

Growth and Prosperity Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Wednesday 19 September 2012

PRESENT:

Councillor Nicholson, in the Chair.

Councillor Mrs Nelder, Vice Chair.

Councillors Mrs Aspinall, Casey (substitute for Councillor Wheeler), Churchill (substitute for Councillor Wiggins), Damarell, Darcy, Fox, Martin Leaves, Michael Leaves and John Smith.

Apologies for absence: Councillors Wheeler and Wiggins.

Also in attendance: Sheldon Ryan, Economic Development Officer, Ian Ellis, Assistant Network Manager, Tim Howes, Monitoring Officer, Sue Eden, Lead Officer (substitute for Gill Peele) and Ross Johnston, Democratic Support Officer,

The meeting started at 3pm and finished at 5.25pm.

Note: At a future meeting, the committee 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.

24. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made by Councillors in accordance with the code of conduct.

25. **MINUTES**

Councillor Nicholson, Chair, commented that the CACI report, emailed to members by Clint Jones, City Centre Manager, in response to the resolution agreed under the Mary Portas Review and City Centre Retail item, lacked detail and required further information to fully make members aware of the collective spend per head in Plymouth City Centre.

Agreed –

- (1) that Sue Eden, substituting for the panel's Lead Officer, would clarify with Clint Jones, City Centre Manager, if any further information was available to support the data provided to members in the CACI report;
- (2) to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 1 August 2012.

26. **CHAIR'S URGENT BUSINESS**

TRAFFIC IMPLICATIONS AND WORKS AT LAIRA BRIDGE

Councillor Nicholson, raised the issue of road works at Laira Bridge and the implications this had had on traffic users travelling over Laira Bridge and the potential traffic impacts on other parts of the city.

Agreed that Clive Perkin, Assistant Director for Transport, provide a report to all members, to be circulated by email, on the traffic implications and works at Laira Bridge, communication activities and any mitigation measures implemented to ensure traffic is kept moving to prevent any traffic impact on other parts of the city.

27. **TRACKING RESOLUTIONS AND FEEDBACK FROM THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD**

The panel noted its tracking resolutions document.

28. **UPDATE ON GOVERNMENT POLICY CHANGES**

There were no government policy updates provided but it was commented by members that there was some concern about the government's proposed changes to the planning system, in particular, the relaxation of Permitted Development Rights.

Agreed that –

- (1) Paul Barnard, Assistant Director for Planning, provide a report, to be circulated to all members by email, on the proposed new Planning laws;
- (2) government proposals to change the planning system is added to the panel's work programme and a Planning Officer is invited to attend the next meeting to explain the proposals in more detail.

29. **CONNECTIVITY: BROADBAND**

Sheldon Ryan, Economic Development Officer, provided the panel with an update on Connectivity: Broadband.

The panel was informed that –

- (a) the report submitted provided a position statement on the city's connectivity and what the council were doing to address connectivity issues within the city, such as:
 - increasing broadband speeds in areas that received less than two megabits per second (Mbps);

- reduce the impact of digital exclusion; the term used to describe a group who find it difficult or are unwilling to connect to broadband, therefore disadvantaging them from other groups which can connect to broadband;
 - dealing with increased demand for connectivity within the city and aspiring to get the superfast broadband (broadband speeds of 20Mbps or over) in all city areas;
- (b) Plymouth had good levels of broadband connectivity with an average city broadband speed of 8.7Mbps, which compared favourably against the national average of 6.7Mbps;
- (c) superfast broadband speeds were available in 88 per cent of the city, although take-up of broadband in these areas was only 69 per cent;
- (d) in order to raise the citywide availability of superfast broadband the Council were working closely with BT and partners to increase broadband usage and encourage companies to provide the infrastructure to produce superfast broadband speeds.

In response to members questions it was reported that –

- (e) Plymstock and Roborough, two localities within the city, had poor broadband speeds and the Council were working with BT to improve connectivity in those areas by using demand stimulation; a broadband take up campaign using posters, leaflets, speaking at local public and business events and publishing newspaper articles;
- (f) BT Openreach, provider of broadband services, by law had to resell their network to other providers as a result of the denationalisation in the 1980s, which was the main reason that the Council were working collaboratively with this company;
- (g) improvements to mobile phone networks and the supply of 4G network services could assist in improved broadband speeds and mitigate the impact of digital exclusion;
- (h) with regard to digital exclusion, the Social Inclusion Unit were working closely with organisations and local residents on the social elements of broadband connectivity.

Agreed that Kevin McKenzie, Diverse Communities Officer, is invited to a future meeting, to address the panel on the social element of broadband connectivity.

30. **HEART OF THE SOUTH WEST LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP**

The panel was provided with a written briefing report on the Heart of the South West: Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP).

