

# **Growth and Infrastructure Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**Wednesday 13 September 2023**

## **PRESENT:**

Councillor Bingley, in the Chair.

Councillor Tuffin, Vice Chair.

Councillors Carlyle, Gilmour, McLay, Noble, Raynsford, Salmon, Sproston, Stevens and Stoneman.

Apologies for absence: Councillor Goslin.

Also in attendance: Councillor Coker, Councillor Laing, Paul Barnard, David Draffan (Service Director for Economic Development), Kate Farmery (Head of Business, The Box), Hannah Harris (CEO of Plymouth Culture), Philip Heseltine (Head of Transport), (Victoria Pomery (CEO, The Box), James Mackenzie-Blackman (CEO and Executive Producer, Theatre Royal), Rosie Starr (Sustainable Transport Manager), and Hannah Whiting (Democratic Advisor).

The meeting started at 2.00 pm and finished at 4.58 pm.

*Note: At a future meeting, the Panel will consider the accuracy of these draft minutes, so they may be subject to change. Please check the minutes of that meeting to confirm whether these minutes have been amended.*

## 11. **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were made.

## 12. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 July 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

## 13. **Chair's Urgent Business**

There were no items of Chair's urgent business.

## 14. **BSIP (Bus Service Improvement Plan) 2023**

Councillor Mark Coker (Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Infrastructure) introduced the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) 2023 and highlighted the following points:

- a) If Plymouth was to reach its climate emergency ambitions, the bus would need to not only be a tool of inclusion, but the transport choice moving forward;

- b) A BSIP was a requirement following the 2021 National Bus Strategy;
- c) The BSIP set out what was required to make buses easier cheaper and better and more convenient;
- d) It was submitted in September 2021, but failed to attract funding along with 61% of other authorities, however, it remained the bidding document for this and future rounds of funding, so needed to be refreshed;
- e) Constructive feedback was provided by the Department for Transport and the team had used this to develop and refresh the BSIP;
- f) He had welcomed representatives from the Department for Transport in Summer 2023, and they had been impressed with many aspects of public transport in the city;
- g) The visit had been a reminder that Plymouth was well-placed to 'deliver bus back better', the aim of the 2023 BSIP;
- h) Improvements needed to be made in what remained highly challenging financial circumstances, and passengers and the bus industry were working with Plymouth City Council to identify improvements;
- i) The vision was to create a thriving bus network to connect people to important places with services that were frequent, reliable, fast, affordable, safe and clean;
- j) The vision was underpinned by nine passenger priorities focused on frequency, reliability, journey speed, affordability, safety, cleanliness, making buses simple, better connected, accessible and modern;
- k) The team were engaging with bus users on ranking these priorities to ensure the plan reflected the needs of current and potential users;
- l) The BSIP was a clear, evidence-based rationale for improvement of Plymouth's bus services, that made the city well-placed to receive future rounds of government funding.

Supported by Rosemary Starr (Sustainable Transport Manager) added:

- m) A statutory partnership had been established and had come into effect on 1 April 2023, which would be the instrument for the delivery of the BSIP, should funding be secured, as required by the National Bus Strategy of 2021;
- n) The 2021 National Bus Strategy had been the first of its kind and aimed to restore public transport, increase use and it also included 12 themes which the BSIP responded to;
- o) The BSIP had also been designed to deliver against two strategic priorities within the Plymouth Plan: To deliver a safe and accessible and health-enabling

transport system, and using transport to grow the economy;

- p) The BSIP had 3 strategic outcomes:
  - i. Supporting the local economy and facilitating economic development;
  - ii. Delivering wider social and health benefits;
  - iii. Enabling reduction of carbon emissions and improving air quality;
- q) The vision of the BSIP was “to create a thriving bus network where everyone can be connected to important people and places, by services that were frequent, reliable, fast, affordable, safe and clean, which would help Plymouth achieve its net zero goals by 2030;
- r) The priorities were out for consultation with a variety of groups to ensure they were correct and ranked correctly;
- s) The BSIP included a proposal to set up a bus user panel to engage with people on a regular basis regarding both what they would like to see improved, and as a group with which to test proposals before implementation;
- t) 1,670 responses had been received at that point for the BSIP Passenger Priority Survey and the top three priorities were frequent, reliable, fast and affordable;
- u) Six core corridors had been identified across the city and the improvements would be undertaken along these corridors in order for the investment to have maximum impact;
- v) Detailed the strengths and weaknesses of each of the priorities as detailed in the background paper uploaded for this item;
- w) The targets for the plan were in two sets, one for 2030 to meet Plymouth’s Net Zero target, and one for 2034 to tie in with the Plymouth Plan, these were also set out in more detail in the background papers.

