

Economic Prosperity Sub Committee

Tuesday, 5 July 2022

Present: Councillor M Wilson (Chair)
Councillors L Bones, M Hall, V Jamieson, L Marshall,
M Murphy, J O'Shea, B Pickard, J Shaw and J Walker

Apologies: Councillors J Kirwin, J Montague and Westwater

EP1/22 Appointment of Substitute Members

Pursuant to the Council's constitution the appointment of the following substitute members was reported:-

Councillor J O'Shea for Councillor J Montague
Councillor J Shaw for Councillor J Kirwin

EP2/22 Declarations of Interest and Dispensations

There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.

EP3/22 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the previous meetings held on 22 March 2022 and 10 May 2022 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

EP4/22 Cycling Strategy

Nick Bryan, the Council's Highways Network Manager, attended the meeting to present details of the Council's development of a local cycling and walking infrastructure plan (LCWIP) and the opportunity to create low traffic neighbourhoods (LTNs).

The development of a LCWIP would support delivery of the Council's ambitions set out in the Local Plan, Transport Strategy, Cycling Strategy, Network Management Plan, the mayoral priority of improving footways and the Climate Emergency Plan. The Government had indicated that the development of LCWIPs would support a national 10 year strategic investment plan which would provide local authorities with more certainty in relation to funding. The national investment plan was to be delivered by Active Travel England who had been allocated a ring-fenced budget for walking and cycling infrastructure by the Department for Transport. The Government had also indicated that a failure to develop a LCWIP would inhibit bids for future investment. The Council had previously been successful in bidding for funding from Tranche 3 of the Active Travel Fund.

Development of the North Tyneside LCWIP would be guided by the "tube map" of strategic routes approved in 2015 as part of the Cycling Strategy and an appraisal tool developed by the Government to assess the viability of proposed routes. The sub-committee was invited

to comment on what criteria should be used to prioritise cycling and walking infrastructure projects for investment. Officers had identified the following criteria:

1. deliverability, in terms of the constraints that would have to be overcome to deliver the scheme;
2. value for money, ensuring a scheme would deliver a return on investment in terms of usage and reducing traffic;
3. access to alternatives, should schemes be prioritised in areas of low car ownership or where access to public transport is poor?; and
4. actual deprivation, the government had indicated it would give weighting to schemes in areas of deprivation.

In response members of the sub-committee raised the following points:

- a) the need to support investment in cycling infrastructure in areas of deprivation with access to cycle hire, loan, and storage facilities;
- b) the value in creating walking and cycling links to sites with the potential for economic development and tourism. Evidence indicated that whilst new routes were unlikely to create new opportunities for economic development they were key to linking existing areas;
- c) the need to maintain and enhance the quality of the existing infrastructure and complete those routes which at present end suddenly or in the wrong place;
- d) the benefits of investing in walking and cycling infrastructure needed to be demonstrated to the public with evidence for example has it led to a reduction in traffic congestion.
- e) the importance of linking corridors of employment. The Cobalt Business Park had very good links but other major retail and employment centres did not;
- f) the Metro system had been designed with bus interchanges but as bus services diminished the system should provide somewhere safe for travellers to store their cycles;
- g) the need for safe routes through major junctions, as the prospect of crossing busy junctions could discourage walking and cycling;
- h) local research was required to understand the demand or propensity for routes and how demand could be created by removing the barriers to walking and cycling;
- i) the philosophy behind the Council's strategy needed to be encouraging;
- j) routes to schools were very important as children had fewer alternative methods of transport;
- k) members highlighted the links between active travel and its benefits in terms of health and wellbeing; and
- l) it was suggested that the Council could work with the community and voluntary sector to deliver cycling support schemes such as loan facilities and repair skills workshops and with local businesses to promote the availability and benefits of e-bikes.

Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs) involved the designation of an area of streets where motor vehicle traffic was restricted to reduce the amount of through traffic and allowed the street space to be used safely by pedestrians and cyclists without segregation. They were best suited to grid style terraced estates where junctions could be repurposed to provide community open spaces. LTNs could be connected to form part of the wider network of walking and cycling routes. Active Travel England was seeking interest from local authorities to introduce 6 regional LTNs as exemplar projects and the Council had commenced a feasibility study.

