

MINUTES of the meeting of the **ENVIRONMENT & TRANSPORT SELECT COMMITTEE** held at 10.00 am on 13 March 2014 at Ashcombe Suite, County Hall, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey KT1 2DN.

These minutes are subject to confirmation by the Committee at its meeting on Thursday 24 April, 2014.

Elected Members:

- * Mr David Harmer (Chairman)
- Mr Mike Bennison (Vice-Chairman)
- * Mr John Beckett
- Mrs Natalie Bramhall
- * Mr Mark Brett-Warburton
- * Mr Stephen Cooksey
- * Mrs Pat Frost
- * Mr David Goodwin
- * Mr Ken Gulati
- * Mr Peter Hickman
- * Mr George Johnson
- * Mr Adrian Page
- * Mr Michael Sydney
- * Mr Richard Wilson
- * Mrs Victoria Young

Ex officio Members:

- * Mr David Munro, Chairman of the County Council
- * Mrs Sally Ann B Marks, Vice Chairman of the County Council
- Mr David Munro, Chairman of the County Council

Substitute Members:

- * Mr David Munro, Chairman of the County Council
- * Mrs Sally Ann B Marks, Vice Chairman of the County Council
- Mr Tim Evans

In attendance

Mr John Furey, Cabinet Member for Transport, Highways & Environment
Mr Mike Goodman, Cabinet Associate for Environmental Services

14/14 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS [Item 1]

Apologies were received from Mike Bennison and Natalie Bramhall.

Tim Evans and Sally Marks substituted.

15/14 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING: 23 JANUARY 2014 [Item 2]

It was recognised that both the Cabinet Member for Transport, Highways and Environment and the Cabinet Associate for Environment Services were present at the 23 January Select Committee meeting and should therefore be included in the attendance list for this meeting.

The minutes were agreed.

16/14 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST [Item 3]

Cllr Michael Sydney stated that he was the Chairman of Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Board.

17/14 QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS [Item 4]

There were none.

18/14 RESPONSES FROM THE CABINET TO ISSUES REFERRED BY THE SELECT COMMITTEE [Item 5]

There were none.

19/14 RECOMMENDATION TRACKER AND FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME [Item 6]

Declarations of interest: None.

Key points raised during the discussion:

1. It was confirmed that the Countryside Management Member Reference Group had met on the 3rd of February.
2. The Chairman explained that the Flood Event Response item had been deferred to the meeting of 24 April as the impacts from flooding were still ongoing and officer resource had been directed to deal with this.

Recommendations: None.

Actions/further information to be provided: None.

Committee Next Steps: None.

20/14 A LONGER TERM APPROACH TO THE MANAGEMENT OF HIGHWAYS [Item 7]

Declarations of interest: None

Witnesses:

Jason Russell, Assistant Director for Highways
John Furey, Cabinet Member for Transport, Highways and Environment

Key points raised during the discussion:

1. A presentation was given to Members of the Committee by the Assistant Director who explained the current challenges highways faced; the timescales for projects to be completed and the key areas the Service would focus on. The Assistant Director proposed for a Member reference group which would focus on highways for the future to be set up. The Assistant Director explained that since 2009 the Service had reduced costs by 15% and would have the first break point in the Kier contract in 2017.
2. The Assistant Director explained that a review of how we deal with the resilience of the highway infrastructure would be reviewed in April 2014. Questions around how we can make the infrastructure more resilient and how we manage serious events would be considered.
3. Members of the Committee questioned whether the Service had begun bidding for Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP's) funding. The Assistant Director explained that funding would be secured if the delivery of schemes put forward by Surrey were effective. Work is currently being done on putting bids in place. The Service is ensuring that lessons learnt from Project Horizon are considered.
4. Some Members of the Committee praised the work done by Kier and raised concerns around procuring for another contractor. The Assistant Director recognised the good work done by Kier but explained that the council had expectations that would need to be met before a contract extension is considered.
5. Members asked for more information around the contract process and how this would pan out over the next year. The Assistant Director explained that the Service would monitor current performance against key performance indicators and then consider whether a contract should be extended. It was explained that it was essential for Kier to evolve with the Service in order to produce success. It was recognised that the recent severe weather had impacted upon Kier but they were committed to working with the Service.
6. It was stated that there would be an annual review of Project Horizon. Rather than looking at making changes to the programme, the review would focus on where improvements could be made. Concerns around any roads concerning Project Horizon would need to be taken to Local Committees for consideration.
7. Concerns around changes to personnel in the highways team were raised. The Assistant Director explained that a people strategy focusing on skills for the future would be introduced. The Service planned to continue developing the skills of employees but recognised there was an issue around staff retention in area teams.
8. A Member of the Committee asked whether Councillors who have been affected by flooding would be included in the flood forum. The Chairman explained that he had been asked by the Leader to

