

Minutes of the meeting of the ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT SELECT COMMITTEE held on TUESDAY 24 MARCH 2015 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillor P Geary (Chair)
Councillors Bint, Cannon, Green, McKenzie, McPake (Vice-Chair),
Petchey and Wilson

Officers: S Heap (Committee Services and Scrutiny Manager)

Also Present: Councillors Brackenbury, Hosking, Long and McDonald

Public: 3

ET22 MINUTES

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Select Committee held on 19 January 2015 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

ET23 PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Witnesses:

Mr S Joseph OBE (Campaign for Better Transport), Councillor Clifton (Cabinet member for Economic Growth and Inward Investment), Councillor C Morris (Chair of the Regulatory Committee), A Rose (Service Director [Planning and Transport]), B Matthews (Head of Transportation Services), A Francis (Chair of the Milton Keynes Transport Partnership Public Transport Sub-Group) and P Ballantyne (Milton Keynes Bus Users Group)

The Committee received feedback from Mr S Joseph OBE of the Better Transport Campaign on Milton Keynes's performance as addressed in the Campaign's report 'Car Dependency Scorecard 2014: The Top English Cities for Sustainable Transport'.

Mr Joseph commented that taking account that Milton Keynes had been designed to encourage car usage the city had performed better than expected and provided a range of transport options.

Mr Joseph explained that the study had been based on four criteria:

1. Accessibility and Planning, which took account of journey times;
2. Bus and train quality and uptake;
3. Cycling and walking as an alternative mode of transport; and
4. Driver and car usage.

Mr Joseph suggested a number of options that could be considered to reduce car dependency which included:

- (a) Designing new developments to ensure that travel is possible to local facilities without relying on cars;
- (b) Providing bus only roads;
- (c) Providing easily accessible cycle hire;
- (d) Making travel vouchers and discount tickets available;
- (e) Improving signage for walkers and cyclists;
- (f) Complete missing links on Redway routes;
- (g) Improving public transport interconnectivity, including through ticketing; and
- (h) Designing public transport services around employment patterns.

Mr Joseph also suggested that an audit of all transport services, both public and private, should be carried out as this might identify opportunities for shared services, particularly between employers.

Mr Joseph further suggested that change needed to be incremental, for example by the introduction of one or two high quality bus routes, similar to the Arriva Sapphire service. Change could also be brought about by involving communities, such as by establishing a town centre partnership which worked on specific problems which were acting as a bar to public transport use.

In answer to a question Mr Joseph suggested that to improve the take up of cycling and walking in favour of car use, the Redways needed to link into Central Milton Keynes avoiding roads, signing needed to be improved, employers needed to provide such facilities as showers and secure bike storage and there needed to be cycle ability training on offer. Mr Joseph referenced the Cycling Cities Report, for further information.

In response to the issue of safety of those using bus stops Mr Joseph recommended the Campaign for Better Transport's design guide.

The Committee then received an Introduction to the CMK Transport and Parking Strategy consultation from Mr Matthews (Head of Transportation Services).

Mr Matthews drew the Committee's attention to the challenges facing Milton Keynes, which included:

- (a) The growth of the city and the capacity of the current network;
- (b) Accessibility to the city from the rural areas;
- (c) Levels of car ownership; and
- (d) Financial constraints.

Mr Matthews outlined the premise of the Strategy which included:

- (a) Continuing to support the existing core bus network;
- (b) Creating fast commuter Redway routes;
- (c) Encouraging multi-occupancy car usage; and
- (d) Promoting modal change.

Mr Matthews also referred to progress so far which included:

- (a) better public transport information;
- (b) car share parking;
- (c) provision of electric vehicle infrastructure;
- (d) the introduction of autonomous vehicles;
- (e) the trialling of parking sensors;
- (f) improvements to accessibility to Bletchley Railway Station;
and
- (g) support for employee travel plans.

