

CANNOCK CHASE COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING POLICY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
HELD ON WEDNESDAY 05 FEBRUARY 2014 AT 4.00 P.M.
IN THE CIVIC CENTRE, BEECROFT ROAD, CANNOCK

PART 1

PRESENT: Councillors

Todd, R. (Chairman)
Gamble, B. (Vice-Chairman)

Anslow, C. Dixon, D.I.
Alcott, G. Sutherland, M.
Davies, D.N.

19. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Mrs. Z.P. Stretton.

20. 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.

21. Minutes

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 10 October 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed.

Minute No.10 – 18-24 Youth Unemployment Update

The Head of Planning and Regeneration advised that J. Whybrow from South Staffordshire College would be attending the March 2014 meeting of the Committee to provide an update on the latest skills data for the District.

Minute No.13 – Work Programme Review

Councillor Alcott reported that progress had been made with the Amazon site in Rugeley. Since the last meeting he had toured the Rugeley site along with the Leader of the Council, accompanied by the Depot Manager and the Head of Public Relations for Amazon UK. He reported that 330 temporary staff at the site had now been made permanent, and it was expected that this figure would increase over the coming months.

22. The Cannock Chase Integrated Transport Strategy

Consideration was given to the proposed Integrated Transport Strategy (ITS) for Cannock Chase presented by N. Dawson and D. Davidson, Staffordshire County Council Highways Department (Item 4.1 – 4.14 of the Official Minutes of the Council).

The Head of Planning and Regeneration advised that the ITS for the District had been jointly developed by officers from the County and District Councils, so the purpose of presenting it to the Committee was to seek Members views about whether the right transport priorities had been identified for the District.

The County officers apologised that Councillor Winnington had not yet arrived, this was due to being delayed at another meeting.

N. Dawson then delivered a presentation to Members on the ITS, covering the following main points:

- What was the ITS and how was it compiled;
- What has changed for the 2013-2028 version of the ITS;
- Cannock Chase DC Connectivity and Transport Investment Priorities;
- Countywide Transport Review.

Councillor Sutherland queried if work had commenced on the A460 Eastern Way dual link, and what the planned works were for Churchbridge junction from May to October 2014?

N. Dawson replied that statutory orders had been produced and ground surveys undertaken, with ground works scheduled to commence by June 2014. Funding for the current part of the scheme was short by approximately £240,000, and £2,000,000 was still required in order to complete the entire scheme.

In respect of Churchbridge junction, a £2,100,000 scheme was in place to increase road capacity and install traffic lights, and could also include widening the island.

Councillor Alcott commented he was surprised about the £2,000,000 required for the A460 scheme as it had not previously been stated elsewhere, but it was important for the project to go ahead to support the district's economic growth in the future. In respect of works to the A5, various authorities had put forward proposals to make the road a dual carriageway, so it was important for this to happen in order to facilitate future economic growth.

Councillor Gamble commented that he welcomed the proposals for Churchbridge improvements. but was concerned to that more work may be required in the future to create further capacity.

N. Dawson replied that the plan was to complete the Churchbridge improvements next year. In relation to the A460 works there was no sign yet when they would be complete, as if the additional £2,000,000 was found, it would not be available until 2015 at the earliest.

Councillor Anslow queried if there were any plans to improve the safety of the A460 whilst the works were being undertaken?

N. Dawson replied he was unaware if the road was unsafe as he had not been notified of any problems or issues.

Councillor Alcott raised that in respect of the A5 corridor, there would be a need in future to provide public transport to developments built along the route, so the County Council and bus operators will need to bear in mind that subsidy funding may be required.

N. Dawson replied that route based strategies were in the process of being developed, so could include the A5 corridor if necessary.

Councillor Davies queried if funding had been received or requested from either the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP) or the Stoke and Staffordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (SSLEP) in order to help progress the various schemes?

N. Dawson replied that the process of seeking funding had commenced, and although the various schemes could sit under both LEPs, funding would most likely be received from the SSLEP rather than the GBSLEP.

The Head of Planning and Regeneration noted that although discussion had centred around road/highways improvements, it was important for challenges in respect of rail infrastructure to be included in the ITS. Furthermore, from the discussion held, Members wanted to see the A5 works included in the ITS and the completion of the A460 Eastern Way project.

