

Economy, Employment and Skills Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 9 February 2011

Present:

Councillor Cameron – In the Chair
Councillors Barrett, Bethell, Chamberlain, Commons, Green, Reid, Richards, Smitheman and Swannick

Councillor Ali, Executive Member for Employment and Skills
Councillor N Murphy, Executive Member for Environment
Councillor D Royle, Assistant Executive Member for Environment

Apologies:

Councillor Walters

EES/11/04 Urgent Business

Decision

To note the Chair's decision to receive the report on Greater Manchester's Third Local Transport Plan (LTP3) as urgent business.

EES/11/05 Minutes

Decision:

To agree the minutes the meeting on 12 January 2011 as a correct record.

EES/11/06 Information and Overview Report

A report of the Governance and Scrutiny Support Unit was submitted providing information about the Committee's work programme and relevant issues affecting the Committee's remit. Members were asked to note the responses to the Committee's previous recommendations and agree the draft work programme.

Members noted that an extra meeting of the Committee had been arranged for 22 February 2011 to consider the business plans.

Decision:

1. To note the responses to the Committees previous recommendations.
2. To agree the draft work programme, and to note the additional meeting of the Committee.

EES/11/07 Work and Skills – Performance Indicators

A report of the Regeneration Manager, Employment and Skills, was submitted to the Committee on the performance of the current Local Area Indicators related to the proportion of people qualified to level 2, 3 and 4. The Regeneration Manager explained that there was a positive trend for the numbers of Manchester residents qualified to all three levels since 2001 but the data was based on a sample of less than 1% of the total national working age population and as such, the reliability of the data was limited.

The Committee discussed the figures in the report, which showed an increase in the number of apprenticeships. A member was concerned that these figures were not backed up in practice by greater accessibility to schemes. Members were also concerned that there was no information on the type of apprenticeships, which could vary in quality according to pay and long term employment prospects. The Regeneration Manager said the National Apprentice Service (NAS) provided the figures in the report. The Committee noted that there was an item on the agenda for the March meeting for which representatives from NAS would be invited, and asked for the scope of this item to include a breakdown of the figures by type of apprenticeship.

A member asked what impact the end of the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) would have on the number of residents achieving levels 3 and 4 qualifications. The Regeneration Manager said a mapping exercise of the effects on participation rates was being undertaken. Members asked for the results of this exercise to be reported to a future meeting of the Committee.

The Regeneration Manager explained that the range of indicators in the Local Area Agreement were to be abolished. As yet, a replacement performance framework had not been established but it was currently being developed with local partners to monitor performance in delivering the revised Community Strategy. The new Performance Framework would give the Council the freedom to develop the most appropriate and relevant indicators for Manchester, which will specifically include fewer indicators shared with key partners such as Job Centre Plus. Members asked for the development of the monitoring framework to be reported back to a future meeting of the Committee when there were more details available.

The Committee discussed the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programme, the funding of which was to be reduced in the future. This concerned members given that the number of courses available could not meet current demand. The Regeneration Manager said that it was possible there would be funding available in the new government Work Programme scheme that could be used for ESOL. If this were a viable option, it would be limited by the terms of the scheme to residents receiving benefits.

Decision:

1. To request that the report for the March meeting of the Committee on the National Apprentice Service include figures for the types of apprenticeships available in Manchester.

2. To request that the results of the exercise to map the impact of the end of the Educational Maintenance Allowance be reported to a future meeting of the Committee.

EES/11/08 Greater Manchester's Third Local Transport Plan (LTP3) – The Manchester Implementation Plan

A report of the Chief Executive was submitted for consideration. This report gave an update of progress on the development of the Local Transport Plan (LTP3) and an overview of the responses to the consultation on the LTP3 strategy. The Committee was invited to comment on the report ahead of its submission to the Executive on 16 February. The Executive were asked to note the information included in the report, and delegate authority to approve the final Manchester Implementation Plan and local transport spending programme.