In response to questions it was further explained:

- x) Buses needed to be able to get through traffic, but designs would not intend on holding up traffic;
- y) Passenger growth targets were ambitious but it was important to be ambitious following feedback from the Department for Transport;
- z) People that were 19 years of age had been identified as an appropriate age to increase child fares to. This would ensure it was the same across providers, and whilst there had not been proposals to increase the age further, there had been discussions around the provision of a skipper ticket that would work across providers to make travel more competitive in terms of cost;

- aa) They would take the suggestion that bus providers undertook bystander training to help make women feel more safe in using public transport at night, to the enhanced partnership;
- bb) There were plans to introduce a park and ride location close to Sherford, once a certain number of houses had been completed there and was supported by Plymouth City Council, Devon County Council and South Hams Council;
- cc) The Bus User Panel was still being developed and the team were going to be in a meeting the following week to discuss best practice across the country to make the panel the best it could be;
- dd) Traffic on the roads was expected to increase, and so the target of keeping bus journey times the same as they were was ambitious;
- ee) The team would take the feedback for consideration that an orbital route in Plympton/Plymstock would be beneficial;
- ff) The measures within the BSIP were gender neutral;
- gg) Plymotion feedback would include information on the barriers people faced in using buses and the team could look to see if there was a trend amongst men, choosing to use their car rather than the bus;
- hh) It was important to encourage the older generations to use the buses, whose usage of public transport had declined since the COVID19 pandemic, not just to encourage public transport use for environmental reasons, but also to improve mental and physical health;
- ii) Feedback from areas where bus shelters had been removed would be considered to determine if some could be replaced;
- jj) The team were working with employers to encourage change in the way people travel to work and the dockyard had introduced discounts for bus users, and bus services had been put on for match days for Plymouth Argyle;
- kk) It was important to work with schools as children could be very influential on modes of transport used by parents;
- ll) Clear communication was essential to encourage people to use buses, including the real time information, as well as timetable and ticketing information;
- mm) Bus operators had joined the national neighbourhood watch campaign for community safety and the enhanced partnership would continue this work;
- nn) The team were looking at other funding options available to make the bus networks greener;

- oo) The Peninsula Transport Board was working on a strategy for the west country and park and rides would be looked at within this, and the need for one in Cornwall to allow people to park and ride into Plymouth would be encouraged by Plymouth City Council;
- pp) Councillor Coker was happy to look into the possibility of care experienced young people getting a discount on buses with the providers.

The Committee agreed to:

1. Endorse the draft of the 2023 Plymouth Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP);
2. Endorse the nine passenger priorities set out within the BSIP 2023 as the drivers behind the improvements that the BSIP sought to deliver;
3. Endorse the measures set out within the BSIP as key interventions, which supported the policies of the Plymouth Plan and, on delivery, would help deliver the identified passenger priorities.

15. **Plymouth Culture Plan Annual Update**

Councillor Jemima Laing (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care, Culture, Events and Communications) introduced the item and highlighted:

- a) The range of benefits a thriving cultural sector to provide to a city and that Plymouth was ambitious and wanted a thriving cultural sector;
- b) The Culture Plan worked towards a number of outcomes including increasing and diversifying of spaces where culture can be seen, increasing creative industry jobs, diversifying and increasing audiences, reducing the environmental impact of the cultural sector and increasing and diversifying funding for arts;
- c) Plymouth Culture was key in working towards these goals, funding by Arts Council England and a small grant from Plymouth City Council, driving forward the strategic activity needed to grow the sector;
- d) Given the ongoing challenges facing the sector, work had been very successful with a number of exciting opportunities for venues, organisations, audiences and those working in the sector;
- e) The economic data showed signs of growth since the pandemic, with signs of 'bounce back' from 2022 and there was an estimated 3350 people employed in the sector, an increase of 9.8% since 2019;
- f) Despite funding cuts, Plymouth had continued to attract investment in the sector and found success in applying for grants;

- g) The cost of living crisis meant there was a risk of a widening inequality gap in cultural participation and it was a priority for Councillor Laing that there were increased opportunities for everyone in Plymouth to participate in cultural activities;
- h) The priority programmes of work included an investment strategy, data collection and analysis, and alignment and integration, which were essential in addressing the cost of living crisis;
- i) The social value to the city was also important as it was essential to support community cohesion, positive well-being outcomes, improved educational attainment, civic pride and a cultural identity for Plymouth.

