

ENVIRONMENTAL & PUBLIC PROTECTION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

21 February 2020

PRESENT: Councillor J.D. James (Chair)

Councillors:

J.M. Charles, T.A.J. Davies, J.A. Davies, K. Davies, P.M. Edwards, S.J.G. Gilasbey,
T.M. Higgins, B.D.J. Phillips, A.D.T. Speake and A. Vaughan Owen.

Councillor W.T. Evans - Substitute for Councillor J.S. Phillips;
Councillor K.V. Broom – Substitute for Councillor D. Thomas;

Also in attendance:

Councillor H.A.L. Evans, Executive Board Member for Environment;
Councillor P.M. Hughes, Executive Board Member for Public Protection.

The following Officers were in attendance:

R. S. Waters, Highways and Transportation Manager;
S. Charles, Transport Strategy and Infrastructure Manager;
J. Owen, Democratic Services Officer.

Chamber, County Hall, Carmarthen, SA31 1JP - 10.00 - 11.20 am

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors E. Morgan, J.S. Phillips and D. Thomas.

2. DECLARATIONS OF PERSONAL INTEREST INCLUDING ANY PARTY WHIPS ISSUED IN RELATION TO ANY AGENDA ITEM.

There were no declarations of interest.

3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS (NONE RECEIVED)

The Chair advised that no public questions had been received.

4. EXPLANATION FOR NON-SUBMISSION OF SCRUTINY REPORT

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

5. HIGHWAY FOOTWAY AND ROAD SAFETY INVESTMENT PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Committee considered a Highway Footway and Road Safety Investment Programme Update report which provided Members with an update on the current investment programme in relation to road safety and associated infrastructure.

The report apprised members with information on the following aspects:-

- Local Transport Plan / Local Transport Fund
- Active Travel Act and Local Authority Obligations
- Safe Routes in communities
- Road Safety Improvement and Footway Improvement Programme
- Road Safety Grant (Capital and Revenue)
- Traffic Management and Accident Prevention Programme

Set out within the report was a summary of funding for road safety related and other infrastructure schemes for 2019/20 and the prioritised programme for road safety, footway and other infrastructure.

The following questions/issues were raised on the report:-

- In response to a request, the Transport Strategy and Infrastructure Manager provided a verbal update on the progress of the Towy Valley Path. Members were informed that:
 - negotiations with landowners were still ongoing,
 - planning has been approved for West section,
 - planning has been applied for the Eastern section – delayed due to conditions in place with NRW,
 - construction has started on the Western section of the path by White Mill,
 - further bids have been placed for the western section.
- In connection with the recent storms which have caused the water levels to significantly rise, it was asked, if an analysis had been made of the extent of the flooding on the path? The Transport Strategy and Infrastructure Manager stated that a detailed flood modelling had been completed for the whole route of the path. It was acknowledged that by the very nature of the path running alongside the Towy river it was accepted that flooding would occur. Flooding measures were in place by means of gates and operational procedures.
- With regard to road safety improvements, a concern was raised in relation to the necessity of a reduction in the speed limit outside Nantgaredig School to 20mph which had been requested on several occasions. The Transport Strategy and Infrastructure Manager stated that whilst he personally did not manage the requests for speed limit reductions, he explained that there were a number of factors that influenced the introduction of a speed limit change. Requests would be considered by the Speed Limit Working Group seeking community support for the change and for the speed limit to be self-enforcing where possible.

The Transport Strategy and Infrastructure Manager stated that he would liaise with the Local Councillor outside of the meeting on the matter.

- At the Committees request, the Executive Board member for Environment and the Chair of Environmental and Public Protection Scrutiny Committee had written a letter to the Minister of Transport raising concerns regarding the inadequate funding available to develop walking and cycling infrastructure [minute 8.2, 5th July 2019 refers]. The Chair announced that a response from Lee Waters, Minister of Transport had been received and provided a verbal summary of the letter to the Committee. The Chair stated that the letter would be shared with Committee members.
- Reference was made to Safe Routes in Communities. It was asked, if it was feasible for wards to join together in order to be more integrated? The Transport Strategy and Infrastructure Manager stated that joint working was good practice and actively encouraged. In addition, it was encouraging to note that the letter received from the Minister of Transport urged that Local Authorities revise their Integrated Network Maps for active travel over the next year with practical support being provided to enable them to ensure that they reflect the needs of local communities.
- The Committee in acknowledging the Public Service Vehicle Access Regulations which came into force in January 2020, requiring all school transport vehicles which are registered to carry fare paying passengers to be DDA/PSVAR compliant raised a number of concerns. Concerns raised were in relation to the appropriateness of the current means of safe routes to school and the current statutory walking distance. The Committee whilst acknowledging the limited funding available, believed that in light of the legislation changes, the Authority should prioritise the provision of safe routes.

