

Ref: RDB/PM/RP/09.09.2014

26<sup>th</sup> September 2014

Councillor Ramesh Patel,  
Cabinet Member for Transport, Planning & Sustainability,  
County Hall,  
Atlantic Wharf,  
Cardiff,  
CF10 4UW.



Dear Councillor Patel,

### **Environmental Scrutiny Committee – 9<sup>th</sup> September 2014**

On behalf of the Environmental Scrutiny Committee I would like to thank you and the officers for attending the Committee meeting on Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> September 2014. The meeting considered items titled 'Transport Strategy (Cardiff Local Transport Plan 2015 to 2020)', 'Highway Asset Investment Strategy' and 'Cabinet response to the report of the Environmental Scrutiny Committee entitled 'Cycling in Cardiff's Parks'. All of these fall within your portfolio of responsibility. The comments and observations made by Members following these items are set out in this letter.

### **Transport Strategy (Cardiff Local Transport Plan 2015 to 2020)**

- The Committee supports and endorses the work undertaken by yourself and the officers to develop the Local Transport Plan. They feel that it accurately sets out a structure which can be used to push forward Cardiff's transport priorities.
- Members acknowledge that the Local Transport Plan in its current format is not designed to provide a detailed summary of the major transport projects, for example, it does not provide a comprehensive breakdown like the Cardiff Capital Region Metro. Members understand the reasons for the limitations of the document, i.e. that funding is ultimately outside of the control of the Council, however, they would still like a greater understanding of how and when these projects will be delivered.

Therefore, they would be grateful if you would contact Welsh Government to ask for greater clarification of the timescale and funding options for the projects.

- The Committee asks that any new major transport schemes that are proposed by Cardiff Council and the Welsh Government are properly managed with a sensitive progression of schemes that involves proper consultation and reporting phases. The progression of such schemes should pay due heed to property owners with any eventual compensation related payment based on pre blight values. Any compensation criteria and values set should be based on the High Speed Rail 2 'Under Exceptional Hardship Scheme'.
- Members feel that the Council should, in the absence of an adopted Local Development Plan, take every practical step to protect potential future rapid transport alignments. In doing this they should do all that they can to protect property owners in and around the potential future route. The Committee acknowledges that this could prove to be a difficult task; however, it is something which needs to be considered and planned for well in advance of any potential event.
- Members were pleased to note that rail journeys into the city centre have increased in recent years while the number of similar car journeys has reduced. They believe that this is a very encouraging trend.
- The Committee will be undertaking a joint scrutiny exercise with the Economy & Culture Scrutiny Committee to look at the proposed options for the new integrated transport hub. It is planned that this will take place during late October and early November 2014. I will provide you with details of the format, terms or reference and potential dates when they are available.
- The Committee noted that it will be very important to link the future Community Infrastructure Levy funding into the proposals made in the Local Transport Plan.

- Many of the proposed schemes within the Local Transport Plan appear to have been priced despite the greater financial pressures that the Council is experiencing. Members would be interested in finding out how, given Cardiff's limited financial resources, schemes will be prioritised for delivery, for example, where would implementing 59 school safety zones be in terms of priority? The Committee notes the medium to long term costings and looks forward to future scrutiny of the Local Transport Plan in future years.

### **Highway Asset Investment Strategy**

- The Committee noted that the overall replacement cost of the Highway Asset was somewhere in the region of £2.8 billion to £3 billion. They were also informed that the repair backlog on its own is £320 million which equates to approximately a third of the Council's gross annual expenditure. Despite an explanation as to how the highway asset can be maintained at steady state level for £7,320,000 per annum the Members struggled with the disparity between the scale of the figures. They feel that further clarification is required as to how much investment is actually required to maintain Cardiff's highway asset in a steady state. Failure to understand the real costs will result in a steady deterioration of the highway asset which would then become prohibitively expensive to maintain or replace.
- Members note that the Local Government Borrowing Initiative Funding ends in March 2015. The Committee feels that the Council urgently needs to identify alternative funding sources to replace the lost monies. This is particularly relevant in the longer term as Cardiff's LDP predicts that new houses and industrial developments will force an increase in the size of the highway asset. Sources such as the Community Infrastructure Levy need to be considered, however, as this limited pool of funding will be subject to many competing wants it is felt that other options have to be explored.