RESOLVED:

That:

- (A) The proposed Cannock Chase District Integrated Transport Strategy 2013-2028 be noted.
- (B) The following should be noted/included as part of the Strategy:
 - Challenges in respect of rail infrastructure;
 - Improvement works to the A5;
 - Completion of the A460 Eastern Way project.

23. Update on Local Bus Services

G. Frost and K. Myatt from Arriva Midlands were in attendance for this item.

G. Frost provided Members with the following service updates:

- From 10 February 2014 seven new buses were being launched on the Pye Green route following £850,000 of investment, with half-hourly Sunday services being operated from March 2014;
- Seven 'Sapphire' brand buses were going to be launched in September

2014 on the Cannock to Walsall route, also following £850,000 of investment;

- As a result of these fourteen new buses being introduced, the age of the fleet would reduce from approximately ten years old, to only six and a half years old, with 40% of Cannock services being provided by buses less than three years old;
- A countywide review of services was being undertaken, which could impact upon services in Cannock;
- The 31, 32 and 33 services between Cannock, Hednesford, Rugeley and Norton Canes were not viable services at present, mainly due to punctuality issues, an issue that Arriva would need to address;
- On a national scale, Arriva had recently launched a new mobile phone application which was being further developed to include real time bus information, along with discussions taking place about the possible introduction of a discounted youth ticket to tackle youth unemployment.

The Chairman raised concern over the poor service between Cannock and Burntwood/Walsall.

G. Frost replied that this route had previously been run by Midland Bus and then bought out by Arriva, but it was currently being operated by a different company.

Councillor Dixon commented that the new mobile phone application had been working well, but was pleased to hear about the additional improvements to it.

Councillor Alcott welcomed the provision of new buses for the area, expecting they would stay based in Cannock and not be moved to depots elsewhere in the Country. However, concern was raised that funding subsidies had been cut for services in outlying areas of the District, causing the frequency of such services to be reduced or withdrawn after certain times of day.

G. Frost raised that in Arriva's 2013 annual customer survey, customer satisfaction with bus services operating out of the Cannock depot were the highest for the Midlands, being 13% above average.

D. Davidson, advised that the County Council spent £31,000,000 annually on transport provision across the County, which included:

- £3,800,000 on bus services – this amount was constant over a five year period;
- £6,500,000 on home to school transport;
- £8,100,000 on Special Educational Needs (SEN) transport;
- £8,000,000 to compensate for the concessionary bus fares scheme.

The £3,800,000 helped to fund commercial routes operated, with period reviews undertaken of all routes to ensure that value for money was being achieved. The County Council were working more closely with commercial operators to increase passenger numbers on all routes and ensure the network was more sustainable. Schools in the area were also being worked with to encourage pupils to take the bus to and from school where feasible, and support travel options for SEN pupils.

Councillor Alcott commented that the concessionary fares scheme was funded by the borough/district councils, not the County Council.

D. Davidson replied that the boroughs/districts did not directly fund the scheme, as central government top-sliced some of the money raised, meaning the County Council did not actually receive the full amount of funds.

The Chairman and Councillor Gamble raised concerns about a number of individual routes in the area, particularly in respect of Hednesford and Norton Canes, citing issues of reliability and punctuality of the buses operated.

Councillor Anslow commented he was pleased about the new buses which had been provided, but was disappointed to note they would only be operating on one route in the area. A query was then raised as to who was responsible for ensuring bus stops were visible to drivers as complaints had been received about drivers not stopping when asked to by passengers and the general poor behaviour and attitude some drivers had been displaying.

G. Frost responded he was disappointed to hear about drivers not stopping. As Cannock was only a small depot all drivers should know where every bus stop was. The bus stop flags were the responsibility of Arriva; the highways and verges were the responsibility of the County Council. In instances where flags were obscured by bushes or trees etc from a private property, the owners could be contacted as necessary.

The Planning & Economic Development Services Manager requested an update about the operation of the Amazon and Tesco services.

K. Myatt replied that the Amazon services were not currently running, but were likely to be re-instated from September 2014. The Tesco contract was due to be reviewed on 28 February 2014, with the aim of it being retained.

Councillor Sutherland queried if the provision of new housing developments had an impact on service provision, as there were no direct buses between Hednesford and Norton Canes despite new houses being built in the area.

