

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Budget Scrutiny Task and Finish Group

27 January 2022

Break out Room - Highways and Transport Services - Carbon neutrality and Highways

Councillors

Councillor Ian McCord Lead Councillor for the Breakout Room

Councillors: Andrew Grant, Keith Holland- Delamere, Rupert Frost, David James, Colin Morgan and Ken Pritchard

Officers

Stuart Timmiss – Executive Director - Place and Economy

Tracy Tiff – Deputy Democratic Services Manager

The Breakout Room confirmed that Councillor Ian McCord would be the lead Councillor for this Group and would report back the recommendations of the Breakout Room to the main Task and Finish Group.

The Executive Director, Place and Economy, gave the Breakout Room a comprehensive presentation – Highways and Transport Services

Key points:

- Highways and Transport Services and the main roles undertaken by the Team were highlighted, included enabling sustainable travel including active travel and public transport; planning, procurement, and delivery of home to school transport (mainstream, SEN, and Post 16) and Social Care and Health Transport on behalf of Adult Services and Children's Trust. Home to school transport needs to be more efficient and effective
- Estimated savings required from the Place directorate at the start of the Star Chambers process was approximately £4m
- Infrastructure managed includes: 1528 miles of roads, 846 miles of footpath, 308 miles of bridleway and 23,200 streetlights (ex NCC under private finance initiative (PFI))
- Work undertaken since 1 April 2021 was highlighted for example: emergency incident responses – 2785, sinkholes repaired – 24, bikeability training – 1962 people
- HR information – 112 posts (110FTE); staffing budget including on costs £3,695,000. 13 vacant posts
- Key service projects include: new contract procurement, highways and transport disaggregation and restructure, home to school transport, bus service improvement plan, active travel strategy development, parking team – to all disaggregation, delivery of major highways projects and development of infrastructure projects pipeline
- Key Covid19 pressures – highways maintenance social distancing £160,000 (expenditure), parking enforcement £201,200 (income pressure) and sustained footfall for 2022.2023 and roundabout sponsorship £14,000 (income pressure)

- Highways –The proposed WNC Team will comprise 59 posts (19 of which are new.) The total pressures for 2022/2023 equate to £1,591,000. Costs could be less if the same contractor is awarded both WNC and NNC contracts. Changes to in/out of scope were provided.
- The new Highways Contract will include a Climate Change and Environment Action plan and will be required to be carbon neutral for its scope 1 and 2 emissions and be able to demonstrate progressive and significant reduction in Scope 3 emissions by 2030. The contractor will be required to report on Scope 1,2 and 3 emissions annually.
- The Council’s carbon plan will include buildings, fleet, energy use, energy production, procurement, `Cloud `IT, emissions from land and staff – climate champions and leads
- Summary of highways budget proposals in the draft budget include:

Pressure	Highways – new contract and increased client side	£1,591,000
Pressure	Home to school transport	£150,000
Income	Parking – pressure due to reduced enforce. Income	£201,000
Pressure	Active Travel – Scheme Design and Promotion	£215,000
Saving	Street Lighting	(£280,000)
Pressure	Pipeline Projects	£500,000
Pressure	HS2 Marshall and young drivers training	£65,000

- The presentation included key points around WNC meeting its climate change challenge – financial opportunities and issues.
- Details regarding Assets: contractor occupied buildings were provided as were the procurement for construction and maintenance and that it would include adopting a high standard of environmental construction, areas of investment that would lower carbon emissions; best use of land and green travel and ensuring all developers employ high level of sustainability.

The Breakout Room made comment, asked questions, and heard:

- It was noted that the there would be a new Highways contract that would be split between the North and West Northamptonshire. By 30 June 2022 it is expected that the successful bidder would be identified.
- The Active Travel Strategy was expected to include walking, cycling, scooters, e-scooters and e-lambretas.
- The home to school transport policy is continuing in the same format is it was pre 1 April 2021. Spend is £21million per year across Northamptonshire. Pressure is due to the change in legislation.
- Parking is being monitoring going forward and it is expected that there will be a Car Parking Strategy within the next 12 months. There has been reduced footfall that has meant less pay and display.
- In response to a query regarding the reduction in bus services, the Breakout Room heard that it was expected that within the next five years the numbers of individuals travelling on buses would be at the level it was five years previously. It was emphasised that this needs to focus on all four towns in West Northamptonshire. Concerns were raised that the numbers

of those travelling on bus services would not return to pre pandemic levels for some time. The Bus Strategy would be fully costed to ensure the most effective and efficient service was offered. It was hoped that there would be some Government matched funding that could be used.

- The Breakout Room heard that savings in respect of street lighting were expected using LED bulbs and remote control of the street lighting, which would require less maintenance. There is a 42.5% increase in energy costs could create lower payback period and increase revenue savings. Street lighting savings are revenue savings.
- There would be a reduction in carbon within the Authority and by making investments, costs would be saved and therefore a reduction in carbon. Invest to save would be key and any savings would pay for the revenue payback over the years. The Capital Programme will detail over the next three years the climate programme, for example adapting the refuse lorries to electric. There is a lot of work taking place regarding the climate programme and the reduction in carbon. “False” savings would be avoided by moving buildings to alternative ownership. Maximising the use of buildings such as shared ownership, improved energy efficiencies, on site renewable generation, offsetting remaining emissions and new ways of working. Options are being developed for energy use such as on building solar, use of open land for solar, solar highways, energy generation from waste
- In response to a question regarding £500,000 for road design, Members were advised that £500,000 is a starting point for pipeline projects. The transformation project will review and update S278 and S38 commuted sums for highways, which will include planning charges such as S106 developer costs.

Councillor McCord, Lead Member for the Breakout Room confirmed with Members which were the key areas that he should report back to the Task and Finish Group for inclusion within the Committee’s report in respect of: Highways and Transport Services - Carbon neutrality and Highways:

- The Breakout room conveys its concerns regarding the underinvestment of buses and bus services across West Northamptonshire. The current Policy is to ensure bus services are the same as they were five years ago, in five years’ time. A number of options are currently being investigated to do this.
- More evidence and detail are required regarding the Council’s Policy in respect of Climate Change. There is a need for concrete performance and a need for more budget for climate change, i.e., there needs to be clear investment and plans set out; for example, more detail about the invest to save proposal and how money will be borrowed. The Breakout Room queried whether being carbon neutral by 2030 was a realistic target; especially as it perceived that the cost of borrowing would rise. Currently, £500,000 has been put in the budget for the next three years. The Council has a big ambition to be carbon neutral by 2030 but the Breakout Room queried that there is not a project in place to meet the ambition. It is important to have the pledge but there is not a clear steer of how much carbon the Council is omitting and the savings to be made. It needs to be ensured that the Council can be carbon neutral by 2030.
- The investment in the highways service and the increase of 19 new FTEs was welcomed.
- Important savings made will benefit other services, such as schools and school transport.

