

At a meeting of the ENVIRONMENT AND ATTRACTIVE CITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on MONDAY, 16th NOVEMBER, 2009 at 6.00 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Miller in the Chair

Councillors Ball, E. Gibson, Howe, Stephenson, Vardy, Wakefield, Whalen and Wood

Also Present:-

Councillor Tate, Chair of Management Scrutiny Committee

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Tye.

Minutes of the Last Meeting of the Environment and Attractive City Scrutiny Committee held on 19th October, 2009

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the previous meeting be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest

Item 4 – Progress on Public Transport Nexus Update

Item 5 – Review of Accessible Bus Network - Consultation

Councillor Wood declared a personal interest as a member of the Tyne and Wear Integrated Transport Authority

Change in the Order of Business

It was agreed that Item 4 – Progress on Public Transport Nexus Update and Item 5 – Review of Accessible Bus Network – Consultation be considered as one item.

Progress on Public Transport Nexus Update and Review of Accessible Bus Network – Consultation

The Chief Executive and the Director General of Nexus submitted reports (copies circulated) which allowed Members to receive a progress report from Nexus on the public transport system and a review of the accessible bus network in Sunderland.

(For copy reports – see original minutes)

Mr Bernard Garner, Nexus Director General, and Mr Tobyn Hughes presented the reports. Mr Garner advised that the Local Transport Act had become legislation in the last year and there were 4 themes involved in the Act. These were:

- The Integrated Transport Authority (ITA) which was responsible for delivering the local transport strategy.
- Influence and partnership. Improving the bus services by working with the operators to develop Partnerships; Statutory Quality Partnerships; or Quality Contracts.
- Governance review which would make sure that the ITA was fit for purpose.
- Road User Charging, there had been very little enthusiasm for this and as such it was currently not being progressed.

There was a Bus Network Design Exercise underway which included the Bus Strategy which would be looking at the development of the bus services. This would also involve the further development of alternate services such as community transport, provided by Compass, and Taxi Buses.

Metro performance had been very good. The number of services to South Hylton had been doubled and this had led to a 40 percent growth in passenger numbers.

Mr Hughes then advised that the Bus Strategy would ensure that the network was designed to meet the needs of the users. The Local Transport Act would also develop systems for receiving feedback on the network design.

Mr Hughes then referred to the accessibility targets and the timelines for meeting the targets. There would be detailed consultation taking place in the first six months of 2010 prior to the accessible bus network being delivered. There were limited resources but he was confident that existing services could be significantly improved.

Councillor Wakefield then commented that large parts of Houghton and Hetton bordered County Durham, people in these areas often travelled into County Durham rather than into Sunderland. He asked whether there were any plans for partnership arrangements between the different areas.

Mr Hughes stated that it was recognised that people travelled across political boundaries and there were partnerships in place. However there were no targets in place to help deliver joined up services for improving services in County Durham as it was beyond the remit of the review of the accessible bus network.

Councillor Wood commented on the targets set out in the report; he felt that the target for access to local centres during the day was good but the other targets were less encouraging. He was concerned over the target of 50 percent for access to the Royal Hospital in the evening; he felt that there should be access to the hospital from across the city. He accepted that there would be different types of services and felt that it was appropriate to ensure that the services were responsive to peoples needs.

Mr Garner advised that in the evening there were services to all facilities however they may not provide access to the key destinations within 30 minutes. It needed to be recognised that there would not just be the conventional bus and metro services and that alternative forms of public transport could be used to satisfy demand.

Mr Hughes added that over 50 percent of the funding available to ensure the provision of essential services was used to provide evening services. The targets were 'Door to Door' targets, they included walking to the stop and waiting for the bus.

Councillor Wood commented that during the day there were four Metro's an hour to Newcastle Airport from Millfield while all of the other stations had five trains an hour. He wanted to know when there would be a full service at Millfield station.

Mr Garner advised that the line through Sunderland and Pelaw was very busy; when the frequency of the services had been doubled there had been a need to fit the services into the gaps between other services using the line. In order for all of the trains to travel through the junction at Pelaw there had been a need for one of the Metro services each hour to arrive at the junction one minute earlier, this had been achieved by removing the stop at Millfield. This stop had been chosen as it was the station with the lowest patronage. The network was reviewed annually and this issue would be raised to see if there was a way it could be addressed.

Councillor Vardy commented on the bus services at Doxford Park. He advised that there were people who started work at 8am however the bus did not arrive until 8:15am; there was a need to look at the workplaces and the bus schedule. He then stated that the Nexus website was solely public transport based and that there were people who drove to the Metro stations. He asked

whether there were any plans to integrate cars into the public transport system by using Park and Ride schemes.