The Deputy Head of Transport informed members that this report updated the Committee and the Executive on the progress in preparing Manchester's Implementation Plan as part of the LTP3 process. The Implementation Plan will set out the Council's local transport policies and proposals over the next four years together with an explanation on how these will be delivered, monitored and reviewed to support the overall aims and objectives of LTP3. He also informed members that funding for local transport schemes would be substantially reduced in coming years although the exact amount of available funding was not yet known. The Implementation Plan would be developed to reflect the level of available funding for transport schemes and would be published by 1 April 2011.

The Committee discussed the difficulties the financial constraints placed on delivering the Implementation Plan. A member suggested that the LTP3 should remain an ambitious document describing what was needed from the transport infrastructure across the region, taking account of other regional infrastructure developments such as Airport City. The Implementation Plan should be a plan of what the Council could realistically expect to be able to achieve under the current financial circumstances. The Deputy Head of Transport agreed that under the circumstances currently facing the Council, it was paramount to have a robust strategy, as the LTP3 formed the framework for all future funding bids.

A member was concerned that if the financial constraints only enabled the funding of maintenance programmes, and no further road improvement schemes, there would be a negative impact on programmes to improve road safety. The Deputy Head of Transport agreed that investment in road safety measures over the preceding years had been successful in reducing the number of serious injuries and deaths. The Executive Member for Environment agreed, and emphasised that the financial constraints meant that difficult choices were being made across the Council. He added that there was a possibility that some of the revenue from the increase in parking charges could be used for road safety measures. Members were very concerned about the impact of this reduction in funding and agreed to ask the Executive to prioritise funding for these schemes.

The Committee discussed a petition asking for the Council to lower the default speed

limit in residential areas from 30mph to 20mph. The Executive Member for Environment said that a 20mph speed limit across the city would be difficult to enforce and would require significant amount of resources to fund. A member asked whether asking schools to pay for road safety measures had been considered. The Executive Member for Environment said although it was not a primary focus it had not been ruled out.

A member asked whether the closure of Mosley Street Metrolink Station proposed by the Greater Manchester Integrated Transport Authority (GMITA) would save money. The Deputy Head of Transport said the proposal to close the station was based on the increased likelihood of bottleneck of trams at the station after the forthcoming expansion of the network was completed. He explained that the Council had no plans to challenge the proposal as long as the site is reinstated to a high standard and proposals for electronic real time information displays to direct people to the nearest services were implemented.

A member asked whether "Smart Travel" would be a system similar to the Oyster Card system in London. The Deputy Head of Transport affirmed this and explained that Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Executive (GMPTE) planned to introduce a smart card system on the Metrolink within the next 18 months. Once established, this product would form a platform for a future roll out on the bus and rail networks. One of the significant challenges to implementing this system was the number of different bus and rail operators in Manchester, and the need to incorporate their individual pricing and ticketing systems on one smart card system. Other places that had introduced similar systems, such as Nottingham had only one or two operators, significantly reducing the complexity of the system needed.

The Committee discussed how areas affected by the extended Metrolink network were being developed in other ways. The Deputy Head of Transport said a strategy document had been produced identifying how different agencies work together to ensure that local areas benefit from the extension, including supporting people in the areas to access jobs and supporting businesses to capitalise on the changes. He gave the example of a programme in Wythenshawe in which a dedicated travel adviser was employed at the Job Centre Plus to assist people in accessing transport when it affects their ability to work, for example through paying for transport to an interview, or for the first week of work until they are paid.

Members requested that the draft Manchester Implementation Plan was reported to the Committee before it was agreed. The Committee agreed to support the recommendations to the Executive.

Decision:

1. To note the progress made in recent years in reducing the number of people, especially children, killed and seriously injured on Manchester's roads through measures funded from the Local Transport Plan.
2. To draw the Executive's attention to the apparent total lack of funding for minor works for road safety measures for the forthcoming year and request that it explores alternative sources of funding for such measures.

3. To support the recommendations that the Executive:
 - Notes the requirement to publish an Implementation Plan and offer any comments that they are minded to make on the draft.
 - Delegate authority to the Chief Executive and the City Treasurer, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, the Executive Member for Finance, the Executive Member for Environment and the Executive Member for Neighbourhood Services, to approve the local transport spending programme to be submitted to GMITA/GMPTE
 - Delegate authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Executive Member for the Environment, to approve the final Manchester Implementation Plan.