

ENVIRONMENTAL SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

7 DECEMBER 2023

Present: Councillor Owen Jones(Chairperson)
Councillors Derbyshire, Lancaster, Lloyd Jones, Jackie Parry,
Proctor and Wood

28 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Gibson and Green

29 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest

30 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 November 2023 were approved by the Committee as a correct record and were signed by the Chairperson.

31 : RNIB - ROYAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF BLIND PEOPLE

Councillor Wood declared a personal interest in this item as Chief Investigator on research project funded by the Macular Society listed as an organisation in Inclusive Street Design document

The Committee received a briefing report regarding concerns from the RNIB in relation to changes that are made to the public realm, that support increased use of sustainable transport and active travel methods and the impact on the visually impaired community.

Members were advised that visually impaired people can often experience difficulty navigating urban areas, especially if the location of seats, signs and bins etc. is not carefully considered. The use of appropriate tactile paving can assist with orientation and is essential to warn of dangers such as flights of steps, as well as indicating road crossings. Warning tactile paving and signage should always be installed to indicate shared routes with cyclists. The camber of the route is also useful as this helps indicate the centre of the path.

Inconsiderate behaviour by some cyclists travelling along community routes can impact on the personal safety of visually impaired people. Cyclists are very hard to hear and can approach very quickly without being detected. It is often impossible for a visually impaired person to know where they are to move out of their way, and feelings of intimidation and danger can result in that individual avoiding the route.

Representatives from the RNIB were invited to deliver a presentation and share their concerns with the Committee about recent changes in road design at locations across the City. The Chairperson welcomed Rachel Jones, Policy and Campaigns Officer, RNIB, Myrdd Jones her personal assistant and Rachel's assistance dog Flick to the meeting. Following the presentation the Chairperson opened the debate on

this item. Members were invited to comment, seek clarification or raise questions on the information received. Those discussions are summarised as follows:

- The Committee thanked RNIB for their presentation and Members shared the concerns that were raised in respect of the safety of a number of temporary bus stops at locations around the city centre.
- Members were advised that the key consideration when choosing colours schemes that would assist visually impair people is contrast i.e. a light colour paired with a dark colour. White and black or, particularly, yellow and black are effective as yellow is one of the last colours on the spectrum that visually impaired people lose.
- Members asked whether RNIB are regularly consulted on street design scheme or are they made aware of changes after they have been instigated. Rachel Jones stated that RNIB are members of the Cardiff Access and Equalities Group. The Group was formed during the Covid-19 pandemic as a result of the social distancing measures that were installed in the City Centre which were very problematic for guide dogs. Objections have been raised by RNIB and other groups representing visually impaired people at those meetings regarding the types of designs being proposed but it was unclear whether the Cardiff Access and Equality Group has any influence on decisions and who the Group reports to. Rachel Jones considered that the 'voice' of those represented on the Group was not being heard and this is incredibly frustrating. Furthermore, design schemes are expensive and, therefore, it was better to have good design in the first instance, because retrofitting accessibility into poor design schemes is a wasteful use of resources.
- Members asked whether there was a design standard that the Council should be adhering to. Rachel Jones stated that there was lots of guidance available to the Council. For example, RNIB has key principles to inclusive street design. Additionally, Active Travel guidance is available and this should be adhered to when funding bids are being made. Active Travel guidance clearly states that bus stop borders should not be used in areas with high passenger numbers, such as Cardiff city centre.
- A Member commented that on waste collections days in the city various containers are presented for collection on the pavement, including the brown waste caddy that is very low contrast, which is often left on the pavement once the food waste is collected. The Member requested the RNIB view on this, whether it has been raised as a concern and for comments on the proposal for further segregated waste collection. Rachel Jones stated that a walking route for visually impaired people on 'bin day' can take twice as long because of the need to navigate around extra obstacles. Reflective or high colour containers are recommended. Guide dogs are trained to navigate around any obstacles on the footway but there are instances when pavement clutter will make navigation more difficult. RNIB is looking into how to change peoples' behaviours and be more

considerate of the visually impaired. Additional containers are likely to cause further issues, particularly for guide dogs.

- A Members raised concerns around the issue of shared segregated cycleway and the issues that raises for other users of the footway. RNIB were asked whether they were aware of any evidence or reporting of accidents that may be used to inform future decisions. Rachel Jones advised that when people have a negative experience it may seem minor to other parties but it can have a detrimental effect including a build up of anxiety. Focus groups will often share stories of their experiences. Some visually impaired people have reported that they are no longer prepared to use bus services because of their experiences and loss of confidence when negotiating some bus stops in the city. In terms of reporting, lots of people are reluctant to report issues because they feel that the Council will not address them. Reporting also needs to be made easily accessible.
- Members were disappointed with the lack of engagement from the Council and supported calls for better engagement with visually impaired people and the groups representing them.
- A Member asked whether Cardiff was a good city for visually impaired people to walk around in general. Rachel Jones stated that the examples provided in the presentation represent a small sample of some of the issues that are regularly reported to RNIB. The presentation has concentrated on examples of bus stop borders because of the risk of serious accidents but unfortunately there are many issues around the City. Many of these related to how the City has changed over recent years and how those changes are communicated to people unable to access visual information. A number of examples of were provided including tactile paving that leads nowhere, obstacles encroaching on tactile paving and issues relating to new sustainable drainage systems.
- Responding to a question, Rachel Jones stated that there has been no engagement with the Council regarding the installation of new bus stop borders at Roath Park. A request has been made that officers present the plans to the Cardiff Access and Equalities Group. Consultation with visually impaired people can be more challenging as they are unable to see technical drawings and the schemes therefore need to explained better or make use of tactile maps and imaging.
- Members asked whether any consultation was undertaken on the recent development of the Canal Quarter in Churchill Way in order to have the most accessible design possible. Rachel Jones stated that no approach has been made. Given the major projects that will be forthcoming in the near future, such as the South Wales Metro and Bus Interchange, RNIB are keen to have a voice in terms of accessibility.