Hannah Harris (CEO of Plymouth Culture) added:

- j) Plymouth Culture aimed to support, enable and facilitate culture, rather than directly delivering cultural activity and acted as a connector and broker to leverage additional support and investment for Plymouth;
- k) The organisation had been working on plans around development of Plymouth city centre and how they could support vacant spaces to be better used. It had made funding available as grants; was working on an anti-racism program; had been instrumental in bringing the immersive futures event forward and had developed an action plan to develop music culturally within the city.

James Mackenzie-Blackman (CEO and Executive Producer, Theatre Royal) added:

- l) Plymouth had a very connected and collaborative cultural sector, facilitated by Plymouth Culture and the Economic Development team at Plymouth City Council;
- m) Culture meant different things to different people, and that was shown in the diverse range of cultural events in Plymouth;
- n) Theatre Royal Plymouth was the largest and best attended regional theatre in the UK, operated as a charity with a turnover of £15-16 million annually and employed around 300 members of staff;
- o) With increasing costs it was essential that the theatre found new ways of working and collaborating to maintain its position within the industry;
- p) James Mackenzie-Blackman was joining the meeting remotely as he had been in London following the announcement of a major co-production with Elton John on an adaptation of *The Devil Wears Prada*, which would be built in Plymouth and star in Plymouth before transferring to the West End in London; a multi-million pound investment in Plymouth that would create a number of jobs, and would bring a number of people to the city, creating a boost for the hospitality sector;

- q) The theatre would be seeking other production opportunities in the future;
- r) 15,000 people a week visited Plymouth city centre to attend shows and this brought wider economic benefits for the city;
- s) Theatre Royal Plymouth was passionate about working with local communities, especially children, young people and families, and there was a major strategic review underway into how they were engaged with and he welcomed feedback from Councillors;
- t) Creativity had been eroded from national curriculum in schools over the previous 10 years and so it had been harder to get children to the theatre through schools.

In response to questions it was added:

- u) Ticket prices at Theatre Royal Plymouth could be perceived as expensive by some, but tickets purchased at £70 helped to ensure there were also tickets available for £15-£18 and it was considered schemes and policies that could be put in place to ensure that people who would ordinarily find it a challenge to purchase tickets for shows at TRP, could attend;
  - i. For example, most tickets for Hamilton would not be cheap, but Theatre Royal Plymouth was the only theatre in the UK to have a show just for children and young people and they would be working closely with Plymouth City Council to provide that opportunity to care leavers and children in care;
- v) The electricity bill for Theatre Royal Plymouth had increased from £185,000 per year to £676,000 a year and there was a deficit in the budget;
- w) Carpenters, welders and electricians, could earn more money working for organisations in the city such as Princess Yachts, rather than working in the cultural sector, so it was a challenge TR2 was trying to overcome, by encouraging people into those fields of work and encouraging them to work in the cultural sector as it was more creative;
- x) It was important that young people understood that they could work in the cultural sector without having to be an artist themselves;
- y) It was important for elected members to advocate for the cultural sector in the city as a good place to learn and practice skills and as the sector developed, the more jobs and opportunities would become available;
- z) Councillor Laing was keen to see cultural activity taking place across the city, closer to more communities, rather than everything happening in the city centre;
- aa) Culture took place at a wide variety of venues, some that might not always be considered, for example, live music at a pub, so it was important to look

at mapping more of what was happening in the city;

- bb) There had been a culture vending machine in Drake Circus Shopping Centre, where the public could pay a £1 to get a poem, short story or play, which had needed to be restocked several times, showing an appetite for culture in Plymouth;
- cc) Plymouth Culture were working with the Economic Development team at Plymouth City Council on a pipeline of places for culture in Plymouth;
- dd) Theatre Royal Plymouth knew it could improve its food and beverage offering, but the economics were very difficult, but different ways of offering this were being considered for the future.

