

MINUTES of the meeting of the **ENVIRONMENT & TRANSPORT SELECT COMMITTEE** held at 10.00 am on 12 December 2013 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, 23 January 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

Substitute Members:

- * Mr Will Forster

In attendance

- * Mr John Furey, Cabinet Member for Transport, Highways and Environment
- * Mr Mike Goodman, Cabinet Associate for Environmental Services
- * Mr Jonathan Essex

61/13 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS [Item 1]

Apologies were received from Mike Bennison, Pat Frost, David Goodwin, and Michael Sydney.

Will Forster substituted for David Goodwin.

62/13 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING: 23 OCTOBER 2013 [Item 2]

The minutes were agreed as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

63/13 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST [Item 3]

There were no declarations of interest.

64/13 QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS [Item 4]

Declarations of interest: None.

Witnesses:

Will Forster, Surrey County Councillor
Peter Hunter, Thursley Parish Councillor

Key points raised during the discussion:

1. There were no petitions to note.
2. One question was received from Councillor Will Forster and the response was provided within the agenda. Councillor Forster thanked the Chairman for his response and queried whether the Chairman was aware the Department for Transport was in the process of rolling out cameras to enable the enforcement of Advanced Stop Lines. The Chairman agreed to provide a written response to the supplementary question.
3. A question was submitted to the Committee from Mr Donald F. Denton and a response was tabled at the meeting which can be found attached to these minutes. The Scrutiny Officer informed the Committee that the Highways Agency were in the process of collating their response, and once this had been received it would be circulated to Members.
4. A question was received from Councillor Peter Hunter of Thursley Parish Council and a response was tabled at the meeting which can be found attached to these minutes. Councillor Hunter asked the Committee a supplementary question as to whether the Committee were aware of the County Council's responsibility to ensure emergency services are able to reach residents. He informed the Committee that during times when the Hindhead Tunnel is closed this is not possible for up to two hours.
5. The Chairman agreed that the current processes to deal with closures were not working and needed to be redeveloped as there were concerns regarding emergency access, particularly to Thursley. The

Assistant Director for Highways confirmed that this was a concern and that the County Council were in conversation with the Highways Agency to find a solution. The Chairman agreed to provide a written response to the supplementary question.

Recommendations: None.

Actions/further information to be provided:

1. The Chairman to respond to Councillor Will Forster and Parish Councillor Peter Hunter's supplementary questions.
2. The Highways Agency response to the question from Mr Donald F. Denton to be circulated to Members of the Committee once received.

Committee next steps: None.

Councillors Mark Brett-Warburton and Richard Wilson joined the meeting.

65/13 RESPONSES FROM THE CABINET TO ISSUES REFERRED BY THE SELECT COMMITTEE [Item 5]

There were no responses from Cabinet for the Committee to note.

66/13 RECOMMENDATION TRACKER AND FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME [Item 6]

Declarations of interest: None.

Witnesses: None.

Key points raised during the discussion:

1. The Committee were informed the seminar on Surrey Future would be arranged for the first quarter of 2014, and would likely take place in March 2014.
2. Members were informed that the item on the Operation Horizon accelerated project plan was to be deferred to March 2014 as it was felt that it was sensible to consider alongside the scheduled update and once the budget was known.
3. Members queried whether the CIL update report in January 2014 would include information on the governance of CIL, such as how it will be spent and managed as it was controlled by the local Planning Authorities. The Cabinet Member stated that the Boroughs and Districts had been receptive during conversations regarding the need for CIL monies to be spent on Highways and Education. The Assistant Director for Highways confirmed the report can include this detail.
4. The Scrutiny Officer confirmed the Utilities update would not be from the Task Group, as it was no longer active, but would be a report from the Streetworks team regarding actions made towards implementation of the recommendations of the Task Group.

5. The Committee were informed the draft report from Knight Frank on the Countryside Estate had been received and would be circulated to Members in the future. It was also agreed that the Countryside Management Member Reference Group would now meet later in 2014 than originally envisaged, in order to allow officers and the Cabinet Member more time to work towards the objectives of the Countryside Management Transformation Programme and Countryside Collaboration Group.