establish a task group which would include various Councillors affected by the floods. The Assistant Director added that the funds from the Bellwin scheme would not cover costs of anything that was a statutory duty but the Department for Transport had made an increase to the block grant.

9. Concerns were raised around whether bids for funding had been placed and the lack of urgency there seemed to be. The Assistant Director stated that the team was acting with urgency to get plans in place. The Cabinet Member for Transport, Highways and Environment explained that lessons had been learnt from last year and would require work from various officers with a final date of submission by September 2014. A figure of £157 million from the M3 Local Enterprise Partnership (M3 LEP) had been identified but would need clearance from the LEP before finalisation.
10. A Member of the Committee raised concerns around highway information not being shared with councillors. The Cabinet Member for Transport, Highways and Environment recognised there was an issue with sharing data. Systems helping to increase this sharing of knowledge would be developed.
11. The Committee agreed to setting up the flooding task group. The Chairman asked for nominations for the task group from Members of the Committee. The Chairman explained that both the Council Overview and Scrutiny (COSC) and Communities Select Committees would nominate a representative to sit on the task group ensuring the task group is politically balanced and represents areas that have been subject to the impacts of flooding. All local committee chairmen would be invited to nominate those divisions which had been most severely impacted, with a view to the relevant members being invited to meet with the task group, together with two or three relevant people from their area.

Actions/further information to be provided: None.

Committee Next Steps: None.

21/14 RIVER THAMES SCHEME [Item 8]

Declarations of interest: None.

Witnesses:

Jason Russell, Assistant Director for Highways
Lesley Harding, Sustainability Group Manager
David Murphy, Programme Manager, Environment Agency

Key points raised during the discussion:

1. The report was briefly introduced by the Sustainability Group Manager who explained that a report on water issues was presented to the Committee in the autumn of 2013. The report on the River Thames Scheme included a general overview of the scheme, engineering measures in place, governance arrangements and costs associated with the scheme.
2. A presentation was given to the Committee by David Murphy, Programme Manager for the Environment Agency. The Programme Manager explained the key locations affected by the flooding, focusing on households and the impacts on the local economy and infrastructure. The key features along with the cost of the scheme were explained in detail. The whole life cost of the scheme would total £538 million with the Government setting aside 53% of funds for this project. Work was being done with consultants to look at possible funding streams for this scheme. The scheme would be delivered in two phases with phase one having already begun.
3. It was explained that the scheme was a working partnership between the EA, Surrey County Council and the other local authorities in the lower Thames area. Governance arrangements had been put in place with officers from SCC sitting on both the Sponsoring Group and Programme Board.
4. Members queried why there was no relief channel planned for Egham and Staines. Officers responded that this was not possible because it would require the demolition of a large number of homes; however the other relief channels included in the scheme would reduce the overall water level and provide protection for Egham and Staines.
5. It was explained that phase one of the scheme would start at Molesey weir as the EA already had work underway there.
6. Concerns were raised around the impact of the Jubilee River on flooding in the area. The Programme Manager for the EA explained that the Jubilee River had done what it was required to do and protected over 3000 homes during the floods. Significant modeling work had been done for flood diversions on the river. Three independent reports concluded that there was no significant impact on flooding due to the Jubilee River.
7. A Member of the Committee asked whether dredging would be included as part of the scheme. The Programme Manager for the Environment Agency explained that the EA did not have an obligation to carry out dredging on the river. It was further explained that dredging might be counterproductive as that part of the river Thames is a self-scouring river with a well-established bed which would probably be damaged by dredging with unclear results. The benefit of making the river deeper would not be great and would not be economically justifiable to carry out. It was also stated that locks and weirs were more effective means of controlling water levels.
8. Members of the Committee raised concerns around funding for the project and asked whether the Government could be approached again to make a greater contribution. It was explained that one avenue

was to look for funding from partners but there would also be another opportunity to ask government for funding. The Cabinet Member for Transport, Highways and Environment explained that the Leader of the Council had written a letter to David Cameron explaining the necessity of the scheme and the economic impact flooding had on Surrey and its residents.

