

Economic Prosperity Sub Committee

Tuesday, 7 January 2020

Present: Councillor Janet Hunter (Chair)
Councillors N Craven, J Harrison, J Kirwin, M Rankin,
J Stirling, M Thirlaway, J Walker and M Wilson

Apologies: Councillors

EP/1620 Appointment of Substitute Members

There were no substitute Members appointed.

EP/1720 Declarations of Interest and Dispensations

There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.

EP/1820 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 5 November 2019 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

EP/1920 Transport Strategy

The sub-committee met to consider delivery of local and regional transport strategies and their impact on economic growth in North Tyneside.

Colin McDonald, Senior Manager: Technical and Regulatory Services, described the national and regional transport policy context and he introduced various officers to the sub-committee who were to present details of those specific areas of transport strategy that the sub-committee had asked to examine.

Andy Flynn, Integrated Transport Manager, described the vision and principles contained within the Council's Transport Strategy 2017-2032 and the action taken to deliver its aims. Whilst most of the actions contained within the delivery plan had now have been completed, the Strategy would continue to shape the Council's decision making and support bids for investment.

The sub-committee considered the mechanisms available to the Council to work with commercial partners to meet the needs transport needs of people working and living in the borough, for example through planning conditions and travel plans. The Council's Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy was currently under review. Members highlighted the need to work with neighbouring local authorities to improve and standardise policies and practices across administrative boundaries ensuring all local authorities were seeking to achieve the same high standards of regulation.

John Cram, Integrated Transport Officer, outlined the emerging vision, objectives and principles to be adopted by the North East Joint Transport Committee in a Transport Plan for the North East. Once a draft plan had been finalised it was likely to be subject to a 12 week public consultation exercise between July and September 2020. The sub-committee expressed its desire, subject to agreement with the relevant Cabinet member, to comment on the plan as part of the consultation exercise.

Members welcomed the vision of “Moving to a green.....North East”, particularly as the Council had recently declared a climate emergency and agreed actions aimed at reducing carbon dioxide emissions. The sub-committee queried whether the Council’s Transport Strategy ought to be refreshed in the light of the climate emergency and evolving regional strategy. Members also discussed the implications of increasing numbers of electric vehicles in terms of the need for charging point infrastructure and continued congestion.

Nicholas Bryan, Highways Network Manager, provided an overview of plans to introduce by January 2021 a charging Clean Air Zone in central Newcastle, lane restrictions on Tyne Bridge, access restrictions on the Central Motorway, grants for vehicle upgrades and behavioural change engagement package. The sub-committee discussed the eligibility and level of grants that would be made available and the time lapse that would occur between the introduction of the measures and the replacement of the metro fleet which help to provide an attractive, alternative means of transport. Reference was made to a report Sustrans were due to publish in relation to the impact of closing streets adjacent to schools on air quality and changing travel behaviours. The sub-committee expressed an interest in considering the report.

John Cram, Integrated Transport Officer, presented details of the proposals to reintroduce a passenger rail service on the existing freight line between Newcastle and Ashington via Northumberland Park. The line would facilitate economic and housing growth, improve public transport, reduce congestion and improve air quality. The sub-committee examined the business case for the service in terms of profitability, demand and its impact on the capacity of Northumberland Park metro station.

Mark Newlands, Highways and Infrastructure Manager, presented the Highway Asset Management Plan (HAMP) Annual Report 2019 which provided information on highway and infrastructure maintenance undertaken. Particular reference was made to changes to the highway inspection policy, the backlog of highway repairs remaining under control and delivery of work programmes including investment in footway improvements. The sub-committee discussed the merits of using recycled plastic material to resurface roads and queried whether the additional investment in footway improvements within town centres had been the most effective use of resources.

The Chair thanked the officers for their presentations and for answering member’s questions.