

SCRUTINY BOARD (INFRASTRUCTURE, INVESTMENT & INCLUSIVE GROWTH)

WEDNESDAY, 23RD SEPTEMBER, 2020

PRESENT: Councillor P Truswell in the Chair

Councillors N Buckley, L Cunningham,
N Dawson, K Dye, R Grahame,
K Maqsood, K Renshaw, M Shahzad,
J Taylor and P Wadsworth

22 APPEALS AGAINST REFUSAL OF INSPECTION OF DOCUMENTS

There were no appeals against refusal of inspection of documents.

23 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

There were no exempt items.

24 Late Items

There were no late items.

25 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests.

26 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

Apologies were received from Cllr J Goddard, Cllr K Renshaw attended the meeting as his substitute.

27 Minutes - 16 July 2020

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 16th July 2020, be approved as a correct record.

28 Matters arising

Minute 17 – Update from the Director of City Development.

In relation to points raised by Board Members, Members were advised of the following:

- Minute 17 – Update from the Director of City Development.
- In relation to points raised by Board Members, Members were advised of the following:
- The availability of Discretionary Grants closed at the end of August, with a deadline for payments to be granted by 30 September;
- Information in relation to responsibilities for flood alleviation would be provided to Board Members. Advice would be sought from DEFRA regarding the responsibilities of the West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service in relation to flood alleviation;
- It was noted that Flood Risk management is due to be discussed at the Board's November meeting;
- First Bus are reporting that they are trying to return to a full timetable. However, due to social distancing buses are running at only 50% capacity. Significant preparations were put in place for the schools and FE colleges returning, however, there is still a finite number of drivers and fleet due to shortages brought about by Covid-19. Member concern regarding school children and students trying to get to classes on time was noted and would be raised with WYCA;
- Discussions will take place with Licensing Colleagues in relation to taxi drivers with a view to exploring the provision of a number of face coverings for passengers who do not have their own.

29 Director's Update: Covid-19 Pandemic Response and Recovery

The Report of the Director of City Development updated the Scrutiny Board on key activity carried out in the City Development Directorate in relation to the response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the implementation of the subsequent recovery plan since the last update to the Scrutiny Board in July 2020.

In attendance at the meeting were:

- Cllr Lisa Mulherin - Executive Board Member for Climate Change, Transport and Sustainable Development
- Martin Farrington – Director of City Development
- Gary Bartlett – Chief Officer, Highways and Transportation
- Sue Wynne – Chief Officer, Employment and Skills
- Eve Roodhouse – Chief Officer, Economic Development

The Board Members were informed of the following points:

- A survey has been undertaken of staff working from home. It was noted that the Council currently has approximately 8000 people working from home. The survey looked at all aspects of staff working from home including wellbeing and consideration of how future working could operate. It was noted that there is a need to rationalise the Council's portfolio of estate and some buildings may be sold. A report was due to be considered by the Executive Board the following day on this matter;

- Footfall within the City Centre is currently at 67.5% which is an improvement on the period during lockdown, although, this is still down on normal footfall;
- Traffic flow is down 15% with rail travel down 70% compared to March prior to lockdown;
- £153,460,000 had been paid out to business of hospitality and leisure through grants up to 11 September, with £5.8m of discretionary grants assisting 600 businesses. It is hoped that the service will be able to process as many applications as possible before the end of the September deadline;
- There has been a 90% increase in claimants for unemployment payments and the Employment and Skills Service continues to support companies going through redundancy processes. The Service has supported 1,382 people into work between April and July 2020;
- 6 trials are currently running for the School Streets Initiative;
- Proposed Active Travel Measures include more segregation of the cycle lane on the A65 and work is proposed for the A660;
- As part of the Emergency Access Travel Fund, Leeds has received £710,000 of monies and £20,000 of revenue as part of the first phase of works. The DFT has outlined a 12 week delivery time for these works;
- Kirkgate Market has remained operational throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Recognising the impact of reduced footfall as a result of COVID-19 a series of fee reductions (ranging from 25% through to 100%, reflecting differing levels of continuing Government restrictions in trade) have been implemented for the 3 month period covering 1 July to 30 September 2020. Hardship claims are being considered on a case by case basis. Footfall in the market was down 40% on the previous year but there had been some recovery through July and August. Footfall will continue to be monitored.
- Planning services have remained operational throughout the pandemic.