The Executive Board Member for Environment explained that as a result of the legislative changes, the Executive Board at its meeting on 3rd February, 2020 had approved the establishment of a cross party Advisory Panel to carry out a general review of the authority's school transport policy (minute 11 Refers). Members were informed that the Panel would undertake a high level review of the current school transport policy, review the changes to the application of Public Service Vehicle Access Regulations to local services and undertake a high level review of the costs school transport provision which would include supply chain challenges arising from the application of the Public Service Vehicle Access Regulations. Following the review, the Advisory Panel would make recommendations to Executive Board.

Notwithstanding the work of the School Transport Review Advisory Panel, it was expressed that that the Welsh Government, on a National Level should review how appropriate its current mechanism is in assessing safe routes and also urgently review the distances that is appropriate for pupils to walk/cycle to school. It was proposed that the Committee write to the Minister of Transport requesting that the Welsh Government undertake the aforementioned reviews and make available any additional funding required. The proposal was duly seconded.

In response to a query raised on whether the Local Authority had discretion to reduce the current statutory walking distance from home to school, the Transport Strategy and Infrastructure Manager emphasised to the Committee that previous consideration of the financial implications suggested that for every mile reduced would result in an annual estimated increase of £10m on the Local Authority's revenue budget.

- In response to a request for an update on the progress of the 'Cardi Bach' cycle route the Transport Strategy and Infrastructure Manager explained that some funds had been committed to undertake a feasibility scheme and design and therefore, subject to funding there was no reason that this would not be forthcoming.
- An observation was made that no investments in road safety related and/or other infrastructure schemes were reflected within the summary for any areas west of Carmarthen. The Highways and Transportation Manager explained that road safety schemes were dedicated to high risk areas.
- The Highways and Transportation Manager responded to parochial queries in relation to Whitland School Park and Carmarthen Bus Station.
- Reference was made to the Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure. In response to a concern raised regarding the negative impact on rural areas due to the lack of available electric charging points, the Transport Strategy and Infrastructure Manager explained that rural areas were included within the electric vehicle charging roll out however exact locations were yet to be determined.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that:

5.1 the Committee write a letter to the Minister of Transport requesting that the Welsh Government:

- a) undertake a review of the current mechanism of assessing safe routes;**
- b) urgently review the distances appropriate for pupils to walk to school;**
- c) give consideration to make any additional funding required available following the outcome of the abovementioned reviews.**

5.2 the Highway Footway and Road Safety Investment Programme Update report be received.

6. TASK AND FINISH MONITORING REPORT

The Committee considered a report detailing progress in relation to the recommendations identified from the findings of the Task and Finish group's review on the maintenance provision of highway hedges and verge rows. The group's report along with their recommendations were adopted by Executive Board on the 4th March 2019.

The report provided the Committee with a brief background along with:

- the scope and objectives of the Task and Finish Group's work;
- it's methodology;
- the Group's recommendations;
- detailed progress report on the actions allied to the Task and Finish Group recommendations.

The Committee noted the progress on each of the recommendations as set out in the report

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

7. ENVIRONMENTAL AND PUBLIC PROTECTION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ACTIONS UPDATE

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report detailing progress in relation to actions, requests or referrals emerging from previous scrutiny meetings, be noted.

8. REFERRAL FROM POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - JOINT TRANSPORT PLAN FOR SOUTH WEST WALES

The Committee was advised that the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee, at its meeting on 27th January 2020, had following consideration of the Environment Departmental Business Plan 2020-23 relating to the Property Division relevant to the Committee's remit, resolved "the Environmental and Public Protection Scrutiny Committee be requested to consider means of securing improvements to the Joint Transport Plan for South West Wales with a view to maximising opportunities to improve public transport within Carmarthenshire."

It was reported that during consideration of the Business Plan, reference was made to the problems faced in recruiting staff and it was considered that the lack of suitable public transport was probably also a contributory factor.

In order that the Committee could undertake the request, a report providing information on the Joint Transport Plan for South West Wales was requested to be included on the Committee's Forward Work Programme for 2020/2021.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that an information report on the Joint Transport Plan for South West Wales be included on the Environmental and Protection Scrutiny Committee's Forward Work Programme 2020/2021.

9. FORTHCOMING ITEMS

The Committee considered the list of forthcoming items for the meeting scheduled to take place on 21st April, 2020 and was afforded the opportunity to request for information to be placed in to the reports.

The Chair emphasised that due to the number of items on the agenda, the meeting would likely continue into the afternoon.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the list of forthcoming items be received.

10. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE HELD ON THE 13TH JANUARY 2020

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Environment and Public Protection Scrutiny Committee held on the 13th January, 2020 be signed as a correct record.

CHAIR

DATE