Members of the sub-committee were invited to comment on what should be the key considerations in selecting areas to become a LTN. Officers had identified the following factors:

1. residents' support or opposition;
2. areas where school streets had been in operation, where similar restrictions on through traffic had been introduced outside schools. A LTN was seen as a development of these schemes;
3. where a LTN would contribute to the LCWIP network; and
4. areas where rat running and external parking pressures were an issue.

In response members of the sub-committee raised the following points:

- a) reference was made to the success of similar restrictions introduced on Edwards Road and Windsor Terrace, Whitley Bay in the 1980s;
- b) any schemes would need the support of local residents and any complaints from the drivers of motor vehicles that the restrictions would add marginally to their journey time should carry less weight; and
- c) if rat runs were occurring due to congestion at major junctions, then improvements to those junctions would need to be considered at the same time as the introduction of a LTN.

It was **agreed** that the comments set out above be referred to officers to be taken into account in developing a local walking and cycling infrastructure plan and in considering the feasibility of introducing low traffic neighbourhoods.

EP5/22 Work Programme 2022/23

The sub-committee were presented with a draft work programme for the year ahead. This had been prepared in consultation with the Chair and Deputy Chair and relevant officers based on outstanding scrutiny exercises carried over from 2021/22, topics identified by elected members who had been invited to suggest topics for examination by the overview and scrutiny committees and issues discussed at a meeting of scrutiny chairs and deputies held on 20 June 2022.

The Chair suggested that the sub-committee should focus its attention on one major topic at each meeting and, in fulfilling its role of reviewing and scrutinising the Cabinet, it should meet and ask questions of the Cabinet Members responsible for transport and an inclusive economy. The Chair also highlighted the increase in the costs of living as an important theme for the sub-committee to consider during the course of the year. Members of the sub-committee were invited to prioritise the topics included in the work programme and to suggest any additional topics for examination.

Members expressed their interest in the development of Town Centres and in particular the North Shields Cultural Quarter. It was suggested that if the sub-committee were to examine the financial support available from the Government in response to the rising cost of living, this work should be extended to include the wide range of support available from the Council.

The data on the state of the economy presented to each meeting of the sub-committee indicated that there was a gap between the number of vacancies and the numbers of people unemployed. It was suggested that the sub-committee should take a closer, in depth look at

the data to consider how the adult education and skills sectors could address the gap.

It was **agreed** that the Chair and Deputy Chair of the sub-committee give further consideration and determine the sub-committee's work programme in consultation with relevant officers and taking into account the comments set out above.

EP6/22 The State of the Economy

The sub-committee was presented with data which provided an indication of the state of the economy in North Tyneside. The data included the numbers of people claiming Universal Credit, the number of employments furloughed, the town centre vacancy rate, the number of job advertisements, new business start-ups, the number of companies in distress, out of work benefit claimants, levels of earnings and qualifications within the population and the number of apprenticeships.

In examining the data the sub-committee made the following comments and asked for the following supplementary information:

- a) the sub-committee had previously agreed that there was no longer a need to report on the 7 day Covid infection rate as this was no longer considered relevant to the state of the economy;
- b) members asked for any further information, research and analysis which may be available on how earnings in North Tyneside and the North East region compared less favourably to other regions in the country;
- c) Councillor Marshall asked for data relating to the number of Universal Credit claimants in Wallsend Ward. It was noted that this information was routinely provided to councillors as part of the 6 monthly ward briefings;
- d) it was suggested that the future reporting of the number of job advertisements provide a clear indication of which month the data related to;
- e) that future presentations include references to the sources of data where available so that members of the sub-committee may research the data in more detail; and
- f) the sub-committee commented on the worrying increase in the number of businesses in distress. They intended to meet with representatives of the business community to better understand the pressures caused by inflation and examine what the Council could do to support them. As part of this work the sub-committee queried whether the data relating to businesses in distress could be analysed by geography to identify areas of particular concern.

It was **agreed** that (1) the dashboard of data relating to the state of the economy be noted; and
(2) officers be requested to provide members of the sub-committee with the supplementary information set out above.