G. Frost replied that it would depend on where development had occurred, such as for the Tesco Rugeley service. Additionally, creating new transport links/routes was a challenge unless they could be supported by S106 funds. Furthermore, network reviews used to be undertaken across the region; however no such review ever happened in Cannock. Routes such as those from Norton Canes to Walsall tended to follow historic routes, so they could be looked at to see if the route was still appropriate.

The Head of Planning and Regeneration identified that Members had raised the following issues as part of the discussion:

- Undertaking of network reviews;
- Reliability, punctuality and frequency of some bus services;
- Provision of bus services for current/future employment hubs.

The Head of Planning and Regeneration then queried if strategic transport

reviews were still being undertaken by the County Council in each borough/district?

D. Davidson replied that the reviews were being undertaken and would be happy to feed in the views and comments of the Committee, as the reviews helped to identify where future funding should be targeted.

Councillor Alcott queried if copies of the strategic reviews could be provided to Members for comment?

D. Davidson replied that discussion would need to take place with bus operators as to what could be provided, as commercial sensitivities needed to be accounted for.

Councillor Gamble also requested that a lack of provision of public transport through large housing estates be considered as part of the review.

Members then thanked the representatives from the County Council and Arriva Midlands for their attendance and the updates provided.

Members then raised disappointment that Councillor Winnington from the County Council had not been in attendance as expected, and requested that the Chairman of the Committee write to Councillor Winnington to this effect, and request his attendance as soon as possible to follow up on issues raised as the officers were not fully able to answer Members' queries.

RESOLVED:

That:

- (A) The update from Arriva Midlands be noted.
- (B) The following comments be considered as part of the County Council's strategic review:
 - A network review should be undertaken in the area;
 - Reliability, punctuality and frequency of bus services;
 - Provision of bus services for current/future employment hubs;
 - Provision of public transport through large housing estates.
- (C) The Chairman of the Committee write to County Councillor M. Winnington, to express the Committee's disappointment at his lack of attendance at the meeting, and request he attend a future meeting to provide an update on issues raised.

24. 18-24 Youth Unemployment Update

Consideration was given to the latest data relating to Youth Unemployment in the District (Item 6.1 – 6.2 of the Official Minutes of the Council).

The Planning & Economic Development Services Manager reported that in December 2013 Cannock had seen a 0.1% increase in overall and youth

unemployment compared to November, however it was important to recognise the long term decrease, which had resulted in Cannock having the second highest fall in the West Midlands Region between November 2010 to November 2013, of 46.4%.

The Chairman queried if any figures were available for the number of people who were self-employed?

The Planning & Economic Development Services Manager replied that he would investigate if such data could be obtained, but it was certainly a possibility that part of the decrease in unemployment could be as a result of more people becoming self employed.

Councillor Alcott welcomed the figures presented, giving credit to all involved whilst noting that Members had asked Officers to be focussed on this issue.

Councillor Anslow commented that self-employment rates were worth looking into, as such people may be potential employers looking to expand their business.

Councillor Alcott commented that the Council's Economic Development team were working hard to encourage local businesses to apply for start up/support grants to help them develop and expand, thus creating jobs and growing the local economy.

Councillor Sutherland commented he was extremely pleased to see that youth unemployment had fallen by more than half from January 2012 to December 2013, down from 10.2% to 5%.

RESOLVED:

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

25. Performance Report

Consideration was given to the Quarter 2 2013-14 Economic Development and Planning Priority Delivery Plan (PDP) Performance Report (Item 7.1 – 7.3 of the Official Minutes of the Council).

The Head of Planning & Regeneration advised that as the performance measure in respect of youth unemployment had been surpassed, a revised measure would be developed.

RESOLVED:

That the Quarter 2 2013-14 Economic Development and Planning PDP Performance Report be noted.

26. Work Programme Review

Consideration was given to the Committee's 2013-14 work programme (Item 8.1 of the Official Minutes of the Council).

The Planning & Economic Development Services Manager advised that K. Parson from Support Staffordshire – Cannock Chase (formerly Chase CVS) would be in attendance at the March 2014 meeting of the Committee, together with James Whybrow from South Staffordshire College.

RESOLVED:

That the 2013-14 work programme be noted.

The meeting closed at 5:45pm

CHAIRMAN