- The Committee questioned whether, when accessibility issues are raised with the Council, that they are remedied quickly but the Council. Rachel Jones stated the Council can be slow to remedy mistakes. The bus stop boarder issues were first identified in 2021 at a meeting with Council officers. Some adjustments were made to those schemes, but these were not satisfactory, and the issue has yet to be addressed fully and no clear commitment has been forthcoming.

RESOLVED : That the Chairperson writes to the Cabinet Member on behalf of the Committee to convey any comments, observations and recommendations made during the way forward.

32 : AIR QUALITY ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT

The Committee received a report providing Members with background information to aid scrutiny of the report to Cabinet regarding Cardiff Council's Local Air Quality Annual Progress Report, which was due to be considered by Cabinet. Issues identified in the summary report were summarised in the cover report.

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Caro Wild, Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Andrew Gregory, Director and Jason Bale, Operational Manager Enterprise and Specialist Services. Following a statement from the Cabinet Member and presentation, the Chairperson opened the debate on this item. Those discussions are summarised as follows:

- A Member asked whether there was any concern that, as a result of the decline in the number of bus services in the city, car usage would increase and it would not be possible to maintain compliance with air quality targets. Officers stated that it was difficult to predict such circumstances, but the aim was to reduce the number of vehicles on the road and therefore other options may need to be considered in such an event.
- A Member requested whether future iterations of the report could provide the locations of the air quality monitoring sites alongside the data. Officers stated that the full report follows a template set by national government, but it may be possible to include an addendum presenting the information as requested in future years.
- Officers were asked to identify the changes made which have led to improvements in air quality in the city and provide an assessment of the efficacy of each of those components. Officers stated that it was not possible to identify that level of detail in the data but the increase in homeworking and lower emission vehicles are factors.

- A Member asked officers to comment on the administration's aims in terms of air quality in the city. Officers stated that the aim was to bring air pollution down as far as reasonably practicable. However, there will always be a level of pollution from other sources. There are national air quality targets in place currently and the Welsh Government will be introducing their own national targets in the near future following approval of a bill in the Senedd recently. Officers were awaiting clarification on what those targets will be. The Director stated that air quality was fundamental to public health in Cardiff and the wider region. The Council is aiming to improve air quality as much as possible.
- A Member asked what soft measures were being considered to convince people to voluntarily opt to use active travel or public transport as an alternative to car use. The Director stated that people will need to have a viable alternative to car use and the actions set out in the 10-year Transport Plan such as the development of an active travel network, support for bus priority measures, the South Wales Metro, the development of Crossrail and the new bus interchange are intended to provide a viable alternative.
- A Member asked whether the issue of odours from take-away premises is being addressed. Officers stated that those issues will be addressed through statutory nuisance legislation as appropriate extraction equipment should be in place at such premises.
- Officers were asked to comment on the introduction of the 20 mph speed limits that have been introduced and their likely effect in terms of air quality. Officers stated that the national speed limits were introduced in September 2023 and it will be another year before the data can be collected and fully assessed. In Cardiff, 20 mph zones have been in place for a number of years so some of those impacts will already be having an effect. Welsh Government research was inconclusive as it indicated that there is some air quality improvement in certain circumstances and an increase in other circumstances.
- A Member asked officers to comment on the criteria used to assess the location of air quality monitoring stations. The Member provided an anecdotal local example of a location that perhaps should be monitored that currently isn't. Officers stated that such requests will be responded to. The locations will be reviewed shortly and implemented in January 2024 and the location identified will be considered.
- A Member questioned whether air quality improvement measures, such as living wall projects are being monitored. Officers stated that air quality is monitored as the roadside and on the opposite side of the living wall to assess the improvements such schemes can bring. This provides evidence of the benefits of such schemes. Similarly with School Streets Projects.

- Members noted that the report provides a yearly average in terms of air quality. Officers were asked whether there are times during the day, such as peak travel periods during 'rush hour' that air quality targets are exceeded. Officers stated that this was a major reason why the administration is seeking to expand the real time monitoring network. Diffusion tube monitoring will only provide a month's worth of data and it is not possible to identify any such peaks and trends. Real time monitoring is able to identify times during the day when there are higher and lower concentrations of pollutants and inform decisions around measures to reduce higher concentrations accordingly. Real time monitoring data will be included in the next annual report.
- Responding to a question, the Director stated that the permanent scheme for Castle Street will involve some adjustments to the current scheme in relation to the crossings, bus stop arrangements and segregated cycleways. However, the fundamental principles will not change. An undertaking was given that the scheme will be fully supportive of accessibility groups and other users.

RESOLVED : That the Chairperson writes to the Cabinet Member on behalf of the Committee to convey any comments, observations and recommendations made during the way forward.

33 : COMMITTEE BUSINESS

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

34 : URGENT ITEMS (IF ANY)

No urgent items.

35 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Members were advised that the next Environment Scrutiny Committee is scheduled for 11th January 2024

The meeting terminated at 6.45 pm