

**MINUTES** of the meeting of the **COMMUNITIES, ENVIRONMENT AND HIGHWAYS SELECT COMMITTEE** held at 10.00 am on 5 July 2023 at .

These minutes are subject to confirmation by the Committee at its meeting on Thursday, 5 October 2023.

**Elected Members:**

- \* Catherine Baart
- Steven Cooksey
- \* Jonathan Hulley (Chairman)
- r\* Andy Macleod
- \* Jan Mason
- \* Cameron McIntosh
- \* Lance Spencer (Vice-Chairman)
- \* Keith Witham
- \* Steve Bax (Vice-Chairman)
- Liz Bowes
- \* Richard Tear
- \* Buddhi Weerasinghe
- John Beckett

**18/23 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS [Item 1]**

Apologies were received from John Beckett

Apologies were received from Stephen Cooksey

David Harmer substituting for Liz Bowes

**19/23 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS: 20 MARCH 2023 [Item 2]**

The minutes of the Communities, Environment and Highways Select Committee held on 20 March 2023 were formally agreed as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

**20/23 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST [Item 3]**

None received.

**21/23 QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS [Item 4]**

**Witnesses:**

Richard Bolton, Assistant Director of Highways Operations & Infrastructure

**Key points raised during the discussion:**

1. The Chairman noted the two public questions received on grass-cutting and verges and invited comments and questions from the committee. The following points were made:
  - A Member observed the growing public concern over the new verge grass cutting regime and urged the Highways Operations Department to look at the frequency and quality of grass cutting by contractors for future years.
  - Concern was expressed at the height of the grass and that it might pose a fire risk.
  - A Member was pleased to hear that verges registered under the Blue Heart Campaign would only be cut once and hoped that more verges would be added to the list to aid wildlife.
  - Concern was expressed that many first cuts had not taken place and were late.
  - A Member queried the £2.67 million cost to collect the cut grass cuttings and the quality of the service provided.
  - A Member called for a simplified system over jurisdiction of grass cutting duties and better understanding of the responsibilities of Boroughs & Districts.
2. The Assistant Director of Highways Operations & Infrastructure acknowledged the shortfalls in the service this year and noted that the change in contractors and the ambiguity of jurisdiction presented a challenge. The Assistant Director assured the Committee that the service was working on plans to tackle the issue which would be made public. According to Surrey Fire and Rescue Service there was no increased fire risk from longer grass.

**Actions and requests for information:**

1. Chairman asked for the Assistant Director to respond in writing to Helen Monroe's supplementary question and for the written response to be shared with the committee.

**22/23 A NEW ROAD SAFETY STRATEGY FOR SURREY [Item 5]**

**Witnesses:**

Paul Millin, Strategic Transport Group Manager

**Key points made during the discussion:**

1. The Chairman explained that scrutiny of the item was postponed to a future meeting and that the draft policy was being revised. The Chairman affirmed the Committee's interest in the matter and that it was of great importance to residents; and asked when it would be ready for scrutiny. The Strategic Transport Manager answered that this was a short postponement, and that road safety strategy and speed limit policy would come back to the Select Committee in October.

**23/23 GREEN FINANCE STRATEGY [Item 6]**

**Witnesses:**

Katie Sargent, Greener Futures Group Manager, Environment Transport & Infrastructure Directorate

Carolyn McKenzie, Director of Environment

Katie Stewart, Executive Director for Environment Transport and Infrastructure

Marissa heath, Cabinet Member for Environment (online)

**Key points made during the discussion:**

1. The Cabinet Member for Environment introduced the strategy. The aim was to achieve cost neutrality in financing Net Zero carbon targets. Substantial capital and risk were involved. The Cabinet Member highlighted dependencies on national infrastructure and grid connections and on government policy and support. Renewable investment initiatives were being explored to generate income including through power purchase and solar farms. The Cabinet Member expressed interest in doing more with businesses and on a joint-finance approach with Boroughs and Districts and highlighted the risks associated with off-setting. Continued input from the Select Committee was welcome. The Cabinet Member proposed reviewing the financial strategy with the Committee and Greener Futures Reference Group on an annual basis.
2. The Chairman asked the Greener Futures Group Manager what the key changes were between this and the original 2021 finance strategy and accompanying model. The Manager explained that the latest model included more accurate costs and assumptions as opposed to estimates. There was now much more confidence in the figures shared and the planning that followed. On the 2030 net zero target the Manager insisted that it was achievable and that costs could be covered with energy savings. The Executive Director for Environment Transport and Infrastructure warned that the council's plans were dependent on government policy and technology. One of the benefits of the proposed financial model was that it allowed for a dynamic response to the changing landscape.