Mr Garner advised that Park and Ride schemes were critical, there were some bids for park and ride enhancement and any opportunities would be exploited. Reliability and punctuality were important for the bus services. There was communication with employers and it was disappointing to hear that there were problems; he asked that Councillor Vardy provide him with the details of the services which had problems.

Mr Hughes added that the consultation would help to resolve issues such as these.

Councillor E. Gibson advised the committee of a success story. Previously there had not been a service through Silksworth to the Royal Hospital in the evening however now the number 35 had been redirected to run through the centre of Silksworth and past the Royal Hospital and Sainsbury's on Silksworth Lane.

Councillor Howe expressed concerns over the reliability of services along Dykelands Road to Morrison's in Seaburn; he had spoken to Robin Knight however had not yet had a response. There were infrastructure problems around Seaburn Metro station as there were high kerbs and the new buses would have problems.

Mr Garner advised that he would contact Mr Knight to obtain a response. The new buses were the low floor easy access buses which were already in operation however by 2015 it was a requirement that all buses had low floors. The infrastructure could be designed to allow the low floor buses to operate.

Mr Hughes agreed to look into the details fully. He advised that traffic calming, on occasions, could cause problems.

In response to a query from the Chairman regarding the cost of fitting CCTV at bus stops, Mr Garner advised that it was a pilot project and there would be cameras fitted at six locations in each district. This would allow the impact of the cameras to be monitored and would show how people would respond to the installation of the cameras.

Councillor Vardy commented that he had been involved with a Task and Finish Working Group which had looked at fear of crime. This has discovered that there was a higher level of fear of crime on the way to the bus stop and at the bus stop than there was on the bus itself. Sunderland had a higher level of fear of crime than many other authorities in the region. If the pilot was successful would there be more CCTV cameras installed.

Mr Garner stated that he understood people's concerns and that perceptions of fear of crime were higher than actual crime levels. There were a range of actions planned and there would be a partnership with the police and the community to improve the physical environment to help reduce fear of crime.

The Chairman asked whether Statutory Quality Partnerships were preferable to Quality Contracts.

Mr Garner advised that the Quality Contracts were part of an untested piece of legislation; it could be time consuming to develop the contract. If the necessary level of quality could be achieved using a partnership then this would be preferable to using a contract.

The Chairman then asked what was happening with the extension of the Metro system.

Mr Garner advised that Nexus was close to receiving a capital commitment from the government which would be used to reinvigorate the network. This would allow improvements to be delivered and would be an opportunity to plan for the future and take forward possible future extension.

2. RESOLVED that the reports be received and noted and consideration be given to the evidence provided.

Policy Development and Review 2009/10 – Evidence Gathering

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which allowed Members to consider evidence from Hazel Walton, Road Safety Officer, in relation to the study into Traffic Issues and Network Management.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Hazel Walton, Road Safety Officer, presented the report and provided the Members with evidence regarding the problems around schools. She advised that:

- There was a need to educate parents to change their attitudes to driving near schools and make them think about where they park their vehicles.
- Engineering measures could be implemented but they would not be fully effective without a change in driver attitudes.
- Some schools had 'safety zones' around them which warned drivers that they were near a school
- There would be a report issued soon regarding 20mph zones around schools.

The Chairman invited Councillor E. Gibson to provide the committee with feedback from the Traffic Issues Task and Finish Working Group.

Councillor E. Gibson advised that 20mph zones and parking around school gates had been discussed. It could be possible to extend 20mph speed limits however there would be a significant cost involved due to the signage required. Enforcement officers had been in attendance at schools. There had

been a large number of schools had implemented travel plans however there was still a lot of schools had not.

Ms Walton clarified the figures for the school travel plans. There were 50 schools with finalised plans in place; 24 schools with draft plans and a further 40 schools which were working on the development of draft plans. All of the travel plans needed to be in place by the deadline of March 2010.

Councillor E. Gibson then advised that walking buses had been trialled. The Washington Area Committee had given its support to the implementation of a 20mph zone in Sulgrave.

Councillor Howe stated that there had been two major incidents recently. There had been a death and a near miss. Highways had been informed that at the site of the near miss the road markings were faded; however they had advised that there were no plans in place for the replacement of the markings. He did not understand why there was a reluctance to replace these markings. He felt that the parking enforcement officers were largely ineffective around schools, there had been a traffic warden 500m away from the school and no one had been caught as people were in such a rush that they had driven away before a ticket could be issued. He had spoken to people who were stopped on the zigzag markings and had received verbal abuse.

