

INFRASTRUCTURE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

TUESDAY, 18 JANUARY 2022

PRESENT: Councillors Sayonara Luxton (Chairman), Christine Bateson (Vice-Chairman), Jon Davey, Phil Haseler and Gurch Singh

Also in attendance: Councillor John Bowden, Councillor Gurpreet Bhangra, Councillor David Hilton, Councillor Gerry Clark and Councillor Samantha Rayner

Officers: Oran Norris-Browne, Andrew Durrant, Adrien Waite, Emma Duncan, Naomi Markham and Steph James

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

MINUTES

AGREED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting held on 21 September 2021 be a true and accurate record.

Q2 PERFORMANCE UPDATE REPORT

Andrew Durrant, Executive Director of Place began by stating that the Council adopted the new Corporate Plan on 23 November 2021, which set out the Council's new strategic priorities between 2021 and 2026. The Q2 performance report covered the dates ranging from 1 July to 30 September 2021. The report also acknowledged the new performance reporting arrangements that had been agreed by Cabinet on 16 December 2021, which would take effect on 1 April 2022.

Andrew Durrant referred to table 2 on page 13 of the report, which summarised key indicators and at close of Q2, 6 out of 8 of those measures were meeting or exceeding their target. Andrew Durrant added that one of these measures was short of target, but within set tolerances and that one was also a non-targeted measure.

Andrew Durrant said that there had been a return to some of the large-scale events in the borough including Royal Ascot, the Royal Horse Show and a wide range of borough-wide Christmas events. Andrew Durrant said that footfall levels were encouraging and that between 1 April and September 2021, Maidenhead saw a 90% footfall volume compared to the same time pre-pandemic. Similarly, Windsor saw 81.7% for the same period.

Andrew Durrant said that with regards to the Environment and Climate Strategy, the Council secured £165,000 worth of grant funding, which would allow for a range of decarbonisation assessments, with reports being made available later in 2022.

Andrew Durrant said that within Q2, the Council ran a number of consultations on the new Corporate Plan and that this helped to shape the final plan that was adopted by Full Council in November 2021. He added that Overview & Scrutiny panels would be aided by a new platform and a new set of Performance Management data and intelligence. Moving forward, any key issues or topics would be referred by the

Corporate Overview & Scrutiny panel to the relevant panels for further focus.

Andrew Durrant said that the Highways Maintenance and planning application processing times for major, minor and other applications was on target and that some other applications were just short of target up to the end of September 2021. This was shown at 83.6% compared to a target of 85%, which was a result of a high volume of planning applications and a number of staff vacancies within the borough.

Councillor Davey asked about footfall counters and their value of being used as accurate measures of footfall in both Maidenhead and Windsor town centres. Steph James, Service Lead for Economic Growth, said that there was no formal way of obtaining this transaction value from the footfall properly. However, she acknowledged that discussions were ongoing with businesses about how this could be improved. This was carried out through ways such as the Retail Forum and through informal discussions with businesses about how they were performing.

Councillor Davey responded by saying this would be more beneficial to focus upon rather than footfall numbers, as this was not an accurate measure of persons spending money on goods and adding value to the town.

Councillor Haseler asked where the footfall counters were located in both Windsor and Maidenhead High Streets. Steph James confirmed these were located above the former residence of Monsoon in Maidenhead High Street, and above Daniels on Peascod Street in Windsor High Street. Councillor Haseler noted that Windsor had been very busy when he had last visited recently and asked what the car park take up was in Windsor, and if there was a measure of weekday and weekend data. Steph James responded by saying that this data was measured, and it showed that car park usage was increasing in line with an increase in footfall.

Councillor Singh asked Andrew Durrant if he felt that the High Streets were in healthy positions now having recovered more so from the effects of the pandemic, with both footfall and car park suage increasing. Andrew Durrant responded by saying that Windsor car parks were back to pre-pandemic levels and that several Windsor car parks were also performing better than before the pandemic. He added that resident parking was down.

Councillor Singh said that having spoken to retailers in Maidenhead Town Centre, they did not share the optimism that was being shown by the officers. He said that retailers he had spoken with were particularly concerned with the regeneration plan of the town centre. He highlighted the demolition of the Nicholson's Shopping Centre having a big impact on footfall and shopper choice. He asked if any business surveys had been carried out and if the Council was braced for the loss of business rates that would occur from this regeneration project.