Agreed that –

- (1) Tim Jones, Chairman of the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership, is invited to the next meeting to inform the panel what the LEP was doing to help Plymouth and how it planned to improve economic activity in Plymouth;
- (2) in order to aid the panel's discussion the following information is emailed to all members in advance of the next meeting –
 - funding arrangements for the LEP;
 - what applications have been submitted by Plymouth City Council and Private Sector companies within Plymouth?
 - what is the relationship between the LEP and the Plymouth Growth Board?
 - what alternatives would exist if Plymouth were to remove its involvement with the LEP?

31. **COMMUNITY EVENTS AND ROAD CLOSURES**

Ian Ellis, Assistant Network Manager, provided the panel with an update on the Community Events and Road Closure Policy.

The panel were informed that the report submitted demonstrated how the Council had responded to the recommendations of the Growth and Prosperity Overview and Scrutiny Panel Task and Finish Group to review the Community Events and Road Closure Policy in October 2010.

In response to members questions it was reported that –

- (a) the actions required following the recommendations by the task and finish group had been delayed due to the Transport department's restructure;
- (b) despite the confusion surrounding charges for Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders (TTROs) for community events, the Council had funded all community events which met the criteria;
- (c) the Council had a clear policy on road closures, charging schedules and what was expected of event organisers, however, it was acknowledged that the delay in producing a list of events which would receive the road closure for free may have caused confusion amongst the public;
- (d) due to the Council no longer having to advertise TTROs in the local press charges had been reduced from £1000 to between £500 and no charge;

- (e) TTRO charging was being monitored and reviewed annually to ensure that all charges were appropriate and realistic in providing a cost neutral service.

In response members commented that –

- (f) they were disappointed that an approved list of events which the council would provide TTROs free of charge had not been completed, two years after the recommendations produced by the task and finish group were agreed;
- (g) the uncertainty surrounding charging for TTROs for community events may have had a knock on effect by impacting on local businesses who rely on visitors attending these events;
- (h) a timescale needed to be agreed with the Transport department and Cabinet Member for Transport in order to progress the recommendations and provide a clearer service to local communities.

Agreed that Councillor Nicholson and Councillor Nelder would meet with Councillor Coker, Cabinet Member for Transport and relevant Transport Officers on the charging for road closures and defining the list of non-chargeable events, and report back to the next meeting.

32. **HIGHWAYS MAINTENANCE**

Ian Ellis, Assistant Network Manager, provided the panel with an update on Highways Maintenance.

The panel commented that the report made no reference to maintenance of cycle routes, which was the main concern of the panel as this was not discussed as part of the task and finish group review on highways maintenance.

In response to members questions it was reported that –

- (a) a road maintenance priority list for 2012 – 2013 existed and was used to dictate which roads were to be improved in the current financial year;
- (b) the priority list was an ever growing list with the level of priority operating fluidly, as roads were continually added to the list and their inclusion and level of priority was determined against a set of criteria which included –
 - the number of defects previously reported/attended;
 - other defects that were not safety related;
 - any previous insurance claims on the road;

- whether the road was used as a bus route;
 - whether the road was situated close to important amenities;
- (c) AMEY, the Council's Highways service contractor, had developed a Winter Service Operation Plan, which now planned the gritting frequency of roads within the city;
- (d) it was hoped that to compliment the Winter Service Operation Plan a Winter Service Policy would be submitted to Cabinet later in the year;
- (e) with regard to third party accident claims, if an accident occurred and was not reported to the police then the Council would not be aware of that incident and could not include it in any data.

Agreed that –

- (1) Ian Ellis would provide a briefing report on the maintenance of cycle routes to all panel members via email;
- (2) Ian Ellis would email to all panel members a copy of the Winter Service Plan and the most recent priority list for road maintenance.

33. **GUIDANCE ON MEMBERS USE OF RESOURCES IN CONNECTION WITH PLANNING APPLICATIONS**

Tim Howes, Monitoring Officer, was in attendance to provide guidance to members on their use of resources in connection with planning applications following the recent changes to the Code of Publicity and 'Probity in Planning' code.

The panel were informed that –

- (a) if the council wanted residents to receive information, regarding any subject, then it was the council's responsibility to inform the public and not members;
- (b) following the planning department's decision to no longer send letters to householders, due to rises in postage costs, it would be unreasonable for members to undertake a blanket mail-out to residents informing them of planning applications;
- (c) members wishing to inform members of the public on planning applications should do so on what they consider to be a reasonable basis.

It was commented that –

- (d) a protocol on the determination of reasonableness could assist members in future when deciding whether to communicate to residents any

planning applications within their wards;

- (e) members were now informed and consulted on the location of site notices within their wards and this, if sited correctly would adequately inform local residents of any local planning applications.

34. **MARKET RECOVERY SCHEME**

Agreed that, due to the Planning Department not submitting a report dealing with the panel's concerns relating to the application of the Market Recovery Scheme in Planning Applications, this item is deferred to the panel's next meeting.

35. **WORK PROGRAMME**

The panel discussed its work programme for 2012 – 2013.

Agreed that Road Safety (actions and education) is added to the work programme.

36. **EXEMPT BUSINESS**

There were no items of exempt business.