

Environment Select Committee

MINUTES OF THE ENVIRONMENT SELECT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 14 JANUARY 2025 AT COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNTY HALL, BYTHESEA ROAD, TROWBRIDGE, BA14 8JN.

Present:

Cllr Jerry Kunkler (Chairman), Cllr Richard Budden, Cllr Mel Jacob, Cllr Jacqui Lay, Cllr Ian McLennan, Cllr Dr Nick Murry, Cllr Tom Rounds, Cllr Iain Wallis, Cllr Derek Walters (Vice-Chairman), and Cllr Stuart Wheeler

Also Present:

Cllr Phil Alford, Cllr Nick Holder, Cllr Tamara Reay, Cllr Jonathon Seed (Virtual), and Cllr Graham Wright (Virtual)

1 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from:

- Cllr Tony Jackson
- Cllr Dr Brian Mathew MP
- Cllr Charles McGrath

2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes for the previous meeting held on 12 November 2024 were considered.

Following which, it was:

Resolved:

The Committee approved and signed the minutes of the previous meeting held on 12 November 2024 as a true and correct record.

3 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4 Chairman's Announcements

There were no specific Chairman's announcements.

5 **Public Participation**

The Chairman announced that a statement had been submitted by Mr Andrew Nicolson, Chair of Wiltshire Climate Alliance, regarding Agenda Item 6, Draft Local Transport Plan (LTP4). Mr Nicolson was invited to present his statement to the Committee.

6 **Draft Local Transport Plan (LTP4)**

Councillor Tamara Reay, Cabinet Member for Transport and Assets, alongside Samantha Howell, Director for Highways and Transport, Parvis Khansari, Director for Place, and Simon Lymn, Strategic Specialist for Highways and Transport, provided an overview of Wiltshire's fourth Local Transport Plan (LTP4), including a summary of the work undertaken to date to prepare the draft LTP4 for statutory consultation which runs until 24 January 2025.

The background to the report was briefly detailed as per Paragraphs 2 to 5 before officers highlighted the 6 key themes that had emerged from the comprehensive review that had been undertaken to inform the preparation of the draft LTP4 as per Paragraph 7 of the report. Officers then explained the structure of the document; namely, that LTP4 was broken down into three overarching documents with supporting appendices.

It was then emphasised that the draft LTP4 had been prepared following initial stakeholder consultation and engagement with key delivery partners and was intended to contribute to national, regional, and local priorities including the Wiltshire Council Business Plan, Local Plan, and Climate Strategy. Finally, officers noted that it was anticipated that the final LTP4 would be presented to Cabinet for adoption in Spring 2025, with a consultation report detailing all comments received and officer responses accompanying the document. However, Members were assured that advance work had already commenced and that a detailed delivery programme for next steps would be confirmed after all consultation responses had been received and fully considered.

During the discussion, points included:

- Officers highlighted that further analysis was needed in understanding the trends across the network and how employers are responding to working in a post-covid environment, such as hybrid working. It was also acknowledged that linking into new developments and local employment sites to ensure local sustainable growth was not within the direct remit of the LTP4, however highlighting those interdependencies and opportunities through a policy context would help to develop sustainable travel plans for businesses.
- With regard to analysing volumes of commuters between their place of residence and employment, officers noted that it was a correlation of lots of different elements, but agreed that it was something that needed to be monitored and understood as the LTP4 evolved over time. Furthermore, it highlighted the importance of ensuring adaptability in the subsequent

delivery plans and Members were assured that there would be opportunities to continue engaging with stakeholders.

- Members emphasised the importance of volunteers and volunteer transport in terms of ensuring that residents, particularly those in more rural areas, could access the services they needed and wished to visit on a more regular basis. Officers acknowledged this and noted that there was a strong working relationship with groups such as Community First.
- Vision Zero was raised, and officers explained that they were moving towards a Safer Systems approach which would work under the umbrella of the Road Safety Partnership to reduce the number of people killed or seriously injured on the network. Although it was recognised that Vision Zero was ambitious, regular meetings were being undertaken through the Partnership to work towards common objectives, and work was being undertaken directly on the network to help achieve this.
- It was explained that officers were moving forward with a detailed delivery plan in respect of the Freight Management Strategy, with mechanisms in place to control and influence driving behaviours. Officers noted that an annual survey was undertaken on the matter and then highlighted the importance of understanding key local issues through Local Highways and Footpath Improvement Groups (LHFIGs) and consultation activities.
- Members noted that although the plan was comprehensive, they felt that the length of the document was too dense and descriptive. It was acknowledged that the LTP4 was a strategic framework, however the detailed delivery plans were necessary to further understand and scrutinise the overall plan.
- Officers recognised that significant revisions could be made to the document once feedback from the consultations was understood, and reassured Members that comprehensive arrangements would be attached to each of the delivery plans and that these could be submitted to future Committee meetings to ensure scrutiny throughout the governance process. Furthermore, officers emphasised that evidence-based decisions and understanding that not one size would fit all in Wiltshire was key and noted that a Communications Plan would be made available to Members to set out how each of the key steps within the LTP4 would be monitored and evaluated against the plan's objectives.
- Comments were provided by the Climate Emergency Task Group, where it was felt that the slow, incremental introduction of interventions to reduce transport emissions was not enough and that greater transparency and clear recognition of the difficulties in addressing the challenges of decarbonisation was necessary. Officers emphasised that the LTP4 was a draft plan, and that further policies and delivery plans would follow, with many in active progression. Additionally, officers concurred that further improvements could be made in communicating progress and milestones, reflecting the gaps between funding by Central Government and delivery partners, and presenting the list of delivery plans in a more accessible format. Furthermore, Members were informed that the Council was recently shortlisted for a national away for decarbonisation in the highways supply chain.