Mr Alan Francis (Chair of the Milton Keynes Transport Partnership Public Transport Sub-Group) indicated that, in his view, the Council was good at developing strategies, but struggled to deliver them. Bus services needed to have greater coverage, both in terms of times of the day, and by providing a choice between estate based routes and quicker grid road routes. Also Central Milton Keynes tended to act as a hub for services, but interconnection between the services was poor.

Mr Francis recognised some good service provision including the 300 service, the John Lewis Warehouse service and services to neighbouring towns.

Mr Francis suggested that if bus usage was to be increased it would be necessary to increase punctuality by giving buses priority at certain pinch points and traffic lights; improve road surfaces; create bus hubs at major retail centres; provide better pedestrian access to bus stops, make the real time passenger information more reliable; and reduce grid road speeds to make it easier for buses to pull out. Mr Francis added that it was also key that people could access work, shops, health care and leisure facilities by bus if car usage in the immediate locality was to be reduced.

Mr Ballantyne (Milton Keynes Bus Users Group) echoed Mr Francis's comments about the need to improve road surfaces and have a reliable real time passenger information system. He was also of the view that such initiatives as autonomous vehicles and demand responsive buses had limited application and would contribute little to improving the overall public transport situation.

Mr Ballantyne suggested that if the Council failed to make improvements to public transport, as the city grew, there would be a significant increase in congestion which would impact on the city's

ability to grow. Overall Mr Ballantyne believed that the draft CMK Transport and Parking Strategy was good, but could still be improved.

Comments from members of the Committee included:

- (a) support for demand responsive transport and the use of smaller buses;
- (b) support for pay on exit street parking;
- (c) the need for improved signage;
- (d) priorities for the use of S106 spend should be debated;
- (e) early morning and late evening buses should be provided to enable to get to work;
- (f) event organisers and shopping centres should make it clear how to get to the location using public transport;
- (g) bus stops needed to be both accessible and safe;
- (h) public transport had to be efficient if it was to encourage less car usage and avoid gridlock;
- (i) the need to create a bus interchange and to redesign services to provide routes from estates direct to key locations such as the hospital and shopping centres, so decreasing journey times by reducing route lengths;
- (j) the introduction of on bus cashless payments and through ticketing;
- (k) giving buses priority at some traffic lights;
- (l) improving road surfaces;
- (m) the need to improve services to rural areas and links to Central Milton Keynes;
- (n) the importance of making people feel safe while both waiting for and using public transport;
- (o) a suggestion that a mobile phone app should be developed giving public transport information;
- (p) encouraging design of estates to accommodate public transport;
- (q) the need to simplify bus timetables; and
- (s) a suggestion that parking charges should be increased to encourage public transport use.

The Committee heard from Councillor Morris (Chair of the Regulatory Committee) who expressed her concern that the draft CMK Transport and Parking Strategy did not mention taxis as a type of public transport and essential to the economy. Councillor Morris suggested that signage to Ranks needed to be improved and the

location of ranks agreed between Highway and Taxi Licencing officers

Mr Joseph offered to assist the Council in taking various initiatives forward.

RESOLVED –

1. That the new Scrutiny Management Committee be requested to review:
 - (a) the use of S106 monies to fund public transport schemes;
 - (b) Redway usage and the barriers to usage including:
 - (i) signage;
 - (ii) promotion;
 - (iii) 'missing links' (disconnects in the network); and
 - (c) the implementation of existing transport policies / strategies.
2. That the Cabinet be requested to:
 - (a) raise with the Chief Executive the issue of 'silo' working, particularly the relationships between public transport planning and health, education and taxis;
 - (b) ensure that the Council's various strategies / policies complement each other and where possible are combined into a limited number of overarching strategies;
 - (c) progress cashless ticketing for buses as soon as possible;
 - (d) request the Chief Executive to report to Cabinet on the Council's apparent failure to complete a number of public transport schemes / schemes which impact on public transport such as way finding / signage and highway pinch points when works have been initiated and funded; and
 - (e) consider the 'Hertfordshire model' for a Transport Partnership and whether it could be used to refresh the current arrangements in Milton Keynes.