Recommendations: None.

Actions/further information required:

1. The Knight Frank report on the Countryside Estate be circulated to Members.

Committee next steps: None.

67/13 SURREY HIGHWAYS CUSTOMER SERVICE & RESIDENT SATISFACTION [Item 7]

Declarations of interest: None.

Witnesses:

Jason Russell, Assistant Director for Highways
 Mike Dawson, Customer Service and Improvement Manager
 Nick Hinds, Performance and Service Development Manager

Key points raised during the discussion:

1. Surrey Highways receive a high volume of enquiries in comparison to the rest of the council, at around 8000 per month, with officers dealing with 92% of these enquiries within 20 days. Of the 33 complaints referred to the Ombudsmen none had been upheld and this was felt to be due to the robust processes adopted by the department. There had been an increase in the number of Freedom of Information (FOI) requests; however this was thought to be largely due to insurance claims against the council.
2. The Highways Service was in the process of working towards the Customer Service Excellence award, which they believe they are on track to achieve, but would appreciate Member input into the process.
3. Though officers were aware improvements were needed within the Service, they felt some new processes were making a difference; including the introduction of social media to update residents of work taking place.
4. Surrey subscribed to the National Highways and Transport Survey (NHT). The survey takes place annually in June, and achieved a response rate of around 20% from around 4,500 questionnaires. A comparison to Hertfordshire was provided to Members as it was considered this was the local authority which compared best with Surrey. Surrey also undertook a residents' survey quarterly which

showed satisfaction with road maintenance was cyclical and likely to be influenced by the prevalence of potholes.

5. Members felt that the information provided told a different story to the reality as many residents were unsatisfied with the customer services they received, in particular regarding contact. Officers stated that a high level of contact was received, and although a high percentage was responded to, this was an area where more work needed to be done.
6. The Committee were concerned that Surrey fell in the bottom six for 14 out of the 22 categories included in the NHT Survey and suggested that this was an area officers needed to look at and consider strategies to improve satisfaction rates. Officers stated that it was a slow process to influence satisfaction levels and it was difficult to understand what caused residents to be dissatisfied as this was not specifically asked as part of the survey, however they were working hard to improve the service. Additionally the Assistant Director informed the Committee that they were working with the South East Seven to better understand the information generated by the survey.
7. Members congratulated officers on the positive relationships they had with their Local Highways Teams. However, it was noted that complaints and freedom of information (FOI) requests were showing an increasing trend. Officers responded that the former was a result of an improved recording process and a drive to use complaints to improve the service while the latter was due to the media encouraging members of the public to submit requests prior to making insurance claims.
8. Members queried whether there was a central contact who ensured residents received a response, they were informed that enquiries were responded either automatically, via the website or by offices, and that they often depended on the manner in which the enquiry was generated, through email or phone call, however the Customer Service & Improvement Team were responsible for ensuring responses were sent.
9. Members suggested that an officer independent from the process be requested to be a mystery shopper who reported faults and complaints and analysed how many responses were received.
10. The Committee queried why some complaints were listed twice within the table on Annex 2 and were informed that this was an unfortunate mistake. Furthermore, Members suggested that FOI information should concentrate on the figures for Environment & Infrastructure directorate only and felt it would be beneficial to see the trends for the last three years as a comparison.
11. Members suggested that a way forward would be to work on cleaning road signs and cutting verges as a tidy appearance often achieved good resident feedback. The Assistant Director stated that officers were looking at ways to improve satisfaction through housekeeping and projects such as Operation Horizon, though the results would not be seen in surveys for a while. However, Members informed officers

that they were starting to receive thank you messages from residents regarding Operation Horizon so satisfaction levels may begin to rise.

Recommendations:

1. That the Committee supports the Customer Service Excellence project.
2. That a Member Reference Group be set up to provide Member input into the Customer Service Excellence project.
3. That officers consider setting up a 'mystery shopping' exercise to look into the rate of responses to enquiries and complaints.

Actions/further information required:

The Committee to be provided with directorate trends for FOI requests in the last three years within Environment & Infrastructure.

