

# ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE EMERGENCY AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

Monday, 29 January 2024

Present: Councillor EA Grey (Chair)

Councillors	S Foulkes	M Booth
	A Ainsworth	G Davies
	P Jobson	N Graham
	V Wilson	A Brame
	G Jenkinson (In Place of Cllr J Walsh)	M Sullivan

## 61 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The Chair welcomed attendees and viewers to the meeting and reminded everyone that the meeting was webcast and retained on the Council's website for two years.

## 62 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Jason Walsh. Councillor Gail Jenkinson was in attendance as substitute.

## 63 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were asked to declare any disclosable pecuniary interests and any other relevant interest and to state the nature of the interest. There were no declarations of interests.

## 64 MINUTES

**Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 5 December 2023 be approved as an accurate record.**

## 65 PUBLIC AND MEMBER QUESTIONS

### 65.1 Public Questions

The Chair reported that 5 public questions had been received in advance of the meeting.

Paul Carr asked a question regarding the environmental benefits of plant-based diets in comparison to the impacts of meat and dairy production. Mr Carr asked if Wirral Council could follow several UK Councils in endorsing the

Plant Based treaty which called for a global treaty to address food emissions alongside local implementation of plant-based initiatives in catering, training and public awareness campaigns.

In response, the Chair stated that they personally would like to see the Council endorse the plant-based treaty. The Chair also reported that Wirral Council, as a partner of Cool Wirral, were engaging the public on various issues to reduce carbon emissions, including advice on how to reduce the carbon footprint of food. It was noted that engagement events in food growing and composting were being advertised for residents. In addition, it was reported that the Council produced sustainable event guidance to encourage plant-based options for partners using Council facilities and that the Climate Emergency team would explore further what the Plant Based Treaty entailed.

Charlotte Smith asked a question regarding comments made by the Chair when asking a public question at Policy & Resources Committee in December 2023, whereby the Chair described land at Arrowe Park Road as a valued amenity space. Ms Smith asked if the Chair agreed that the residents of Hoylake considered Hoylake beach a much loved amenity space and if she would support the restoration of an amenity beach between King's Gap and New Lifeboat Station. Ms Smith highlighted public health and safety risks, operational safety concerns of the local RNLI and concerns over breaching the Equality Act 2010.

In response, the Chair agreed that Hoylake beach was a much loved community space and that the Council's extensive consultation highlighted that residents understood amenity value in different ways with a number of different views on future beach management options. The Chair stated that the Council had not breached the Equality Act or put the operational safety of the RNLI at risk.

Charlotte Smith asked a supplementary question relating to health and safety concerns on the beach and whether a risk assessment had been considered in relation to the condition of the beach.

In response the Chair affirmed that a risk assessment was undertaken when the decision was made to stop raking the beach and that risk assessments would be undertaken for any future beach management options.

Wendy Bennett asked, since the decision to stop clearing Hoylake beach in 2019, how much the Council had spent on all matters relevant to the beach, including sand removal, legal and professional advice, public consultation and administration costs including the costs of any dedicated teams working on the future management options for the beach.

In response, the Chair indicated that an answer to that question would require some time to collate the relevant information and that a written response would be provided.

The Head of Legal Services read out a question on behalf of Frank McArdle which related to previous mass gatherings on Hoylake beach and asked that the rules and regulations for mass gatherings on the beach to adhere to Council and Natural England requirements could be clarified.

In response, the Chair set out the requirements for members of the public and organisations wishing to organise events on Council land. It was reported that event organisers are asked to submit a 'notification of event form' through the Council's website and provide a written plan for the event, evidence of public liability insurance and a risk assessment. In relation to events on Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI's) on Council land, it was noted that organisers were required to apply well in advance as the process of seeking assent, if required, could be costly and time consuming. If the event required a Habitats Risk Assessment (HRA), it was reported that the Council would work with organisers to agree payment for the assessment and likely timescales, and once complete would be shared with Natural England for their assent.

The Head of Legal Services read out a question on behalf of Keith Randles relating to the 2016 Council beach management plan, whereby Natural England recommended a 2-rake operation to remove vegetation from Hoylake beach. Mr Randles asked whether the then cabinet member was aware that a chemical free option was available to the Council to continue with their obligation for maintaining Hoylake beach and if so why it was not adopted.