Steph James acknowledged that a new Maidenhead Town Manager had been appointed and that her key role was in engaging with retailers and assuring them that the regeneration project once complete would attract more shoppers. She was currently involved in organising a Lunar New Year celebration to attract food markets and local organisations to the town. In terms of business surveys, Steph James acknowledged that this could be adopted, but assured Councillor Singh that a lot was being done to reassure retailers.

Councillor Bateson asked about the percentage of other planning applications that were processed in time. Adrien Waite, Head of Planning said that they were a few percentage points down, but this was primarily due to resource issues and high staff turnovers. He added that he was confident as a service that there were no indicators of this dropping further and as a service, they would endeavour to increase it.

Adrien Waite added that lots of components were involved in planning applications and agreed with Councillor Bateson that it could sometimes elongate the process if applicants were to not submit information in a timely manner, However, he acknowledged that this was

not always the sole reason and that the reasons he noted previously were also contributing factors.

Councillor Davey asked about the Ringo Parking Scheme and problems that he and others had faced where they had forgotten to end the parking time and had been charged for a full day. He asked if there was any scope to aid residents in reminding them to end their parking time.

Andrew Durrant replied by saying that Ringo would be introduced at all the borough's car parks and that this would provide residents with a discount on parking within the borough from 4th April 2022 onwards. He added that his understanding was that users could pay an additional charge to receive notifications upon their car parking time expiring. Councillor Davey disputed this and added that the borough's system differed to others. Andrew Durrant said that he would discuss this further with Neil Walter, the Parking Principal offline to better understand the small details of this and reconfirm.

ACTION: Andrew Durrant to contact Councillor Davey offline with regards to the Ringo parking System.

Councillor Hilton, Lead Member for Finance, said with regards to business rates that when the pandemic began, a business rate holiday occurred until July 2021, and since then this was changed to just a third until April 2022. The business rate multiplier also would not change.

Councillor Haseler said that the number of homeless households in temporary accommodation was 73 less than the same period in 2021, which was a positive move. He asked if there were any significant trends between these people in temporary accommodation. Andrew Durrant said that this would have to be directed to the Housing team. The clerk and Andrew Durrant agreed to pick this up offline.

ACTION: Councillor Haseler to be provided with information on trends between people in temporary accommodation.

Councillor Singh asked what the turnaround time was for pre-planning application advice. Adrien Waite said that this figure was not currently monitored but acknowledged that this was one of the most important parts of the planning process and therefore it could be looked at being implemented in the future.

Councillor Singh asked further questions on business rates, specifically in Maidenhead. Councillor Hilton replied by saying that there were no discrepancies between Maidenhead and Windsor and that all Council tax that was paid to the Council was retained. 15% of business rates that were received were also kept, the rest went to National Government for their own distribution to other local authorities.

Councillor Davey asked about 5G infrastructure and said that it was resident belief that the Telephone Companies paid the Council to place 5G poles within the borough, but it was his understanding that this was not the case and that they were not charged anything. Councillor Davey asked for clarity on this. Councillor Hilton said that his understanding was that any pole or mast that was placed on highways land was granted permission.

The Panel noted the report.

ANNUAL SCRUTINY REPORT- DRAFT

The Chairman opened the item by stating that the number of topics discussed by the panel in the previous municipal year had been 22, compared to 4 during the current municipal year. The Chairman acknowledged that there had been changes to the way Scrutiny was conducted, which may in the short term have affected this. However, she said that going forward scoping documents would need to be carried out by panel members.

Emma Duncan, Monitoring Officer, said that the purpose of the Annual Scrutiny Report was to acknowledge what had been achieved by the panel over the last municipal year, but arguably more importantly what can be improved. Issues can be identified and addressed, with outcomes being scrutinised. Emma Duncan confirmed that this would be member-led and that panel members would have to complete a scoping document, which would then have to be agreed with the rest of the panel.

The clerk asked panel members to send in any comments they had for the Annual Scrutiny Report by Friday 28 January 2022, to ensure that they were added to the draft copy ready for publication.

