

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

1 February 2023

Present: Councillor T Osborn (Chair)  
Councillor F Ezeifedi (Vice-Chair)  
Councillors S Ahmed, P Jeffree, P Kloss, R Martins, K Rodrigues  
and M Turmaine

Also present: Councillor Hofman (Chair of Sustainability Strategy Task  
Group) (minute numbers 59 to 64)  
Councillor Stotesbury (Portfolio Holder for Transport and  
Sustainability)

Officers: Associate Director of Planning, Infrastructure and Economy  
Senior Democratic Services Officer

### 59 **Apologies for Absence/Committee Membership**

There was a change of membership for this meeting: Councillor Jeffree replaced Councillor Stiff.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Feldman.

Councillor Ezeifedi had sent apologies that she was delayed.

### 60 **Disclosure of interests (if any)**

There were no disclosures of interest.

During the course of the meeting, the following members declared interests:

- Councillor Ahmed declared that he was a taxi driver, in relation to discussions on minute numbers 64, 65 and 66.
- Councillor Turmaine noted that he worked for Hertfordshire County Council, but not in the highways or transport teams, in relation to discussions of minute number 66.

### 61 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 December 2022 were submitted and signed.

62 **Other scrutiny meetings - minutes**

The committee noted that Finance Scrutiny Committee had met on 9 January 2023 and the minutes were published on the council's website.

The Chair of Finance Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Turmaine, reported that it had been a good discussion of the budget and the outcomes had been reported.

RESOLVED –

that the update be noted.

63 **Call-in**

The scrutiny committee noted that there had been no call-in.

64 **Sustainability Strategy Task Group final report**

The scrutiny committee received the final report of the Sustainability Strategy Task Group.

The Senior Democratic Services Officer set out the purpose of the item which was to ensure the recommendations were coherent and as the formal scrutiny committee, it was for Overview and Scrutiny Committee to recommend the report to Cabinet.

The chair of the task group, Councillor Mark Hofman, introduced the report. Setting out the urgency of the issue, he noted that global carbon emissions were at record levels with a 50% chance that an increase of 1.5°C in global temperatures would be exceeded in the next 9 years. The council's existing sustainability strategy expired in March and the task group gave non-executive members a chance to feed in. The report recognised that the targets were challenging and would require coordinated effort to lead the local response which would have a positive impact on thousands of residents.

Responding to a question about the recommendation to increase the target for the percentage of households taking climate actions, the task group chair explained that it was an emergency situation and the

census had shown that Watford had a young demography. Numerous studies had demonstrated that younger and more educated people were more likely to engage in climate action. Many older residents were also climate aware. The monitoring of this target would be in the delivery plan and there would be an online platform to record pledges of action.

The Portfolio Holder added that the task group had had lots of good conversations and he fully supported the recommendations. The latest iteration of the report would reflect some of them. He confirmed the delivery plan would come to Overview and Scrutiny Committee as well as the Climate Emergency and Sustainability Forum.

Councillor Ahmed noted that there were a large number of taxis in Watford which contributed to air pollution and asked whether there could be a limitation on taxi vehicles from outside the area as part of the strategy. Declaring an interest, he noted that he was a member of the taxi trade. It was noted that it was not possible to show a preference for different drivers or firms and the discussion would be picked up outside the committee meeting.

Turning to the recommendation around strengthening sustainability considerations in decision-making, the committee noted that the approach to procurement was key to this aim. Further there was an internal board at corporate level to oversee sustainability at the council.

It was further noted that the task group discussed the issues carefully taking into consideration the range of views held by task group members.

Considering the targets further, it was confirmed that the delivery plan would contain more detail on delivery mechanisms and any targets for individual services. The target profile had been built with an external consultancy, confirming the need for off-setting for certain sectors. Noting a comment about interim targets, the Portfolio Holder agreed to take the point away.

RESOLVED –

the final report and recommendations of the Sustainability Strategy Task Group be agreed and forwarded to Cabinet.

## Task group update - Sustainable Transport Strategy

The committee received an update on the recommendations made by the Sustainable Transport Strategy Task Group.