In response, the Chair clarified that there was not any legal obligation for the Council to maintain the beach in order to remove vegetation and that if the Council was to maintain the beach in such a way it must gain assent from Natural England as the beach falls within North Wirral Foreshore SSSI and would therefore be subject to protections under the Wildlife and Countryside Act. The Chair clarified that the methods put forward to Natural England in 2016 for assent included both raking and spraying, and that both methods were undertaken until 2019. Glyphosate spraying ceased in 2019 whilst raking took place until concerns over driver and public safety led to it being halted later in 2019, whilst assent expired in March 2021. The Chair also clarified that beaches were not in their portfolio as Cabinet Member when they were last raked and sprayed.

## **65.2 Statements and petitions**

No statements or petitions were received.

## **65.3 Questions by Members**

Councillor Gail Jenkinson asked a member question relating to small business day. In light of the Council subsidising parking for last year's small business

day, Cllr Jenkinson asked whether the Council could petition the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority to consider subsidising public transport for small business day in November of this year.

In response, that Chair noted that the waiving of car parking charges for small business day was not a committee decision. Whilst acknowledging that public transport was not in the remit of this committee, the Chair supported the principle that those using public transport should be incentivised to support small businesses and stated that officers had agreed to take this request to the Combined Authority.

## 66 **HIGHWAY INFRASTRUCTURE ASSET MANAGEMENT (HIAM) POLICY AND STRATEGY**

The Assistant Director for Highways & Infrastructure introduced the report of the Director of Neighbourhood Services which recommended that Committee approved the Council's Highway Infrastructure Asset Management (HIAM) Policy and Strategy for 2023-27. It was reported that the HIAM Strategy and Policy, originally approved by Committee in December 2020, had been refreshed to align with the priorities of the new Council Plan 2023-27 and in consideration of devolved grant funding through the Liverpool City Region Transport Settlement. It was noted that the Policy and Strategy were high-level, overarching, documents that would form part of a highway asset management framework, and a HIAM Plan with specific operational policies and implementation plans would be presented to a future meeting of the committee, alongside a refreshed performance management framework.

Members discussed procedures relating to highway inspections, including the process for road inspections and the timescales for resolving issues. The Assistant Director reported that recorded ward inspections were undertaken on a cyclical basis, alongside additional inspections arising from the reporting of issues by members and public and councillors, whereby qualified inspectors would undertake dynamic risk assessments when inspecting defects to resolve what action was required with a related prioritisation score.

Members also noted issues relating to deterioration of roads in the network, including increased traffic on minor roads and the impact of different approaches to fixing defects, alongside balancing climate challenges with effective highways management. In response to queries, The Assistant Director indicated that the network was in good condition overall considering funding challenges, and the Council adopted a policy of maximising the lifespan of roads with minimum intervention whereby various surface treatments would be utilised rather than full reconstruction where possible.

**Resolved – That**

- 1. The Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Policy 2023-27 be approved;**
- 2. The Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Strategy 2023-27 be approved; and**
- 3. The Director of Neighbourhoods Services be authorised to make any non-substantive changes revisions or amendments to the documents as are necessary to align with the council's corporate objectives or with legislative changes.**

## 67 ACTIVE TRAVEL STRATEGY

The Assistant Director – Chief Regeneration Officer presented the report of the Director of Regeneration and Place which detailed the draft 'Places for People' Strategy alongside work undertaken to develop detailed network plans for a proposed Active Travel Infrastructure Plan (ATIP). It was reported that the strategy was a critical step in securing future investment for delivery plans from Government through the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, and the strategy formed part of the Council's wider transport strategies to achieve the goals of the Local Transport Plan and provide a framework for management of active travel in the context of place-making. Alongside approval of the draft strategy, Committee were recommended to authorise the Director of Regeneration of Place to undertake public and stakeholder engagement to support the development of an ATIP, the outcomes of which were anticipated to be presented to Committee in September 2024.

Members discussed the impact of the strategy on different network users, including the elderly, pedestrians and car users, particularly in light of the hierarchy of users within the revised highway code. The Assistant Director reported that the strategy considered the benefits of walking and cycling alongside consideration of car users by creating spaces for all users to access the network.

