

Overview & Scrutiny Management Board

8 July 2020

Public Forum



Questions

Ref	Name	Agenda item	Page No.
Q1	Joanna Booth	15 - Performance Report Q4	2
Q2	Suzanne Audrey	5 - Public Forum	2
Q3	Suzanne Audrey	7 – City Leap	3
Q4	Cllr Clive Stevens	8 – Council Tax Reduction Scheme	4

Statements and Petitions

Ref	Name	Agenda item	Page No.
S1	David Redgewell, South West Transport Network and Railfuture Severnside	12 – WECA Forward Plan	5



Questions

Q1: Joanna Booth

In the Performance Report published for the OSMB meeting, the text to item:

WC4 BCP533 Increase the percentage of people who feel they can influence local decisions (QoL) states the following: "the Council is planning to develop additional Deliberative Democracy work in 2020/21 to further strengthen public engagement."

Residents already know about the £90,000 paid to Impact Social for monitoring social media (with no clear GDPR specification), and the £8000 a year to Delib Democracy for a platform for the Citizens Panel. In addition to the Quality of Life Survey, would you please let me know:

1. What is the additional Deliberative Democracy work in 2020/21?
2. Whether the Impact Social contract is being cancelled or renewed in September 2020?

You can see further information about Impact Social at this link: <https://medium.com/@jo.stillawake/has-the-bristol-mayor-learnt-the-wrong-lessons-from-cambridge-analytica-a17b26421ff1>

Answer (Mayor's Office)

1. That work is in process and any progress will report to cabinet
2. The insight social contract is for internal analysis and will be reviewed by the relevant departments.

Q2: Suzanne Audrey

Papers for OSMB

Background

For the public forum of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board meeting on the 8 July, it originally stated that written questions must be received at the latest by 5 pm on Thursday 2 July. At the same time, the agenda indicated reports relating to City Leap and the Council Tax Reduction Scheme would be made available on publication of Cabinet Papers on 6 July 2020. After concerns were raised, an extension was granted to allow questions up until 5pm on 7 July 2020.

The Bundred Report (2017) raised concerns about the accountability of officers to Members other than the Mayor and Cabinet and stressed their responsibilities to the whole Council. The Mayor accepted all the recommendations of that report including the recommendation that relevant officers be reminded of their responsibilities to backbench and Opposition Members.

Question

Please can you explain why papers for the agenda of OSMB meetings are frequently noted as being published in time of the following Cabinet meeting and consequently are not available until after the date when members of the public are required to submit their questions?

Answer (Chair of OSMB)

Papers for cabinet are published 5 working days before the cabinet meeting.

If OSM is to happen before the cabinet meeting it is impossible for papers to be available in time to be published with the proper notice. We have requested early release of papers to help us in this process but have been told that is not possible,

I recognise that this has to be a flexible process. We are in unusual circumstances, so I accept that preparing reports is more challenging, and we always acknowledged that the financial papers for this meeting were going to be brought at short notice. The additional government funding announced last week is clearly most welcome but meant the report had to be completely rewritten.

However, other reports must have been available earlier but were not released to us.

The only way to mitigate the problem is to hold OSM the day before the cabinet meeting reducing the delay in papers to hours rather than 4 days+.

However, Officers are needed to be able to attend out meetings and we have to fit in with their availability. A later meeting was not possible on this occasion.

Proper scrutiny requires members and the public to have time to read and understand papers and ask questions. However only the administration can decide whether it wishes to facilitate that process or frustrate it.

Q3: Suzanne Audrey

City Leap

With regard to the City Leap procurement process, the presentation indicates:

As at 31 March 2020: £4.2m spent on procurement of a City Leap partnership since November 2018.

It is estimated a further £2.3m will be required leading up to Contract Award, including 10% contingency

Total estimated spend of £6.5m by Contract Award.

To someone without expertise in procurement, this seems a lot of money. I presume OSMB have been given access to a breakdown of the costs to date.

Question: Please can you comment on whether this procurement process represents good value for money?

Answer 1 (BCC Officers)

City Leap is a highly innovative and ground-breaking initiative which seeks to transform Bristol's energy system by delivering £1bn of investment into low carbon energy projects to enable Bristol to become the UK's first carbon neutral city by 2030.