**Net Zero 2030 Programme**

3. A Member asked which strand of the 2030 capital programme of retrofit, refurbishment & renewable presented the greatest risk and queried what was being done to address the 99.3% of carbon emissions created by non-Council facilities. The Greener Futures Group Manager explained that the biggest risk was delays with the National Grid that meant viable solar farm sites might not be launched until 2035. The department was exploring other avenues to acquire working solar sites with grid connections already in place. The Manager outlined the process for annual update of the Climate Change Delivery Plan and review of progress against the 2030 and 2050 targets. This would come to the Committee and Cabinet in the autumn.

4. A Member asked to what extent the risk to delivery from a capacity skills shortage had been assessed and factored into plans. The Greener Futures Group Manager said procuring skilled workers has been an issue in the past, but that successful procurement rounds had built confidence. Close working with colleagues in Procurement and Land and Property were important.
5. A Member asked if the decarbonisation delivery rate of 13 to 20 buildings per year was achievable. The Greener Futures Group Manager explained that this programme was slow to start but that a robust team was now in place and the pace was stepping up. The new Facilities Management provider would play a critical role. The Member asked about carbon banking from private wire energy supply. The Manager noted that where electricity was sold to a private off taker say from a solar farm, this would count towards reducing their carbon not that of the Council. Carbon produced from virtual sleeving where electricity is sold to the grid and taken off the balance of electricity being provided could be banked.
6. A Member asked about decarbonisation of Flex buildings and whether there was a potential to generate more income from these. The Manager explained that Flex buildings were those with an uncertain future. Land & Property were conducting an asset strategy review, due to complete by 2025. This would clarify the status of various assets including which should be retained or sold. In the meantime, decarbonisations costs for both Flex and Core & Flex buildings needed to be assessed. Carbon offsetting would be required for any Flex properties retained by the Council in 2030 without decarbonisation investment.
7. A Member expressed concern over national energy supply and the need for more generating capacity in the UK and wondered if consideration of high-level risks had been built into plans. Potential future developments for a hydrogen economy were flagged as was the need to maintain close links to central government as thinking on this developed. The Director of Environment emphasised the importance of a mixed approach to mitigate risks including through projects such as rooftop solar which didn't rely on changes in government policy. She explained that lobbying took place on a regular basis at all levels. The Council was starting to look at hydrogen for buses and waste vehicles but there is more to be done to plug into strategic conversations about long term hydrogen plans.
8. A Member asked for an explanation around rising Capex costs under the 2030 finance model. The Greener Futures Group Manager explained that the jump in capital costs reflected the robustness of the new finance model which was more thorough and included all the costs involved including for example associated connection costs which can be significant. One building can cost in the region of £100,000 to connect to the grid. The Director of Environment

explained the process for annual and quarterly reviews and for inputting real, as opposed to anticipated costs into the model to create a more accurate picture.

9. A Member noted that fleet transition costs were being funded by the service rather than the central Greener Futures budget and queried how to embed decarbonisation costs into other services. The Greener Futures Group Manager explained that electric infrastructure costs remained in the Greener Futures budget but that costs for replacing individual vehicles should be considered on a local basis by the relevant service area. A fleet strategy was being developed. This would cover decarbonisation of the Council's fleet and provide guidance and support. The Manager noted the other key areas of emissions addressed by the 2030 strategy were LED streetlight replacement and corporate estate emissions and that it made sense for these to be dealt with in their own budget areas.
10. A Member asked if there were any solar farms being launched in the next couple of years and whether Solar Power Purchase Agreements (PPA) or solar panels on Council buildings could make up for a lack of ground based solar. The Manager noted frustrations with solar farms: sites had been identified but couldn't be connected to the grid. A range of other opportunities were being explored, including maximising solar on rooftops. The directorate hoped to have a much clearer idea of solar potential within the next 6 months. The manager stated that schools would be the first target for PPAs. Although they fall outside of the Council estate, they form part of Surrey's indirect emissions. There was a huge appetite from schools for PPA to reduce energy costs. Pilots were being run and a business case developed for Select Committee and Cabinet. The Director of Environment noted that in addition to schools, there was potential to work with the NHS to install solar on its Surrey estate. Initial conversations had taken place.
11. The Chairman noted that the report set out a range of options for consideration and asked for an explanation of the difference between option three and four. The Director of Environment explained that option four set out a more proactive approach to generating income to offset costs. On option two, a Member expressed concern over the viability of buying carbon off-set credits as an alternative to carbon reduction projects. The Director noted that a small amount of offsetting was required in all scenarios. This would be delivered where possible via the County's nature recovery strategy through habitat creation, tree planting and re-wetting of heathlands to bring positive benefits to Surrey residents. Reassurance was given that offsetting remained a last resort and that only good quality offsets would be used. The Director explained that option two had been included for completeness but was not the recommended approach.
12. A Member queried if the service had the resources it needed to maximise income. The Executive Director for Environment Transport and Infrastructure stated that the service had received immense