9. It was explained that possible funding streams included the Local Growth Fund and approaching Europe through MEPs for funding.
10. A Member of the Committee asked for a cost and benefit analysis of each phase of the scheme. It was explained by the Programme Manager for the Environment Agency that most of the benefit derived from full completion of the scheme and the construction of channels. However the completed scheme would have a benefit/cost ratio of approximately 6.4:1.
11. Members of the Committee asked whether there was any value to carrying out a public enquiry before the work on the scheme started. The Programme Manager for the Environment Agency explained that discussions around this would be raised at the project board meetings. The current approach would be to contact town and county planning authorities to generate consensus for the scheme.
12. A Member of the Committee asked if it would be possible to include the River Thames Alliance in the governance arrangements for the scheme. Officers agreed to consider this outside of the meeting.

Recommendations:

That the Committee supports the need for central government to review current funding arrangements and recognise the national significance.

Actions/further information to be provided:

For the presentation on the River Thames Scheme to be sent to Members of the Committee.

Committee Next Steps: None.

22/14 COUNTRYSIDE TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME [Item 9]

Declarations of interest: None.

Witnesses:

Lisa Creaye-Griffin, Countryside Group Manager
John Furey, Cabinet Member for Transport, Highways and Environment
Emily Boynton, Asset Investment and Regeneration Manager

Key points raised during the discussion:

1. The report was introduced by the Countryside Group Manager who explained the report provided an update on the latest position of the Countryside Management Transformation Programme. Significant progress had been made in three key areas. The Countryside Collaboration Group would now be known as the Surrey Countryside and Rural Enterprise Forum (SCREF). There has been an agreement to bring the management of the rural estate in-house which would be managed by Property Services in Surrey County Council (SCC). The review of the agreement with Surrey Wildlife Trust (SWT) to manage the countryside estate had also made positive progress, following the development of a business plan.
2. A Member of the committee stated that the rural estate had always been managed in-house by Property Services. The Asset Investment and Regeneration Manager explained that the 'day to day' management of the rural estate had changed. The changing nature of the smallholdings estate meant the Service was better equipped to manage the rural estate. The reasons for why the day to day management of the rural estate has returned in-house can be found in the report on the review of the rural estate. At the moment the Service relies on one surveyor who holds all the data on the rural estate. The Service will now take on the responsibility for managing this data.
3. A Member of the committee raised concerns around there not being any clarity on what was happening with the rural estate in the past. The Asset Investment and Regeneration Manager clarified that the agent who managed the rural estate was given direction by Property Services.
4. The Countryside Group Manager clarified that informal discussions had started with SWT which would hopefully lead to renegotiation of the contract. The Service had approached SWT with specific issues and was now awaiting a response to these. The Cabinet Member for Transport, Highways and Environment explained that SWT had produced a five year plan on the future management of the Countryside estate but had not provided financial details with this. The Cabinet Member for Transport, Highways and Environment explained that it had taken time to discuss specific issues with SWT but a finance director had been employed by SWT to help produce a finance plan. The view was expressed that the current 50 year contract with no break clause was not desirable.
5. A Member of the committee raised a concern on point seven of Appendix 1 and commented that progress had been made on establishing the management and governance of the Surrey Hills AONB. It was explained that this point had been included because Surrey County Council hosted the Surrey Hills AONB.
6. A Member further added that point three in Appendix 2 which referred to the Surrey Hills Trust Fund was incorrect. The Countryside Group Manager stated that the point being discussed had been written by the respective organisation.

7. It was added that there had been no mention of Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) as the new formed SCREF would not be covering this remit.

Recommendations: None.

Actions/further information to be provided: None.

Committee Next Steps: None.

23/14 DATE OF NEXT MEETING [Item 10]

The next meeting will be held on 24 April 2014 in the Ashcombe Suite, County Hall, Kingston upon Thames.

Chairman