Committee next steps: None.

Councillor Peter Hickman joined the meeting.

68/13 COMMUNITY RECYCLING CENTRE SERVICE UPDATE [Item 8]

Declarations of interest: None.

Witnesses:

Justin Foster, Contract Management Officer
Richard Parkinson, Waste Group Manager

Key points raised during the discussion:

1. The Committee was provided with an update on the provision and future of Community Recycling Centres. There were 15 recycling sites within Surrey which processed around a quarter of the waste that is generated within the county each year. The centres collected and separated around 40 materials, and officers were now considering additional materials which could be processed.
2. To assess the usage of the Community Recycling Centres counters had been positioned at all the sites - this will enable officers to analyse when the sites are most popular and will help inform any future decisions on opening hours, if a decision is required.
3. Officers were in the process of considering potential efficiencies with regards to the services including opening hours, charging to drop all materials at some sites, and charging to drop specific materials. In addition, they were considering introducing advertising at sites.
4. Members were informed that the Community Recycling Centres were popular among residents and many of the sites in Surrey had received or been nominated for awards.

5. The Committee commended officers for an excellent service (in particular, the conduct of staff at various sites), however, Members were unconvinced by the merits of charging to drop waste at Community Recycling Centres and felt there would need to be substantial consultation before any changes were made to the services at these centres. They were concerned that charging residents for using the centres would encourage fly tipping in Surrey which would cause resident satisfaction to drop. Furthermore, there was a concern that making specific sites 'pay as you throw' would geographically discriminate against some residents.
6. Officers responded that other local authorities who charged residents for the disposal of waste had seen a 90% reduction in the amount of rubble at sites, resulting in a £1million saving. It was also stated that reports of flytipping did not increase significantly as a result.
7. Members felt that introducing advertising at these centres would be a revenue generating opportunity, and was something that should be considered.
8. It was discussed that sometimes residents arrived at the centres in vans with household waste, but were requested to pay to drop their waste as the rule was that vans constituted trade waste. It was felt that it was important to inform residents of the terms and conditions for dropping waste and advertise the permits more effectively.
9. Members felt that it would be beneficial to re-open discussions with the Royal Borough of Kingston regarding the possibility of Surrey residents using their Recycling Centres and vice versa.
10. The Committee felt that changing the staff rotas may be a possibility to make efficiency savings, as in their experience there were more staff than required during quieter times.
11. It was felt that it was important to maximise returns from recycling as much as possible as many materials, such as textiles, were of high value. The Cabinet Member stated that currently the South East Seven spent £100 million on waste collection and recycling, though if there was more collaboration between the authorities it was felt a surplus of £300 million could be made. It was important not to be complacent and that changes would need to be made to ensure the service continued to be of a high standard.
12. Officers assured the Committee that changes made would be through the use of evidence from other authorities and information from public consultation, and that they felt it was important not to make changes which would seriously harm resident satisfaction with the service provided.
13. The Cabinet Member suggested that it would be beneficial for the Committee to consider the Surrey Waste Partnership at a future meeting.

Recommendations: None.

Actions/further information required: None.

Committee next steps:

The Committee to look at the Surrey Waste Partnership at a future meeting.

69/13 TREE MAINTENANCE [Item 9]

Declarations of interest: None.

Witnesses:

Jason Russell, Assistant Director for Highways
Lucy Monie, Operations Group Manager

Key points raised during the discussion:

1. The Committee were informed this item was an update following previous discussions with the Committee. The team were continuing to perform maintenance to trees which posed a risk to the highway and safety of residents, and with the threat of Ash Die Back in the South of England they were currently formulating an action plan in case there are cases in Surrey. Officers were continuing to have conversations with Boroughs and Districts regarding devolving tree maintenance, in particular with Spelthorne Borough Council.
2. Members queried why it appeared conversations regarding the devolution of tree maintenance with Boroughs and Districts now appeared to be not as successful as had been previously reported to the Committee. The Operations Group Manager informed the Committee that they were still in conversation with partners, however they often reached difficulties which they were attempting to overcome. Furthermore, some local councils had no interest in taking on tree maintenance.
3. The Committee felt that Members needed to be kept informed regarding maintenance work going on in their division so they are able to answer residents queries, as many queried when stumps would be removed. Furthermore, it was felt that there should be communication with residents to inform them when trees and the debris would be removed from the side of the road as it was often left for many weeks. Members were informed that the maintenance schedule was now part of the Highways Bulletin which should assist them to answer residents queries. The contractor would also carry out a letter drop and provide advance signing of tree works to let residents know what work would be carried out. Though there was a legacy of tree stumps which needed to be dealt with, in rural area these were often left for ecological reasons.
4. Members asked whether there was a procedure for dealing with private overgrown hedges on the highway as these can cause a risk. The Operations Group Manager informed the Committee that the landowner would receive a request for the hedge to be cut back, and if this was ignored there was a legal process which was followed, however it was often difficult to identify who the landowner was.

5. Members queried what was done with the tree remains as it was felt this could be a potential revenue source through recycling. It was stated that the tree remains were processed with some being recycled as wood chipping. The Cabinet Member informed Members that part of the Countryside plan was to develop two wood hubs in the county.
6. The Committee raised concerns that trees which had been found to be diseased were still standing after a year, with the disease spreading to neighbouring trees. The Operations Group Manager stated that the tree expert advised officers how long a tree can remain without posing a serious risk, however if the disease was spreading this would need to be looked at.

Recommendations: None.

Actions/further information required: None.

Committee next steps: None.

70/13 GULLY CLEANING UPDATE [Item 10]

Declarations of interest: None.

Witnesses:

Jason Russell, Assistant Director for Highways
 Lucy Monie, Operations Group Manager
 Jim Harker, Kier
 Dave Rendell, Conway

Key points raised during the discussion:

1. Gully cleaning is an essential part of highways maintenance to ensure highway flooding does not occur. To do this silt levels within the gullies are monitored by the subcontractor Conway to ensure they are at a minimum.
2. The Committee were informed that all known gullies were being cleaned within the current financial year with flood prone roads being identified. This will enable, from April, those gullies which need more cleaning to be put on the list for cleaning more than once a year. Conway felt confident they would be able to identify gullies which required additional cleaning as they had the silt levels for all the gullies from the last eight years. This would include roads that contained a high number of trees. In addition they would monitor strategically important roads regularly to ensure they would be able to update the schedule as necessary.
3. Members raised concerns that often leaves were being ground up by street cleaning machines which blocked the gullies. Officers confirmed that they liaised with Borough and District colleagues so they would be able to discuss and address the issue where necessary. Conway also confirmed they tried to schedule their programme to take place after the leaves dropped.

4. Members requested to have a copy of the database of 'blockage hot spots' so they were able to inform residents. The Committee were informed this would be difficult until Conway had gone through a complete cycle of gully cleaning, however residents could look on the public website to see when their road would be cleaned.
5. The Committee were informed there was jetting machine dedicated to the Local Highway Teams in a rota basis which could be requested through the local Highways Officer, if it was felt this was required at certain problem locations.
6. Members queried what the procedure was if there were cars parked along the road when a gully was scheduled to be cleaned. Officers stated that where there were parked cars, Conway was required to go back at another time to complete the cleaning. Where there was a fault with the gully system, officers were required to consider permanent fixes which would need to go on the highway schedule of planned works.
7. Members felt knowledge of the gully system was important to ensure effective maintenance in the future. They were informed that Conway were in the process of surveying every street to locate all the visible gullies and soakaways, and would then plot how to link them all together to ensure there was a functioning system.

Recommendations:

1. That the Committee endorses the allocation of a minor works budget to support the gully cleaning programme.

Actions/further information required: None.

Committee next steps:

The Select Committee will receive a further update in Spring/Summer 2014.

71/13 DATE OF NEXT MEETING [Item 11]

It was noted that the next meeting of the Environment & Transport Select Committee would be held on 23 January 2014 at 10am at Elmbridge Borough Council Civic Offices.

Meeting ended at: 12.55 pm

Chairman