- It was noted that officers had capitalised on the Restoring Your Railway Scheme and would be working with the players in the industry and Central Government on making progress with the priorities identified in the Wiltshire Rail Strategy.
- With regard to improving integration with public transport, it was highlighted that certain Park and Ride sites within Wiltshire were bucking the national trend, with patronage on sites increasing. It was noted that these sites would continue to be monitored to ensure that value for money was delivered.
- The introduction of electric buses to the South of the County was raised, and it was explained that the ZEBRA (Zero Emission Bus Regional Area) Scheme introduced by the Department for Transport (DfT), was targeted at more rural areas and had to be produced in conjunction with a bus company who would be responsible for delivering the service through out the network. As such, the opportunity was offered to all bus operators in Wiltshire with Go-Ahead in the South of the County being the most proactive and submitting a robust business case. However, it was emphasised that officers were keen to explore other opportunities across Wiltshire, including trialling an electric vehicle for Demand Responsive Transport, and would support any other bus operators who wished to capitalise on the ZEBRA scheme.

At the conclusion of the discussion, it was then:

Resolved:

The Committee:

- a) Noted the contents of the report which set out the progress made on the development of Wiltshire's fourth Local Transport Plan (LTP4) to date, including statutory consultation with the closing date of 24 January 2025.**
- b) Requested that the issues raised by the Committee were considered in any new draft e.g. how it integrated with the Local Plan, a list of delivery plans, the process of development, de-carbonisation trajectories, and how Vision Zero would be achieved through the Plan.**
- c) Requested a further update to the Committee detailing progress as well as the adoption and delivery of LPT4, including how the Select Committee would have oversight of the development and delivery of the Plan.**
- d) Requested that further consideration was given to how to make the Plan more accessible.**

Previous Investment in Carriageway Surfacing Activities

Councillor Nick Holder, Cabinet Member for Flooding, Street Scene, and Flooding, alongside Samantha Howell, Director for Highways and Transport, Parvis Khansari, Director for Place, and Dave Thomas, Head of Highways Assets and Commissioning, provided additional information of recent previous investment in carriageway surfacing activities by Area Board and road class.

Officers referenced Paragraphs 2 to 4 of the report where it was explained that following the previous meeting of the Committee held on 12 November 2024, Members had resolved to receive an additional report confirming Area Board spend by road categories and class, with Appendix A setting out the spend in the requested format. It was emphasised that the figures had not changed since the previous report and that officers took an evidence-led risk—based approach to asset management in line with agreed best practice and adopted policies.

During the discussion, points included:

- Officers noted that a report on the annual review of the service would be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee and would detail where additional funding over that provided by the Department for Transport (DfT) had been spent and the impacts of such.
- It was highlighted that significant improvements had been made with regard to engagement and ensuring open and transparent information. Furthermore, it was noted that a proportional approach was undertaken when considering delivery on the ground and data collection. It was further highlighted that all Area Boards were consulted in respect of local priorities which were then analysed, programmed, and completed where the intervention criteria had been met. Officers acknowledged that any outstanding actions would be considered, but that any further interventions were dependent on resources and other priority areas.
- Reference was made to Table C and investments in potholes, and officers emphasised the importance of reinforcing the use of the MyWilts app with residents and Town and Parish Councils to report defects. It was then highlighted that although an element of pothole repairs was reactive, the additional investment enabled officers to bring forward some scheduled repairs and utilise the Bobcat to fix both the pothole and its surrounding area to provide a better fix. Furthermore, the additional investment helped to develop better prevention techniques and a better reactive response.
- It was noted that major maintenance planned works had caused substantial disruption due to extensive utility operations which therefore had impacted on planned interventions, with the deterioration of the road continuing and exacerbated by the prolonged extreme weather conditions. As such, officers were anticipating pothole reporting to increase.
- It was emphasised that minimising the risk to road users with the resources available was a priority for the Council and when considering promoting active travel, particularly in more rural areas, it was important to ensure the correct routes for all cyclists be it recreational or utility. As

such, understanding the data was crucial in understanding how to make the network as user friendly as possible and ensuring that residents understood that it was one tool in the mechanism to deliver the Business Plan priorities.