support from their Cabinet Member and had the resources needed for now but stressed that this must evolve as needs changed. It was important to continue to grow the agenda and to bring in the necessary resource and expertise to match.

### **Net Zero 2050 Programme**

13. The Chairman asked about the state of engagement with stakeholders to deliver the programme. The Greener Futures Group Manager noted the overlap between two of the Council's strategic priorities: *greener futures* and growing a *sustainable economy* and highlighted joint working on the green skills agenda and growing green jobs. Work was underway to ensure green skills are embedded in the Surrey Skills Plan and within local skills improvement plans to deliver growth of the green economy. A holistic green business support package was being developed for SMEs covering how to measure carbon footprint and what financial support is available (e.g. the Green Grant programme).
14. A Member asked what steps were being taken to develop a countywide communications and engagement strategy to raise awareness, support and buy in for low-carbon measures. The Executive Director for Environment Transport and Infrastructure noted that the Deputy Cabinet Member for Environment was leading on this work. A Greener Futures Engagement Strategy had been produced. Colleagues in the Communities team and volunteers from Surrey Climate Commission and Zero Carbon Guildford were being trained to deliver unified messages to residents and to encourage uptake. A parish council climate change training course had been developed and piloted and a network set up for all elected members (county level down to parish level). This would be used to disseminate green messages and raise awareness of developments and opportunities around grant funding.
15. The Executive Director agreed with the Member that different modes of communication were vital in getting buy in from residents. A Member noted that 40% of Surrey residents over 60 did not use the internet and communication must be tailored to tackle this. The benefits of simple printed literature for dissemination by councillors and local associations was emphasised. The Director of Environment agreed and noted that different methods would be considered to reach all residents including use of 'trusted' community groups as intermediaries to disseminate messages.
16. A Member asked if the indirect emissions which make up 85% of the Council's emissions were addressed in the 2050 programme. The Director of Environment explained that a detailed 2050 finance model was still being developed and would be brought to the committee in due course. An update on the Council's indirect emissions would be provided as part of the Climate Change update coming to the Committee later in the year. The Greener Futures Group Manager noted the difficulties in quantifying indirect emissions from schools and supply chains.

17. A Member expressed concern over communications to Council, Borough and District members and suggested a membership development session was needed on how the various Greener Futures boards and groups relate to one another. It was unclear how it all fit together in terms of governance and communications. The Executive Director for Environment Transport and Infrastructure acknowledged the problem and agreed to investigate.
18. The Committee discussed the draft recommendations and agreed and approved of option four.

Break at 11:55 for 14 minutes. Meeting resumed at 12:09 pm.

Rebecca Jennings-Evans left at 12:00 pm.

### **The Communities, Environment and Highways Select Committee**

- a. Endorses the approach set out in the updated Greener Futures Finance Strategy including continued focus and commitment to the County Council's organisational target to become net zero by 2030 and preparations to deliver the 2050 target.
- b. Fully supports the commitment to ensuring financial risk to the Council is effectively identified and managed and the processes outlined for achieving this, in particular the annual 2 step review process which focuses on effective management of financial risk; and approves the recommendation for the Council to adopt option 4 to proactively generate income to offset costs.
- c. Recommends that the Council achievements to date towards the net zero 2030 target be publicised to Surrey Members at all tiers by the end of August 2023.
- d. Welcomes the review of effective communications and steps to improve engagement with residents on Net Zero; and urges consideration of online and offline communications, as well as opportunities to use Councillors to disseminate messages locally.
- e. Requests an update to the Committee on progress in early 2024 including on the Communications & Engagement Strategy.