The innovative nature of this project means that the process to shape the procurement for a strategic partner for City Leap has been complex and has required extensive specialist legal, financial and commercial expertise and advice in order to develop a robust and comprehensive suite of procurement documentation, which aims to secure the best possible outcome to the City Leap procurement and minimise risk.

Securing this expertise has required significant investment from the council to get to this stage and requires further investment to bring it to a conclusion, but a successful future partnership will deliver a level of investment in Bristol, as well as social, environmental and economic benefits, that far outweigh this initial investment.

Answer 2 (Chair of OSMB)

OSM has no more information than is available to members of the public in the cabinet report. If City leap delivers all that it is intended to, then the procurement cost would be a very small proportion of the capital raised, but there are too many unknowns and I do not believe scrutiny can answer your question.

Q4: Cllr Clive Stevens

Council Tax Reduction Scheme

Dear OSMB - thank you for extending the deadline for public forum.

I am pleased to see that the Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) remains fully funded. I suspect that the estimates will be blown out the water by the impact of Covid-19 but it makes a fully funded scheme even more important to protect low earners.

My question to OSMB is about the administration costs of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and “inefficiencies” caused by the introduction of Universal Credit. When I last spoke to officers on this subject (late 2019) they explained that the Government was cutting the funding to BCC for administration of benefits. This meant that proportionately the administration costs of Council Tax Reduction were going up (they were shared across the old benefits system).

I think it would be worth OSMB (and Cabinet) realising the implications for the future and considering what changes should be made to CTRS that minimally impact people but help reduce administration costs. Any changes need to be consulted upon and so the leadtime is quite substantial. **If you agree with this request, could you ask officers please to prepare a summary for an appropriate future meeting?**

Answer (BCC Officers)

Cllr Stevens is correct in that CTR funding by MHCLG for LA Benefits Services, including Bristol, has reduced over the years (as shown below) but this is broadly in line (pre COVID) with decreases in both caseload and processing numbers.

Financial Year	MHCLG funding £	Caseload (at end of year)	No of new claims/changes processed
2016/17		37708	96094
2017/18	656,573	36312	87564
2018/19	625,539	35246	89774
2019/20	599,269	34372	82778
2020/21	595,492	35428 (to date)	

However this does not reflect the complexity of processing CTR changes of circumstance associated with Universal Credit (UC) amendments since its introduction and as discussed with Cllr Stevens late last year.

In addition there has been a large improvement in the automation rate in UC CTR changes since this was last discussed.

Statements

S1: David Redgewell

We would like to put on record are thanks to all public transport workers, trade unions, First Group bus and rail divisions, Stagecoach West and HCT group for their work in keeping the Bristol and Bath city region moving. We also want to thank the Mayor, Metro Mayor and Peter Mann and his team in particular.

With the Department for Transport covid 19 bus operators grant payment to WECA and transport operators every 4 weeks, we are concerned about the directive to provide bus services between 7am and 7.30 pm Monday to Friday.

With the opening up of the leisure and tourism economy the Secretary of State now wants to see this extended to evening and weekend services from 4th July 2020.

However, with the tourist industry reopening in Bath Somerset and the Bristol city region will BANES, Bristol City Council, South Gloucestershire Council and the WECA mayoral transport authority protect bus stops around public houses and restaurants especially when there are tables and chairs outside so that pavements can be kept clear for the benefit of public transport users and those with disabilities.

We are concerned about controlling the area around the public transport interchange in Dorchester street and Brunel Square. We support the social distancing measures in Bath bus and railway stations, around local bus stops and the return of National Express coach services as well as improved priorities for disabled passengers. We also support social distancing measures around Clifton Down shopping centre, Whiteladies Road, Cabot Circus, Broadmead, Bedminster, Fishponds, Staple Hill, Knowle, Gloucester Road, the city centre and the Harbourside.

Social distancing also applies to Keynsham town centre, Radstock town centre, Paulton and Midsomer Norton, Downend, Kingswood, Westbury on Trym, St George, Gloucester Road, Stapleton Road and Clifton village. Streets in these town centres must be kept clear from people drinking at tables blocking pavements.

On public transport we are still concerned about the WECA mayoral transport authority not restarting the following bus services under the covid 19 bus operators grant:-

Route 18 - Bath Spa Bus and Coach station to Saltford, Keynsham, Oldland Common, North Common, Warmley, Kingswood, Hillfields Staple Hill, Downend, UWE bus station, Bristol Parkway and Cribbs Causeway bus station.