In response to questions from Members the Board were informed of the following:

- Rationalisation of properties within the Council's portfolio will be considered through reports to the Executive Board. A number, to be determined by their size and price, will go to auction. There are auctions taking place in October, December and February. All sales would be approved by Executive Board;
- Through the staff survey it had been noted that younger cohorts of staff are more likely to find report difficulty in working from home. This is for a number of reasons, including sharing space within a house of multiple occupation, living with parents, or not able to access the right equipment. 1000 desks have been made available in covid-secure offices for those who wish to return back to the office. It was noted that use of these spaces is not at full capacity. New staff are being welcomed into the organisation with appropriate support and training being provided;

- The process for paying Discretionary Grants is time consuming, with checks having to be made against set criteria and against information held by Companies House. The first phase of the programme between June and July had seen 962 applications with 447 approved. The second phase is due to close at the end of September, the Council's service along with other Local Authorities, had requested a further eight weeks to process all the applications but had only been given a further four weeks. Representation would continue to be made to Civil Servants with a view to securing a further extension of the current deadline;
- The School Streets Initiative has been popular and the service are still receiving requests. Fourteen schools streets are currently in the trial with positive responses reported in all instances. It is hoped that the Scheme can be progressed;
- The Action Travel Fund bid has been delayed. Deadlines are tight but officers hope to receive feedback from WYCA soon. In relation to the Beeston Active Travel the service are still working to establish community contacts, although there have been discussions with local ward members;
- Information on general levels of footfall outside the city centre is not being monitored at present. However, work is underway to understand activity in a number of specific areas such as White Rose. It was noted that the Trinity Centre is currently receiving 70% of its normal footfall with White Rose approaching more normal levels than have been experienced in recent months;
- Apprenticeships at the start of lockdown fell between 50-75% this was due to employers finding it difficult to provide training and other training providers such as colleges and universities being closed. However, quarter three figures showed that in Leeds there were 4,000 starts within the academic year. Quarter 4 figures will be calculated through October and November for the academic year. It was noted that this was approximately 37% less than normal. It was also noted that this was reflective of national trends. There was a concern at the two Further Education Colleges about whether individuals that had been furloughed would return to work or be made redundant. This is currently being monitored. Members were advised that there are still firms coming forward with offers for apprenticeships. Leeds Digital Festival will provide guidance to employers on how to employ an apprentice;
- Council officers are continuing to work with Job Centre Plus and the Rapid Response Team are working with employers due to make redundancies to offer support. Since lockdown 1548 people have been supported into work;
- Staff have completed a bespoke survey on homeworking and have been asked how they would like to work after the pandemic. The survey explored what staff view as working well and what is not working well. Staff have also undertaken a Pulse Survey which focused on wellbeing;
- The HR Helpline has received 300 calls requesting additional support;

- The Elland Road Park Ride has not received the anticipated number of return users and this might need to be reviewed in light of current measures relating to the covid response. Traffic flow throughout the day is near pre-covid rates, however morning peak traffic is still low. Discussion will continue with bus companies to try and ensure more buses are getting where they are needed;
- PPE supplies will be delivered where required;
- In relation to perceived inconsistency in the approach of Plans Panel meetings, highlighted by members, it was agreed this would be raised with the Chief Planning Officer.

It was noted that the Director of City Development had no delegation powers in regard to planning applications. However, the issue raised by Cllr Taylor in relation to Horsforth would be taken back to the Chief Planning Officer.

RESOLVED - To note the report.