- The report included a table which illustrated in detail the breakdown of the highway asset by asset group. This table provided a value to reflect the distance or quantity of each type of asset group; these were supported by a data confidence column which gave descriptions of high, medium or low to reflect how confident the Council are of the information. Members were concerned that certain classes of asset were supported by a low confidence value, for example, they didn't accurately know how many seats or bins formed a part of the highway asset. The Committee understand that there are historical reasons for not knowing exact detail on each asset group, however, at a financially difficult time when alternative delivery options are being considered it is felt that we should have a better understanding of exactly what we manage. This lack of accurate data could undermine the budget setting process and make it difficult to create meaningful service specifications or service level agreements. The Committee would, therefore, ask that a detailed audit is undertaken in the near future to improve understanding of the low confidence asset groups.
- During the meeting a comment was made that a large number of signs on Cardiff's highway asset were not required, however, they created a maintenance liability. Members feel that there should be a review of street signs and when signs are identified that are no longer required they should be recycled to generate an income.
- Members noted the difference between capital and revenue funding in the highway asset investment strategy. They felt that there were circumstances where the difference between capital and revenue funding became blurred, for example, at what point does patching a stretch of the highway asset become resurfacing of the road? The Committee feel that they need further clarification on the difference between the two.
- The Committee agree that adopting the steady state funding approach is the best way forward for Cardiff in the current financial climate. The managed decline approach would result in revenue budgets having to

increase significantly over time, while the enhanced / ideal state would require significant capital investment in the short term. Adopting the steady state approach would provide a balance between the other options which Members feel would create a suitable financial and political solution. The Committee, therefore, endorse the steady state funding approach.

- Members noted that the idea of relaxing highway maintenance criteria had been discussed at previous meetings. This was identified as a way to potentially stretch the budget while remaining within nationally acceptable highway maintenance tolerances, for example, increasing the depth at which a highway defect needs to be repaired would mean that in the short term fewer repairs would be required. The Committee would ask that the highway maintenance repair criteria is reviewed to establish if it could deliver savings while meeting nationally acceptable highway maintenance repair standards.
- Members were concerned at the frequency with which some foot paths are maintained in Cardiff. In effect large sections of the footway are being managed into decline as little or no maintenance is being planned or delivered. The Committee felt that taking such an approach leaves the Council vulnerable to accident claims made under section 58 of the Highways Act 1980. In an effort to combat this type of claim Members would welcome an increased investment into replacing Cardiff's slab based footway with bitumen based alternatives.
- The Committee were concerned that there was only a small budget to support the maintenance of major assets such as bridges in Cardiff. In addition to this there was little if any funding to cover the cost of the major failure of a large capital item, for example, a city centre bridge. Members feel that the Council should review how it would deal with such a large failure and how this would be addressed financially.
- Members welcome the longer term planning approach proposed in the Highway Asset Investment Strategy. They endorse this approach over

the short term reactive planning that the Council has engaged in for so many years.

**Cabinet response to the report of the Environmental Scrutiny Committee entitled 'Cycling in Cardiff's Parks'**

- The Committee welcome the response to the report titled 'Cycling in Cardiff's Parks' and welcome the implementation of the pilot schemes and code of conduct in the nominated Cardiff parks. Members will watch with interest the progress of the pilot schemes and code of conduct before deciding if they wish to review the implementation of the recommendations in future.

I would be grateful if you would consider the above comments and provide a response to the requests made in this letter.

Regards,



Councillor Paul Mitchell  
Chairperson Environmental Scrutiny Committee

Cc to:

Andrew Gregory, Director for Strategic Planning, Highways, Traffic & Transport

Paul Carter, Operational Manager, Transport Strategy & Projects

Matthew Price, Land Use Transport Planner

Owen Jenkins, Operational Manager, Infrastructure

Gary Brown, Operational Manager Highways Maintenance

Andrew Greener, Principal Engineer – Inspection & Assessment

Chris Hespe, Director for Sport, Leisure & Culture

Joanne Watkins, Cabinet Office Manager

Members of the Environmental Scrutiny Committee