WORK PROGRAMME

Councillor Davey said that if the panel agreed that a certain subject matter needed to be scrutinised, then a scoping document could be completed in its entirety to ensure that no officer time was wasted. Emma Duncan Confirmed this

Councillor Davey then introduced a topic to his fellow panel members titled 'Facelift 2022, Optimising Visitor First Impressions'. He outlined to the panel what this involved including a facelift of the Victoria Street car park and the Alexandra Gardens Coach Park. This would be to enhance resident experiences and visitors first impressions of the borough when arriving in Windsor, especially for the upcoming Jubilee Celebrations in June 2022.

The Chairman said that there was already a Jubilee Facelift Project ongoing and that she implored Councillor Davey to contact the Windsor Town Manager, Paul Roach to get an update on if these two named locations were being covered within this. She added that Councillor Cannon as the Lead Member for parking may also be a useful contact on this. The Chairman added that works were already planned for the Alexandra Gardens Coach Park and that these were planned to be complete before the Jubilee Celebrations in June 2022.

Andrew Durrant said that plans were underway for Alexandra Gardens Coach Park but admitted that further assessments were needed before work could commence. Some capital budget was being allocated towards this from the borough's own funds. Victoria Street car park had seen increased cleaning regimes being implemented. Once having spoken to Paul Roach, a clearer picture on future plans with Victoria Street car park would be visible, and this would be shared with the panel if required.

Councillor Singh expressed frustration with the new process and the introduction of scoping documents. Emma Duncan outlined why the new process had been adopted and said that support was there for members in aiding them with producing a scoping document.

Councillor Singh outlined an idea that he had to be brought before the panel. This was in reference to the reflective stickers on bollards and road signs. He said that during the day they worked well, however due to them becoming dirty, they became slightly more ineffective at night-time. He asked if there was a cleaning routine in place for these signs and he asked for a review into how often these were cleaned.

The Chairman responded by stating that items had already been agreed by the panel as being important ones to discuss and produce scoping documents on. Councillor Singh was encouraged to produce a scoping document on this issue that he had raised and present it to the panel. Councillor Singh asked when this would come to a panel. The Chairman responded by stating that this depended on the urgency of the item and the speed in which the scoping document was produced.

Councillor Bateson asked if the bridge at Alexandra Gardens Coach Park was owned by the borough. Andrew Durrant confirmed that the borough held a 125-year lease on the bridge.

Councillor Bowden was allowed to speak by the Chairman as Ward Councillor for Eton and Castle. He stated that the relevant Councillors for the area were fully aware of the issues that he had raised, and work was underway with officers to see what could be done about them. Councillor Davey acknowledged this and said that it needed to be rectified.

Councillor Davey said that CIL was already being dealt with offline, and he suggested that the items that currently existed on the work programme should all be scrapped, with panel members individually bringing items to the panel to discuss, considering the new process being adopted. Emma Duncan clarified the new process to the panel and emphasised that if there was an immediate danger caused by something, then this should be reported directly to officers and should not come to an Overview and Scrutiny panel.

Councillor Haseler said that members needed to focus on separating scrutiny topics and regular casework. He added that the scoping document could be supported by some additional guidance to aid members in better identifying why a topic should be brought to a scrutiny panel. Emma Duncan confirmed that this would be possible and that she would explore this.

Councillor Singh expressed his frustration with the panel and stated that he and Councillor Davey were trying their hardest to bring items to the panel, however he claimed that they were being blocked out by the majority of the panel. He claimed that his serious issue that he had brought to the panel could have been dealt with by liaising with officers behind closed doors, however he felt that it should be discussed in public through the panel.

Councillor Clark, Lead member for Infrastructure, said that Councillor Singh had already presented his question on the reflective signs and bollards to Full Council, which would be debated in the days after the panel. He added that this was a resident question, which was already being dealt with by lead officers.

Councillor Singh replied by asking the Lead Member if there was a cleaning regime in place to clean these. The Lead Member replied by saying that further discussions on the matter would occur at Full Council.

The Clerk emphasised that the work programme had already been streamlined by the panel in a meeting offline in November, where the panel went through the work programme item by item and agreed to keep some items of high importance to residents and to disregard some that were not. Panel members were then given the opportunity to fill in scoping documents for these agreed items to ensure that work was put in motion, however this had not yet occurred, potentially due to the process still being reasonably new.

The Chairman thanked officers and panel members for their attendance.

The meeting, which began at 7.00 pm, finished at 8.45 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....