30 Leeds Public Transport Investment Programme

The report of the Director of City Development on the LPTIP included spend to date and forecast spend, along with scheme delivery status. It requested Members consideration of the schemes that have dropped out of the LPTIP, are being paused or are being delivered through other funding and delivery mechanisms.

In attendance for this item were:

- Cllr Lisa Mulherin - Executive Board Member for Climate Change, Transport and Sustainable Development
- Martin Farrington - Director, City Development
- Gary Bartlett – Chief Officer, Highways & Transportation
- Andrew Hall – Chief Officer, Transport Planning
- Sabby Khira - Programme Executive, LPTIP
- David O'Donoghue – Principal Transport Planner

Board Members were informed of the following key points:

- Connecting Leeds is working to tight timescales. The DfT had originally set funding to be spent by March 2021. However, in light of current circumstances relating to Covid-19 there is a degree of greater flexibility and as a result a proportion of money can be transferred into the next financial year if schemes are already underway;
- A trial inclusion of motorcycle access to bus lanes on the A65 LPTIP corridor has been agreed in principle;
- Funding has been secured for the extension to the Temple Green Park and Ride;
- Regular meetings are ongoing with DfT regarding schemes, including those for the next financial year, which are well developed and 'shovel ready';

- Contractors are making good progress on the schemes that are going ahead, although bad weather a month ago did impact on the works;
- The team have worked hard to ensure the continuation of the supply chain, which had been impacted by Covid -19;
- Good progress has been made with the city centre changes. Work continued whilst many businesses were closed during lockdown thereby limiting the impact of works on businesses;
- The Lawnswood scheme is no longer part of the LPTIP but there has been progress in developing alternative options and officers are moving towards public engagement. It had been hoped that this could be a blended approach with online engagement and face to face consultation. However, in light of recent changes and the ongoing impact of Covid-19, face to face consultation may not go ahead.

Responding to questions from the Board the following points were discussed;

- Lawnswood is a priority scheme - however, it remains unfunded. Officers are committed to securing funding for a revised scheme and are therefore continuing to prepare the project so it can be quickly progressed once funding has been identified. The scheme is required principally for road safety but also to keep traffic flowing in this busy area;
- Prior to the trial of motorcycles accessing with flow bus lanes there will be communication to stakeholders and signage will be changed to depict motorcycles and buses;
- The Council has a planning application in progress to look at the expansion of flights and timetable for Leeds and Bradford Airport. The Plans Panel will be considering proposals which include a new environmentally friendly terminal building, hours of flying, and also the impact the proposals may have on the Council's Ambitions for the Climate Emergency agenda;
- A subway near the Hope Inn on the A64 has been replaced with a zebra crossing. Officers are aware of ongoing issues on this route as subways have had to close due to Covid-19;
- It was noted that a road safety audit would be needed to address parking issues near Moortown Shopping Parade, which were highlighted in the meeting;
- It is understood that improvements to Morley Train Station will be undertaken as part of the Trans-Pennine upgrade. This is to be confirmed and Members updated;
- The City is to receive 500 new real time bus screens. Members raised concerns about 'phantom buses' which appear on journey tracking screens but do not then arrive. Members were advised that the software system is due for renewal and it is hoped this will reduce inaccurate information being displayed;
- The City is to receive 9 new electric buses, Cllr. Mulherin shared her experience of travelling on one of the new buses. The buses can be charged overnight and can operate for 200 miles.

RESOLVED – To note the content of the report.

31 Work Schedule

The report of the Head of Democratic Services requested Board Members consideration of its work schedule for the remainder of the current municipal year.

Members were informed of a Working Group scheduled for Thursday 1 October, at 1:00pm to consider early budget proposals. Members also requested a working group be scheduled to update them on new Government planning proposals and processes.

RESOLVED – To note the content of the report.

The meeting concluded at 12:30pm

32 Date and Time of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Scrutiny Board Infrastructure, Investment and Inclusive Growth will be on 14th October 2020, at 10:30am. There will be a pre-meet for all Board Members at 10:15am.