The Committee agreed to:

- 1. Note the report;
- 2. Write to the relevant minister to ask for more support for organisations in the cultural sector, following significant increases in utility costs.

*(The meeting was adjourned for 10 minutes for a short break).*

*(The Chair left the meeting following this item and Councillor Tuffin was Chair for the remainder of the meeting).*

#### 16. **Update: The Box and its performance**

Councillor Jemima Laing (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care, Culture, Events and Communications) introduced the report on The Box and highlighted:

- a) The Box had been a hugely ambitious capital project and opened in September 2020 in the midst of the global COVID19 pandemic to critical acclaim and had gone from strength to strength;
- b) The Box had more than 600,000 visits in total with 245,987 of those in the last financial year and was on target to do just as well in 2023/24;
- c) More than 10,000 people had taken part in The Box's family programme and had generated £429,830 in the previous financial year and was building its fundraising capabilities in a competitive environment;
- d) There had been an ambitious summer programme at The Box, and it had had 52,000 visitors over the 6 weeks of the school holidays, and the team were preparing for the Autumn programme;
- e) Solomon Hart's work 'The execution of Lady Jane Grey' would be on display from 27 September 2023;



- f) The Box was diversifying and growing the ways it used its spaces, one example was a monthly bazaar that occurred outside the entrance on the last Saturday of each month with local diversity business incubators, food stalls and music and entertainment;
- g) The innovative work of The Box was being noticed locally, regionally, nationally and internationally;
- h) Visitors to Plymouth from the LGA had been very impressed with The Box and what Plymouth had to offer;
- i) The Box continued to raise the profile of Plymouth whilst contributing positively to the health and wellbeing of the city, being a fantastic learning resource, and supporting creativity, especially for children and young people;
- j) The press and media coverage for The Box had an advertising value of £5 million with a global reach of 187 million people.

Victoria Pomery (CEO of The Box) added:

- k) Visitor numbers had peaked at different points each year that The Box had been open which had been due to the summer holidays falling slightly differently, as well as the weather as it was often busier on wetter days;
- l) The team worked hard to ensure that the offer was strong and the venue was accessible and welcoming;
- m) Victoria was excited about the future of culture in Plymouth and the positive impact it could have on the city as a whole.

In response to questions raised it was further explained, with Kate Farmery (Head of Business, The Box) and David Draffan (Service Director for Economic Development) that:

- n) It was challenging for schools to get older students to visit venues like The Box as part of the curriculum;
- o) The Arts Council funded The Box as a visual arts organisation, rather than as a museum or archive and although some exhibitions might not be populist to some, they did make the most of The Box's collection;
- p) Data on visitors had been collected and analysed but more would be done with a planned increase in surveys, primarily through interviewer-led exit surveys and would look at where they were visiting from, their motivations for visiting and how long they spent there;
- q) They hoped to have a significantly improved data set for the annual update for the Committee in 2024;

- r) The team always considered how to make works relevant for contemporary audiences;
- s) There were challenges faced in the sector of changing the demographics of who engaged with cultural activities, but this was a challenge that the team were keen to tackle and to remove the perceived, but very real, barriers for access;
- t) Councillors had a role in advocating for The Box and encouraging people to visit, especially for people who felt it wasn't 'for them';
- u) 2023 had been the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Pele playing at Plymouth Argyle, and an exhibition marking this had brought a very different demographic to The Box, and the team were looking at items in the collection that had the potential to bring in different audiences;
- v) The team at The Box were keen to make the opportunities to work in places like The Box more visible to people and that there was a wide range of areas through which to get involved, and a some apprentice roles had been made available at The Box and Councillor Laing wanted to think more about how the 'behind the scenes' jobs in the cultural industry could be promoted;
- w) The donation strategy was going to be reviewed and refreshed, including a refresh of donation boxes on site, ensuring staff felt more comfortable asking for donations on site and more visibility of how to donate online;
- x) The Box was receiving donations close to the national average, but it was ambitious and wanted to achieve more.

The Committee agreed to note the report.

17. **Work Programme**

The Committee agreed to note the work programme document.

18. **Tracking Decisions**

The Committee agreed to note the tracking decisions document.