Route 37 - Bath Spa bus and coach station, Weston, RUH back entrance, Kelson, Bitton, Longwell Green, Hanham, St George, Lawrence Hill, station and Bristol bus and coach station.

Route 19 evening service - Bath Spa bus station to Weston, RUH back entrance, Kelston, Bitton, Cadbury Heath, Warmley, Kingswood, Hillfields, Staple Hill, Downend, UWE bus station, Bristol Parkway station and Cribbs Causeway bus station.

Route 178 - Radstock, Midsomer Norton, Paulton, Clutton, Pensford, Whitchurch, Knowle, Bristol Temple Meads station and Bristol bus station.

There is still no weekend service 96 from Brislington to Hengrove hospital in south Bristol to connect with buses from Bath and Keynsham at Brislington and for buses from the A37 villages at Knowle. This is the main community hospital serving North East Somerset.

Currently there are no evening services on the T2 Bristol bus station, Gloucester Road, Horfield, Filton, Cribbs Causeway bus station with connections from Severnside to Thornbury for evening and night workers or the Y2 service between Bristol bus station, Eastville, Fishponds, Downend, Yate and Chipping Sodbury.

We would like to know why WECA failed to bid for rural bus service grants especially with the need to improve public transport in rural areas in North East Somerset. and South Gloucestershire.

We are very concerned about the lack of progress in North Somerset Council joining the West of England combined authority for the mayoral election in 2021.

If First cannot provide these services perhaps small bus operators could work under contract to the WECA mayoral transport authority or be sub contracted by First group.

Currently, services can only operate with 10 or 11 passengers and 1 wheelchair on a single decker bus and 20 21 on double decker buses plus wheelchair space, 45 on a 3 car train on First group Great Western Railway Severn beach line services, 60 on an intercity train or between 20 and 14 on an express Coach.

We would like to see more enforcement of face coverings by the Avon and Somerset police, Bristol Port Police and the British Transport Police to make sure that passengers are social distancing on the region public transport network with clear messaging from the Department for Transport.

It is very disappointing that many bus services are not being restored by the WECA mayoral transport authority from 5th July 2020 so can this be raised with them as a matter of urgency.

On the railways we welcome train service extension to Westbury via Keynsham, Oldfield Park, Bath Spa, Freshford, Avoncliffe, Bradford on Avon, Trowbridge, and Westbury.

We support the proposed stations at Charfield, St Anne's Park and Saltford. Wiltshire County Council are looking at stations for Corsham and Royal Wootton Bassett. We must also ask the Department for Transport to stop cutting up HST rolling stock which are urgently required for social distancing on trunk rail services from the South West via Bristol Temple Meads and Bristol Parkway to Birmingham New Street, the Midlands, Manchester, the North East and Scotland.

We also welcome progress on Patchway station lifts and Portway Parkway station. The needs of disabled and blind people need to be addressed when dealing with social distancing measures if we are to have outdoor table service in the street especially within the Bristol and Bath city region.

On Bristol Temple Meads we are concerned about the lack of progress on the public transport interchanges for buses, ferries and the future light rail routes. There is a need for progress on the extra platform in the Midlands train shed, electrification of the Western routes from Chippenham to Bristol Temple Meads, Bristol Parkway and Patchway.

We welcome the works on the Eastern

Entrance and the station roof but works on and shopping centre facilities, waiting rooms, buffets and restaurants are still required.

Hotels are needed at Temple Meads - a railway station that should have the facilities of Leeds, Birmingham Grand Central, London Paddington, Edinburgh Waverley, Aberdeen and Cardiff Central where construction is underway. We need design proposals from the Western Gateway Transport Board and the South West Transport Board. A transport board for the South West of England similar to the Midlands Engine and the Northern Power House.

We welcome the restarting of the Megabus and National Express Coach services. We ask the WECA mayoral transport authority and Bristol City Council to investigate the provision of a coach service by Flix bus of Germany with permission from Bristol City Council to run coach services to London Victoria coach station and Luton from Bristol Bond Street working with South Gloucestershire Council to provide a stop from the UWE coach station.

We also welcome the review of public toilets in Bath and North East Somerset, Bristol City Council, North Somerset and the South Gloucestershire Council areas but would like to see public toilets at Avon Street coach station and Bristol Harbourside. We need to look at any extra money for public toilets from central government.

David Redgewell for South West Transport Network and Railfuture Severnside