The update was introduced by the Associate Director for Planning, Infrastructure and Economy. The report had provided a helpful opportunity to reflect on progress and he provided an update on key areas:

- Progress on reducing short trips was through the development of the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) which was delivered in partnership with Hertfordshire County Council (HCC).
- There was a strong officer partnership with HCC and work remained ongoing on the joint strategic plan with neighbouring authorities.
- Beryl Bikes were keen to extend the service into neighbouring areas and the council was facilitating these conversations, but otherwise had limited control over this.
- The task group rightly underlined that low traffic neighbourhoods should only be a priority where residents supported the interventions. Some initial feasibility work had been carried out and was close to conclusion. Members were invited to discuss any known traffic issues with the team but these would only be taken forward with extensive support.
- The team had a good relationship with HCC's school travel planning team. A virtual engagement session with local schools, facilitated by the Mayor, had taken place and ongoing work was taking place with interested schools, but schools' capacity was understood.
- Work with local businesses remained ongoing. Watford Business Connect Forum was planned for March and would provide an opportunity to facilitate conversations. The forthcoming car club would also look to serve businesses.
- Behavioural change, including travel habits, was being picked up through the Sustainability Strategy, including changes to travel behaviour.

The committee discussed the importance of enforcing lower speeds, there had been little progress on extending 20mph roads through the borough. Almost 90% were suitable for a 20mph limit but only 30% were 20mph. Progress at HCC on this issue had stalled although their approach was gradually changing. One issue was the requirement for average speeds to be below 25mph to avoid the need for unpopular traffic calming measures. It was noted that the council

would continue to lobby for more 20mph streets in appropriate locations in the partnership working with HCC.

Turning to school travel plans, it was explained that HCC used a system called ModeShift STARS to develop and monitor travel plans. Members also discussed school streets which were becoming commonplace in London. Officers noted that few had been implemented in Hertfordshire as there was nervousness around the reaction to closing streets, but it was an initiative worth exploring further. The first stage would be to ensure schools were engaging with active travel plans to avoid relocating traffic issues. The Portfolio Holder added that school travel planning was a journey and the positive working relationship with HCC would facilitate further progress.

Following a question, officers explained how the car club would operate where people could have a short hire of a car booked through an app. It was a meaningful alternative to owning a car, or a second car. The procurement exercise for a partner would be underway shortly and there would be a strong preference for electric vehicles in the scoring. It would be well-suited to Watford which had parking issues and would support car-free or car-light developments and build confidence in electric vehicles.

Responding to a question from Councillor Ahmed, it was noted that the car club was unlikely to be suitable for taxi drivers looking for a temporary vehicle due to the business model. His personal interest in this question was noted.

Discussing the Beryl Bike scheme, the limitation appeared to be the number of bikes and ebikes were disproportionately popular. Beryl had been chosen in part due to the ability to scale the scheme.

Officers agreed to provide statistics on the levels of usage of the Beryl Bike scheme as well as the number of electric vehicle registrations in Watford.

RESOLVED –

that the report be noted.

## 66 **Task group update: Electric Vehicles**

The committee received an update on the recommendations made by the Electric Vehicles Task Group.

The update was introduced by the Associate Director for Planning, Infrastructure and Economy who thanked the task group for their work. He summarised some key points in the update:

- Dual on-street charging points were available in 23 locations, totalling 46 in total, this was a leading number for Hertfordshire.
- Awaiting outcome of funding bids which would roll out another 79 chargers in 38 locations. Once the outcome was known, there would be a meeting of the Sustainability Forum to discuss electric vehicles (EVs).
- A webpage was available with an interactive map of charging points and a form was available for residents to propose locations for new charging infrastructure. Further work was ongoing to improve the information.
- HCC's EV Strategy was forthcoming and details of the approach to on-street and lamppost charging would be included.
- The Licensing service provided a 50% subsidy for taxi drivers to licence an EV but current government funding could not be used for chargers in taxi ranks.

The Portfolio Holder paid tribute to the Senior Transport and Infrastructure Project Manager for his work in this area. Work had been ongoing for a long time to get lamppost chargers into the HCC strategy. Following a question, he stated that his view was HCC had not seen the need for lamppost chargers in other areas of the county. It had been demonstrated that some streets in Watford had no space for the standard charging infrastructure.

RESOLVED –

that the report be noted.

#### 67 **Executive Decision Progress Report**

The scrutiny committee was invited to review the current Executive Decision Progress Report for 2022/23 and consider whether any further information was required.

RESOLVED –

that the current 2022/23 Executive Decision Progress report be noted.

#### 68 **Hertfordshire County Council's Health Scrutiny Committee**

The committee noted that there had been no further meetings of the Health Scrutiny Committee.

69

### **Work Programme**

The committee reviewed the latest version of the work programme. The following changes were noted:

- The tree maintenance item would now be taken in the new municipal year to enable an audit to take place first.
- The Customer Experience Strategy would now be taken in the new municipal year.
- WCH would be invited later in February to discuss maintenance.

RESOLVED –

that the work programme be noted.

70

### **Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting would take place on Wednesday 22 February 2023. This meeting would start at 7.30pm.

Chair

The Meeting started at 7.05 pm  
and finished at 8.20 pm