ET24

PLANNING PEER REVIEW

Witnesses:

A Rose (Service Director [Planning and Transport]), and J Entwistle (Head of Spatial Planning and Implementation)

The Committee considered an update on the implementation of the improvement plan arising from the recent Planning Peer Review.

The Committee noted that the main concerns in the Peer Review Report related to levels of customer service, including the backlog in processing applications; a lack of leadership; levels of stakeholder engagement; and inconsistent decision making.

It was reported that much of the backlog of applications had been caused by vacancies in the Development Control Team. Recruitment to all of the vacant posts was almost complete and it was expected that the full complement of staff would be in place shortly. Already there had been a significant improvement in performance. Other significant changes that were in train included:

- (a) involving councillors at an earlier stage in the consideration of major applications
- (b) cross departmental works at an earlier stage in in the planning application process;
- (c) ongoing discussions with parish councils on how the relationship between the councils can be improved;
- (d) improved training for both councillors and officer colleagues; and
- (e) a customer survey to identify any additional issues.

It was reported additionally that there was still a number of issues to be addressed which included:

- (a) a customer charter;
- (b) improving the time taken to answer customer queries and determine applications;
- (c) web-site improvements;
- (d) implementing the findings of the stakeholder group review;
- (e) building customer confidence;
- (f) preparing a planning obligations protocol; and
- (g) developing a pre-application service.

It was noted that the implementation of the Peer Review recommendations was being overseen by a councillor led steering group.

In answer to questions, it was noted that:

- (a) it was intended to give a time limited guarantee on pre-application advice to increase public confidence;
- (b) a Ward Councillor Hotline was being considered by the Steering Group; and
- (c) staffing structures were being considered to ensure suitably qualified staff were in place to deliver the Council's responsibilities with regard to a Flood and Water Strategy.

Members of the Committee also commented that:

- (a) 'Planners' should not be part of the initial visioning exercise for the preparation of PlanMK; and
- (b) the planning service should work closely with other services such as health and transport providers to ensure development was co-ordinated with essential infrastructure.

RESOLVED –

That the report be noted and the progress made to date welcomed.

ET25

HIGHWAYS CONTRACT SUB-GROUP - 3 FEBRUARY 2015

RESOLVED:-

That the minutes of the meeting of the Highways Contract Sub-Group held on 3 February 2015 be received.

ET26

RESPONSES FROM CABINET – 3 FEBRUARY 2015

It was noted that at its last meeting on 19 January 2015, the Committee had made a number of recommendations to Cabinet. The recommendations, together with the responses provided by the responsible Cabinet member, as detailed below, were noted:

Recommendations:

“(a) Highways – Prioritisation of Works

- (i) “That the responsible Cabinet member be requested to work with the Service Director (Public Realm) to develop a holistic communications / consultation approach around future plans for the management of the Council’s Highways Assets which actively engages all stakeholders, including parish and town councils, in a variety of ways and is at heart of the Council’s work on highway maintenance.
- (ii) That the Cabinet be requested to ensure that adequate resources are available to enable the Council to apply for all appropriate Government Grants, so maximising the resources available to support the Council’s Highways Assets.”

Cabinet Member Response:

“Bidding for External Funding

The Highways team have a strong track record when bidding for additional government grants having secured some £2.26million over the last 3 years. The team has a certain capacity to respond to these bids but on occasion needs additional support. When this is the case, and rather than employing additional staff, the team utilises the services of consultants with relevant expertise. The costs over the period

were approximately £6,000. The ratio of additional cost to return is therefore 1:377.

The current Department for Transport Challenge Fund bid (for which we seeking £5M) is being produced and will be submitted in early February 2015. We have used the existing Highways team and Ringway resources (at no additional cost) as well as the services of an external consultancy. The charge for the consultants will be in the region of £5,000. If we are successful, the ratio of additional cost to return will be 1:1000.

Communications Plan

The Highways Team provide a wider range of communications relating to programmed works, network conditions, road works, winter maintenance and capital projects. These are provided via email, twitter, the web and face to face at community events and meetings.

