant advised that performance was generally positive for quarter 1, and although the delivery of an increase in commercial floorspace had not been achieved, it was expected that it would be by the end of March 2015.

The Planning & Economic Development Services Manager advised construction of commercial floorspace had declined during the recession, but had since recovered, and this was reflected in the data for quarter 2.

In respect of the performance measure for youth unemployment, this had been reviewed, and the revised data was detailed in the quarter 2 report.

21. Work Programme

Consideration was given to the work programme for the Committee for 2014-15 (Item 6.1 of the Official Minutes of the Council).

Cllr. Kraujalis welcomed the suggestion to seek more information on the Employment Support Allowance, but requested that a breakdown of the figures into their three component parts also be provided if possible.

The Planning & Economic Development Services Manager replied that he would liaise with the Job Centre to see what data could be made available. He then suggested that as the current agenda for the March 2015 meeting was light, he had already approached a representative of Talent Match and asked them to provide an update on delivery of the project, which they were happy to do.

The LEP Consultant recommended that Councillor Alcott picks up the various transport issues raised through the Leader’s Meeting held with the County Council.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee’s updated work programme for 2014-15 be noted.

The meeting closed at 5.40 pm.

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CHAIRMAN