Ms Walton advised that the parking section had a schedule of visits for the parking enforcement officers; this ensured that the officers attended the schools at different times. There were problems outside of every school; Redby Primary School which was where the near miss incident had occurred had an established travel plan in place. However St. Benet's school which was adjacent did not. She agreed to find out whether there was anything that could be done to improve the poor quality zigzag markings. It would be difficult to put safety measures in place at the scene of the fatal accident until after the full details of the cause of the accident had been released.

Councillor Wood commented that school travel plans were important. He was concerned that the need for them had been recognised for years however with only a few months left until the deadline only 50 schools in Sunderland had implemented the plans.

Ms Walton advised that good progress had been made but that mid way through the project, the Government had changed their criteria which had resulted in much of the work needing to be redone. There was evidence that needed to be provided by the schools and getting this evidence was time consuming and the plans were highly detailed. It had also previously been difficult to recruit specialist staff as there were no specialists on school travel plans; the Council now employed a Safer Routes to School Technician who was involved in developing the school travel plans. It was hoped that a large percentage of the school travel plans would be completed by the deadline. There was no incentive for private schools to develop travel plans as they would not receive any funding for creating the plans.

The Chairman commented that he knew that the plans were the responsibility of the schools and it was important that the Council provided assistance to ensure that they were produced.

Ms Walton advised that there had been meetings with Children's Services in order to identify what support the schools needed. The main feedback from schools was that they were not traffic experts and that they were not given enough support.

Councillor Wood asked for a feedback report to be delivered to the Committee in the New Year.

The Chairman agreed with this request and asked that if there were any issues they were brought back to the Committee.

Councillor Wakefield commented that it would not be easy to educate drivers. He also stated that enforcement was sometimes difficult and that the police needed to prevent parking on the zigzag lines.

Ms Walton stated that school "keep clear" zigzag markings were enforceable by the council if there was a traffic regulation order preventing stopping in place. There were efforts being made to ensure that all of the zigzag markings were covered by traffic regulation orders.

Councillor Howe asked whether tickets could be given for stopping on zigzag markings when the driver was still in the car.

Ms Walton advised that this was the case as the offence was stopping on the zigzag markings.

Councillor Vardy commented that the same people were parking on the zigzags every day. If there were a 20mph zone introduced these people would not obey the speed restriction. He asked whether parking was allowed on the pavements behind the zigzag markings.

Ms Walton advised that the traffic regulation order covered from the centre of the road to the far side of the pavement so even if the vehicles were not directly on the markings then the offence would still have been committed.

Councillor Vardy then stated that he had identified a location where there were parking bays behind the zigzag markings. It was agreed that he would provide the information to Ms Walton so that she could investigate this location.

The Chairman stated that the parking enforcement officers received unbelievable amounts of abuse from parents. It was rare to get above 20mph in urban areas apart from on arterial routes. In Europe the speed limit in towns was normally 30kph which was roughly 20mph.

3. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted, consideration be given to the evidence received as part of the committee's study and a further report be received in the New Year in relation to the progress on school travel plans.

Request for Inclusion of an Item on the Agenda

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which allowed Members to consider a request from Councillor Wood for an item to be included on the agenda of a future meeting of the committee.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

The Chairman asked Councillor Wood to introduce the report.

Councillor Wood advised that concerns had been raised regarding the condition of Fawcett Street at the Planning and Highways Committee and the East Area Committee. This was a main thoroughfare and an important street however the buildings were in a dilapidated condition and there was traffic congestion. He asked that a presentation or report be brought to a future meeting of the committee.

Keith Lowes, Head of Planning and Environment, advised that there was a strategy in place for Fawcett Street as part of the Sunnyside Planning Framework and the Sunnyside Conservation Area. He would provide Members with a report showing the baseline position and would then meet with the Members to find out what they wanted including in the report to the committee.

The Chairman suggested that a scoping session be held with the Members once the baseline had been completed. He asked what the timescales would be.

Mr Lowes advised that the baseline position would be completed by January 2010 and the scoping exercise would then be able to take place in February or March 2010.

4. RESOLVED that a scoping meeting be arranged for Members in February or March 2010.

Forward Plan – Key Decisions for the Period 1 November 2009 to 28 February 2010

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided Members with an opportunity to consider the Forward Plan for the period 1st November, 2009 to 28th February, 2010.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

The Chairman presented the report and advised that since the agenda had been produced there had been a new forward plan published which covered the period 1st December, 2009 to 31st March, 2009. This new plan had been circulated to Members.

5. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

(Signed) G. MILLER,
Chairman.