### **Actions and requests for information:**

1. The Vice-Chairman asked ETI Directorate to organise a Membership Development Session on the democratic landscape around Net Zero and Greener Futures including how all the Boards relate to each other and decision-making comes together.

## **24/23 SURREY FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE PERFORMANCE [Item 7]**

### **Witnesses:**

Denise Turner-Stewart, Cabinet Member for Communities and Community Safety

Dan Quin, Chief Fire Officer

Bernadette Beckett, Chief of Staff

**Key points made during the discussion:**

**Annual Performance Report Red KPIs**

1. The Chairman welcomed the witnesses and asked the Cabinet Member for Communities and Community Safety to introduce the item. The Cabinet Member welcomed scrutiny by the Committee and extended an invitation for members to receive a briefing on fire and rescue service operations at Wray Park. She drew attention to the latest HMICFRS Inspection which was due to report in August and noted that a report on this would be provided to the December Committee session.
2. A Member welcomed the Chief Fire Officer to his new role and expressed appreciation for the Surrey Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS). He asked about the service's policy regarding annual fitness assessments for officers nearing retirement and whether those who might not pass the annual physical exam could be utilised in non-frontline roles. The Chief Fire Officer explained that a certain level of fitness was required for operational roles. Where individuals fell below this support was offered via occupational health, gym facilities and allocated fitness time to get fitness levels back up to the standard. For operational personnel unable to do so, a capability process exists which could result in redeployment to different roles under Council Terms and Conditions.
3. A discussion followed on the issue of Fire and Rescue Service governance and the outcomes of the Home Office White Paper: *Reforming our fire and rescue service*. The Chief Fire Officer noted that the response to the White Paper consultation would be available before the summer recess. Good governance is vital as is the scrutiny performed by this Committee. The Cabinet Member for Communities and Community Safety said there was no significant benefit to a change in fire governance arrangements and that the current exercise being undertaken by the Police and Crime Commissioner was unwarranted.
4. The Chairman asked about the programme of engagement with schools and the ambition to reach all schools in the county. 59% of schools had been covered, how would 100% be achieved? The Chief Fire Officer explained that all schools were being contacted but not all were taking up the offer. A Member asked about education around water related risks. The Chief Fire Officer noted that most fatalities in the county involve water and roads, not fire. The fire and rescue service is a risk-based organisation and effort is focused in line with risk. In addition to core business, the focus in Surrey is addressing risks from wildfire, water, and road safety. These risks are reflected in the school's education packages. The Chief Officer drew attention to the Safe Drive Stay Alive event aimed at addressing road risk and



explained how this was being developed into a new *DriveFit* programme.

5. The Chairman noted that feedback on Safe and Well Visits was quantitative and not qualitative. The Chief Fire Officer gave examples of feedback on the impact of these visits which were overwhelmingly positive. Work to improve the feedback process and to target groups as well as individuals was outlined.
6. A Member noted the risks around teenage boys jumping in rivers and asked if water safety was being addressed in events other than in schools. The Chief Fire Officer agreed that water safety was an issue for all age groups and gave reassurance that service engagement reflected this. Water safety events are being undertaken in partnership with other organisations involved in water safety education and rescues outside of the school's education programme. In addition, the service is engaging with partners and landowners to improve access to throw lines and information boards along waterways and in areas where there has been an increase in public use of water for leisure purposes. The need for improved education and collaboration with partners to address water safety issues was noted.
7. A Member asked if a wildfire event could be created in Chobham, and an action was taken to revert with a response.

### **Sickness Absence**

8. A Member asked about the reasons behind increasing sickness absence within SFRS; and how these levels compared to those in neighbouring areas. The Chief of Staff accepted that sickness levels were high and explained the common reasons for both short-term and long-term sicknesses. The attendance management policy had been reviewed and there is clear guidance to managers around when to act to monitor individual absences or work with individuals to get them back to work as soon as possible. Regular case support meetings are taking place. An employee relations team had been established to provide support to managers. Employees have access to Occupational Health support and a business case had been developed to introduce additional health support to allow staff to get support and appointments quicker than they would on the NHS. The Chief of Staff noted that sickness levels amongst operational staff was very high compared to other fire and rescue services but lower in relation to the neighbouring services of London and East and West Sussex.
9. A Member asked how a high level of service could be provided with such a high level of sickness. The Chief of Staff gave reassurance that services were being delivered adequately and that overall staffing levels were good. Nevertheless, reducing sickness absence is a priority and steps are being taken to introduce new mechanisms and adopt best practice. The Chief Fire Officer explained that there had

been a significant uplift in recruitment which meant the service was above establishment level for Wholetime firefighters, providing a cushion to compensate for the impact of sickness.