In addition, Members discussed existing Active Travel infrastructure in the borough. In response to queries relating to the Fender Lane cycle lane, the Strategic Transport Project Manager confirmed reviews were being undertaken for the Fender Lane and New Chester Road Schemes which included the use of traffic count sensors.

Members also highlighted concerns relating to the national rollout of active travel initiatives and the importance of inclusion of active travel design in securing funding for wider projects. Members also noted the importance of referencing co-design of the network within the strategy, alongside economic and health benefits associated with active travel.

On a motion proposed by Councillor Grey, seconded by Councillor Foulkes, it was:

**Resolved (8:3) – That**

- 1. The Places for People strategy be approved; and**
- 2. The Director of Regeneration and Place be authorised to undertake public and stakeholder consultation to support the development of an Active Travel Infrastructure Plan.**

68 **ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE EMERGENCY AND TRANSPORT PERFORMANCE REPORT**

The Director of Neighbourhood Services presented the report which provided a performance update in relation to Environment and Climate Emergency, and Highways and Infrastructure. It was noted that a forthcoming Performance Management Framework workshop had been scheduled with Committee Members to undertake a review on how best to report performance data in future meetings. It was reported that some of the data within the dashboards was incomplete and would be addressed in the forthcoming review.

Members noted the number of requests relating to missed bin collections. The Assistant Director for Climate Emergency and Environment detailed that whilst missed collection service enquiries was a big demand issue for the Council, the performance on all coloured bins remained very consistent with numbers of missed collection per week extremely small overall. The impact of recent service disruption due to unsafe weather conditions and industrial action undertaken in December 2022 on legacy figures was noted.

Members also raised concerns in relation to recycling rates and enforcement of flytipping. It was noted whilst changes in legislation would require systematic changes to how recycling was undertaken, alongside coinciding with the new waste collection contract in 2027, it was important that work was undertaken to promote recycling under existing arrangements including increasing awareness regarding what can be recycled. In addition, it was detailed that a revised enforcement policy would be presented to a future Committee meeting which would have implications for enforcement of flytipping.

In response to queries associated with spend on street lighting columns replacement and upgrades, it was clarified significant funding in the region of £10 million had been spent in recent years on the replacement of lanterns with LEDs and replacement of columns. A residue from that funding remained which was being used to replace columns which were not undertaken in the previous work.

**Resolved – That the Performance report be noted.**

69 **2024-25 BUDGET REPORT UPDATE**

The Director of Neighbourhood Services presented the report of the Director of Finance which provided an update on the budgets within the remit of the Committee in respect of forthcoming pressures and proposed savings considered within the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFS). Budget pressures relating to the Committee were outlined, which primarily related to inflationary increases in the Refuse & Street Cleansing contract, the Waste Levy and Transport Levy. It was reported that there were no specific budget savings within the remit of the Committee within the MTFS as savings had been identified for the Neighbourhoods Directorate within the remit of the Tourism, Communities, Culture & Leisure Committee.

**Resolved – That**

- 1. The indicative pressures and proposed savings detailed in Appendix 1 and 2 be noted; and**
- 2. The budget workshop feedback and outcomes, as detailed in appendix 3, be agreed.**

70 **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Head of Legal Services presented the report of the Director of Law and Governance which advised Members that the Committee in co-operation with the other Policy and Service Committees, was responsible for proposing and delivering an annual committee work programme. It was noted that the work programme should align with the corporate priorities of the Council, in particular the delivery of the key decisions which were within the remit of the Committee.

Members requested that the issue of gully cleansing be added to the work programme as an issue for consideration. In addition, Members raised the issue of addressing pavement parking which was listed on the work programme. Officers clarified the next iteration of the devolution deal for the Combined Authority would clarify powers available for tackling the issue of pavement parking.

Members asked questions relating to timescales of existing items on the work programme, whilst the Chair detailed that it was approaching 5 years since the Council declared a Climate Emergency, and invited Members and Officers to consider how Committee could reaffirm its commitment to this declaration and mark progress made so far.

**Resolved – That the work programme be noted.**

**71 EXEMPT INFORMATION - EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

**Resolved - That under section 100 (A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined by paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A (as amended) to that Act. The Public Interest test has been applied and favours exclusion.**

**72 2024-25 BUDGET REPORT UPDATE - EXEMPT APPENDIX**

**Resolved – That the exempt appendix be noted.**