The Team are very keen to improve on this, however. As part of the forthcoming draft Public Realm Strategy we will be asking the Milton Keynes community how they would like to hear from us in the future about a range of issues. In addition, all councillors will have been contacted by a member of the Public Realm Team who will provide councillors with any information they require at the frequency of their choice and via their preferred channel(s). When we have collated information directly from councillors and the consultation we will develop a targeted communications plan.”

(b) Reductions in Bus Subsidies / Concessionary Fares

Recommendation:

“1. That the Cabinet be advised of the Committee’s disappointment at the potential impact the reduction in bus subsidy and increases in concessionary fares, if they are necessary, would have on the local economy, education parking, travel patterns and modal shift.

2. That the Cabinet be recommended to receive legal advice on:

(a) the implications of the Barnet Judgement regarding increases to parking fees to raise surplus revenue for use on other transport purposes; and

(b) whether it is lawful to allocate expenditure from the Parking Surplus Account 2015/16 before the year starts and any sequential spending priorities set out in Section 55 of the Road Traffic 1984 Act.

3. That the Cabinet be recommended to consider the possibility of either reducing the frequency of some services and / or using fewer vehicles in order to create a saving which could be used to support other bus services.
4. That the Cabinet be recommended to consider alternative ways of achieving the level of savings required from the transport budget by identifying alternative reductions from within that budget.
5. That the Cabinet be recommended to review of the proposed spend on temporary car parks in Central Milton Keynes and the long term implications of their removal.
6. That the Cabinet be recommended to consider whether any reduced demand for concessionary fares may result in less take up, so freeing up additional resources which could be used to lessen the reduction in bus subsidies.
7. That the Cabinet be advised of the Committee's concerns at the apparent lack of consultation with town and parish councils and other stakeholders which it finds unacceptable."

Cabinet Response

"Councillor Clifton, the responsible Cabinet member, noted the concerns of the Committee and that some information had not been available when the Budget Review Group considered the issue. Councillor Clifton indicated that he had already responded to concerns of the parish and town councils in connection with out of town parking and had undertaken to publish a pack of technical information of the economic impacts of parking changes, together with the Barnett Judgement advice from Government.

Councillor Clifton further indicated that the shape and configuration of Bus fare structures would be included in the Central Milton Keynes Transport and Parking Strategy which he expected to be published for consultation following a decision on 24 February 2015.

Councillor Marland (Leader of the Council) also apologised that some information had not been made available in a timely manner."

ET27

FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME ITEMS

The Committee considered potential items to be forwarded to the Scrutiny Management Committee for possible inclusion in the 2015/16 Work Programme.

RESOLVED –

1. That, in addition to the items mentioned under the Public Transport item above, the Scrutiny Management Committee be requested to consider setting up task and finish groups to look at the following items in the 2015/16 Scrutiny Work Programme:
 - (a) Flood and Water Strategy
 - (b) Bus Subsidies / Concessionary Fares
 - (i) The impact arising from any reductions in bus subsidies or increases in concessionary fares relating to:
 1. changes in travel behaviour;
 2. Parking, including around schools and local centres / shops;
 3. travel patterns;
 4. modal shift;
 5. the local economy, particular travel to work, to education, by grandparents who act as unofficial child-minders to allow other members of the family to work;
 6. other Council services;
 7. the effect elasticity of demand on the budget (whereby a greater saving being achieved from the concessionary fare savings could be ploughed back); and
 8. the night time economy.
 - (i) measures to potentially mitigate any negative impacts; and
 - (ii) whether additional spend on promotion would increase ridership.
 - (a) Cultural and Community Services Review
 - (b) The communications approach adopted around the management of the Council's Highways Assets as part of its programme for 2015/16
 - (c) Grid Road Crossing Safety
 - (d) Landscaping Contract
 - (e) Bus usage.

2. That the Scrutiny Management Committee also be requested to consider including a review of partnership working' and the interface with the public in respect of flood and water risk management, in the 2016/17 Scrutiny Work Programme.

THE CHAIR CLOSED THE MEETING AT 10.03 PM

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