- Officers acknowledged that they were aware of instances in which utility companies had failed to reinstate highways to an approved standard. Although officers were seeing an unprecedented demand in terms of access from utility companies on the network, Members were reassured that officers monitored any works and where an appropriate level of effective reinstatement had not been demonstrated, utility companies were held to account and in instances where there was an immediate safety risk, the Council would seek to undertake the repairs and then recharge the company responsible.
- It was noted that within the network inspection regime, officers were mindful of rural runoff in areas but emphasised that a proportional and evidence-based approach was necessary in terms of maintaining the network and repairing defects. It was further explained although repeat visits for potholes were monitored, it should be noted that some repeat visits were due to officers undertaking temporary repairs before returning to perform a more permanent repair.
- Officers agreed to provide a full written response setting out the methodology and frequency of road condition surveys.
- Officers and the Cabinet Member were thanked for the report and their hard work.

At the conclusion of the discussion, it was then:

Resolved:

The Committee:

- a) Noted the report.**
- b) Requested that future Highways Review of Service reports incorporated a detailed breakdown of expenditure information in its Highways Investment Plans.**
- c) Requested updates on the progress of preventing damage to roads, surveying roads, identifying repairs, and monitoring third part reinstatements.**

8 Update on Speed Limit Assessment Task Group Recommendations

Councillor Holder, Cabinet Member for Highways, Street Scene, and Flooding, alongside Councillor Jonathon Seed, Chairman of the Task Group, updated the Committee on the progress of implementing the recommendations of the Speed Limit Assessment Task Group.

Members were informed that work to review and action the eight accepted recommendations had been ongoing, with the current progress summarised in Appendix A to the report. Specific reference was made to Paragraphs 2.14 to 2.19, and 3.24 of Appendix B, and the input of local communities in the Speed Limit Assessment process. It was emphasised that the review would ensure that officers were not wholly relying on accident figures to trigger Speed Limit Assessments, but instead would take a more holistic approach.

During the discussion, points included:

- Members noted that Highways Officers' experience and expertise along with the input of local communities and other road users should be trusted to produce appropriate speed limits for roads.
- The use of more predictive measures such as AI systems were raised, and officers confirmed that such measures were being considered, but highlighted that the technology was still in its infancy, therefore further reviews on how it would improve operations was necessary.
- Members were reassured that although Atkins undertook the assessments and provided reports to officers, the recommendations to either change or not change speed limit was determined by Wiltshire Council officers. It was acknowledged that improved communications on the process were needed and that relevant officers needed to be further empowered to have confidence in their own experience and expertise to make decisions.
- It was confirmed that Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs) and the different types of road users were taken into account when undertaking Speed Limit Assessments.
- Thanks were given to the Chair of the Task Group and Highways Officers for their continued hard work.

At the conclusion of the discussion, it was then:

Resolved:

The Committee:

- a) Noted the report.**
- b) Requested that the Select Committee was updated on the implementation of the new policy and its impact in 18 months' time.**

9 Wiltshire Council Housing Board Annual Report 2023/2024

Councillor Phil Alford, Cabinet Member for Housing, alongside James Barra, Director for Assets, and Nick Darbyshire, Head of Strategic Assets Maintenance and Facilities Management, updated the Committee on the activities of Wiltshire Council's Housing Board (WCHB) between October 2023 and November 2024, and provided an overview of the activities and performance across the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) service.

Reference was made to Paragraph 18 of the report with each of the key achievements over the past 12 months briefly detailed, before listing some of the challenges being faced currently and expected for the future, such as cost-of-living pressures and inflation. It was further explained that from April 2024, the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) had introduced an inspection regime for all social landlords based on a revised set of 'Consumer Standards'. As such, a new regulatory environment had been created for officers, and therefore Members were assured that a lot of work was being undertaken to prepare for any future inspections.