### **HMICFRS Inspection Improvement Plan**

10. A Member asked about the recommendation to evaluate the service's Prevention work and whether there were figures to show it was working. The Chief of Staff explained that evaluation was taken very seriously across all areas including Prevention. An Evaluation Framework is being developed to ensure consistency and provide assurance that feedback was being used to improve services. This would be finalised in August. It was hoped that the forthcoming HMICFRS Inspection report would reflect the work done on evaluation of some prevention activities.
11. A Member asked about the multi-agency and cross-border exercise programme. The Chief Fire Officer noted that 15 cross-border/multi agency exercises have been undertaken in the last six months. Changes in the approach to operational learning were outlined including ways to harvest learning from smaller incidents and to instil a 'no blame' culture. An Operational Performance Support team had been established offering peer to peer support around incidents.
12. A Member asked about the challenge of culture reform and what being done to make the service more inclusive. The Chief of Staff emphasised that this was a high priority for the service. New procedures were embedded across all teams to address these issues. The focus is on creating an inclusive environment to retain diverse staff and to ensure any issues that arise are addressed. A *Core Code of Ethics* was at the heart of this. A Culture Action Plan had been developed which is monitored independently by staff. Challenging unhelpful gossip and rumour was also a particular priority. The Chief Fire Officer noted close working relationship with the Fire Brigades Union and that joint communications on these issues were created.
13. A Member asked for statistics on deaths in Surrey from fire, road and in rivers. The Chief Fire Officer noted that that almost 50% of those road Killed or Seriously Injured in Surrey involved non-Surrey residents and emphasised the importance of regional and national coordination to address the issue.
14. A Member queried how the service was adapting to issues caused by hot summers and rising heat levels. The Chief Fire Officer responded that resilience was good. All operational staff were now equipped with new wildfire personal protective equipment and had undertaken additional training. Additional equipment and wildfire support vehicles had been developed. Surrey was recognised as one of the leading fire and rescue services on Wildfire. The Chief Fire Officer emphasised the efficiency of staff in tackling wildfire incidents and expressed his confidence in the service. A Member stated that he had received many

emails of concerns over wildfires from residents and asked how the service responded to concerns from residents. The Chief Fire Officer offered to share a statement with members that could be passed on to residents. A Member queried the use of barbecues in public spaces. The Chief Fire Officer cautioned the public to use barbecues as per manufacturer's instructions and to clean up after themselves. Furthermore, to avoid undertaking bonfires during periods of heightened fire risk.

15. The Members discussed and agreed their recommendations and invited SFRS to report back in December. The Chairman paid tribute to the progress SFRS is making.

#### **The Communities, Environment and Highways Select Committee**

1. Commends the commitment to improvement work in hand to implement the HMICFRS inspection 2021.
2. Ask SFRS to report back to Committee once the latest HMIC Inspection report is received; and to agree a date for follow-up scrutiny.
3. Works with SFRS to arrange a programme of site visits for Committee Members.

#### **Actions and requests for information:**

1. The Committee asked the Chief Fire Officer to provide the committee with a list of schools that aren't taking up the offer of school engagement visits.
2. Chief Fire Officer to confirm on the implementation of the wildfire awareness events in Chobham and inform the committee of the dates they have and will occur.
3. SFRS to provide statistics on deaths related to fire, road, and water that Surrey has had for the last 5 years.
4. SFRS to provide the wildfire statement to the Committee.
5. SFRS and Democratic Services to set up a meeting/site visit for members education regarding what SFRS does in depth.

### **25/23 RECOMMENDATIONS TRACKER AND FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME [Item 8]**

#### **Key points made during the discussion:**

1. The Chairman noted that the road Safety Policy had been pushed back and welcomed it coming for scrutiny in October. The rising costs of road repairs, Greener Futures engagement strategy, parking enforcement, verge-cutting and Communities/liaison officers were all identified as items of interest for the future work programme. The Chairman thanked the Committee and witnesses for their effort.

### **26/23 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING: 5 OCTOBER 2023 [Item 9]**

The Committee noted its next meeting would be held on 5 October 2023.

Meeting ended at: 1:55 pm

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**Chairman**