During the discussion, points included:

- Members raised Paragraph 28 to 29 of the report, and queried how many Council owned properties had had their EPC (Energy Performance Certificates) upgraded. Officers explained that there were not EPCs in place for all properties, therefore full stock condition surveys were being undertaken to provide exact data to model from. However, it was highlighted that approximately over the last 4-5 years, 600 component interventions had been undertaken on a phased retrofit programme. As such, officers would soon be able to report on the statistics for both the impact of the EPCs and the componentry that would form part of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Scorecard in the coming months.
- It was further noted that officers were continuing to review and develop improved metrics to evaluate performance with regard to component installations, but that the aim to have all properties with a minimum of an EPC B had not changed. Furthermore, it was confirmed that through the Acquisition Programme, all new properties being built would be carbon zero, but that there were challenges when considering the retrofitting of second-hand stock.
- It was explained that the Build Programme was a mix of housing already in the market, second hand stock, new builds both through, and not through, Section 106 agreements, modular construction homes, and trials in traditional builds to cover the breadth of the market in terms of construction types. Furthermore, property sizes were based on the need of the local area, therefore officers were continuing different approaches to cater for lots of different property sizes across the programme.
- It was noted that for the delivery of work programmes, there was a mixed economy, meaning that there were both Council employed trade teams, but also a reliance on external contractors for servicing activities. As such, the Council was constantly in a position of having to procure different contracts, with examples being given of either refreshing services, ensuring a diverse portfolio of contracts to minimise the risk of single points of failure, and challenges faced within the operating environment such as financial constraints and attracting and employing suitable and competent staff. Following from this, Members were informed that officers were looking to develop Apprenticeship Schemes and to raise the external profile of the services to encourage more people to consider a career in social housing.
- Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM) were raised and Members queried how to further improve these. Officers referred to the Table in Paragraph

36 of the report which demonstrated that for many of the scores the Council were either at or above the national benchmark criteria. It was also highlighted that there was a distinction between social housing norms in comparison to the service-based commercial sector, and that HRAs had substantially more resources focussed on customer interfaces. Despite this, officers highlighted Paragraph 18 vii of the report and noted the 100% compliance in the handling of complaints through the new regulatory framework. Furthermore, officers were continuing to improve and refine the level and quality of engagement with residents through regular newsletters and the introduction of the iHousing Portal to improve accessibility to the service. In addition, resources had been put ring fenced to recruit a Customer Experience Manager to mirror best practice in the sector by reinforcing positive messaging, good customer journeys and experiences, and further informing improvement processes.

At the conclusion of the discussion, it was then:

Resolved:

The Committee:

- a) **Noted the report.**
- b) **Requested that the next Housing Board Annual Report is received by the Select Committee.**

10 **Cabinet Member Update**

Verbal updates were provided by Councillor Nick Holder, Cabinet Member for Highways, Street Scene, and Flooding, Councillor Tamara Reay, Cabinet Member for Transport and Assets, and Councillor Phil Alford, Cabinet Member for Housing.

Highways, Street Scene, and Flooding

Cllr Holder provided brief updates on the Winter Resilience Programme, flood resilience activities, and funding for the financial year 2025-26.

The Highways Team were congratulated for their work in keeping the roads open in recent weeks as a result of the extreme weather conditions, with three teams being deployed each night to undertake reactive works. Members were asked to encourage Town and Parish Councils to work with Flood Working Groups to support and advise residents on long and short-term flood resilience. It was highlighted that historically, grants had been available for householders and businesses affected by flooding, however these same grants were not available at the current time. Therefore, Members were encouraged to sign-post members of the public to the Council if they needed advice on preventative measures that could be undertaken to protect their households.

Finally, it was noted that confirmation of the final settlement for highways funding for the financial year 2025-26 was still awaited. As additional investment had been received for the year 2024-25, works could continue, but clarity was needed on the final settlement to inform future plans and strategies.

Transport and Assets

Cllr Reay provided brief updates on the delivery plans following from the Draft Local Transport Plan 4 (LTP4), Demand Responsive Transport (DRT), Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI), and Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWHIPs).

It was noted that the Passenger Transport and Bus Service Improvement Plan had been awarded £7m which would allow for officers to bring enhancements to the service and further infrastructure including stops, shelters, and improved accessibility. The continued success of the DRT scheme was raised, and Members were informed that in December 2024, patronage had increased by 15% compared to December 2023. As such, officers were continuing to improve the operational and financial sustainability of the service and to seek for opportunities for other communities to have access to similar services.

Members were informed that the LEVI had received its initial funding from the Department for Transport (DfT), with LEVI Officers in place and undertaking assessments for opportunities and needs, with a start point of focussing on properties that do not have access to off street parking. Finally, it was noted that the Salisbury, Chippenham, Devizes, and Trowbridge LCWIPs had been completed and approved, with others in draft form following public consultation. Thanks were given to all Parish and Town Councils that had completed the various surveys.

Housing

Cllr Alford acknowledged the Rough Sleeper and Housing Team and thanked all officers for their hard work in recent weeks.

Resolved:

The Committee noted the Cabinet Member updates.

11 **Forward Work Programme**

The Committee received the Forward Work Programme for consideration.

Following which, it was:

Resolved:

The Committee approved the Forward Work Programme.

12 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

13 **Date of Next Meeting**

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 4 March 2025.

(Duration of meeting: 10.30 am - 1.00 pm)

The Officer who has produced these minutes is Ellen Ghey - Democratic Services
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