

**MINUTES** of the meeting of the **RESOURCES AND PERFORMANCE SELECT COMMITTEE** held at 10.00 am on 13 July 2022 at 10:00am.

These minutes are subject to confirmation by the Committee at its meeting on Friday, 7 October 2022.

**Elected Members:**

- \* Ayesha Azad (Vice-Chairman)
- \* Nick Darby (Chairman)
- \* Will Forster (Vice-Chairman)
- \* David Harmer
- \* Robert Hughes
- \* Robert King
- \* Steven McCormick
- \* Tony Samuels
- Lance Spencer
- \* Lesley Steeds
- \* Hazel Watson
- \* Jeremy Webster

(\* =present at the meeting)

**26/21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS [Item 1]**

Apologies were received from Lance Spencer.

**27/21 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING: 14 APRIL 2022 [Item 2]**

The minutes of the Resources and Performance Select Committee held on 14 April 2022 were formally agreed as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

**28/21 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST [Item 3]**

None received.

**29/21 QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS [Item 4]**

None received.

**30/21 CUSTOMER SERVICES UPDATE [Item 5]**

Witnesses:

Mark Nuti, Cabinet Member for Communities  
Marie Snelling, Executive Director of Customer and Communities  
Sarah Bogunovic, Head of Customer Strategy and Registrations  
Susan Grizzelle, Head of Customer Services

**Key points raised during the discussion:**

1. The Cabinet Member for Communities introduced the report, commending the work undertaken by the customer services team

throughout the pandemic which included the implementation of the test and trace and vaccination programmes. The Cabinet Member for Communities added that Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) around call times would be considered carefully going forward as calls became more in depth and lasting longer as a result.

2. The Chairman queried what were the three main challenges faced by Customer Services. The Executive Director of Customer and Communities said the first challenge was workforce, explaining that customer services could be a time limited job. Surrey County Council (SCC) had a good track record of people remaining within the organisation which in turn could cause issues with retention and the delivery of the customer services operation as staff move into other roles. This coupled with the challenges faced more broadly around recruitment across the County Council required creative and innovative methods of attracting applicants and retaining staff to be considered. Secondly, the nature of calls had become more complex, resulting in the need to provide staff more training and adjust the operation to support residents successfully. The third main challenge was to continue running a good operational service whilst fulfilling a wider corporate role, providing training, guidance, advice and support across the organisation to support customer culture.
3. The Chairman asked what innovative and creative methods were being considered to address the recruitment and retention challenges mentioned previously. The Head of Customer Services explained the current buoyant employment market meant that some staff were returning to pre pandemic jobs. Recruitment campaigns were emphasising the interesting and diverse services offered to attract applicants in addition to offering permanent roles rather than fixed term contracts, providing more job security.
4. The Chairman queried if the contact centre currently had a full complement of staff. The Head of Customer Services confirmed that there were vacancies within social care areas but overall, the current staffing profile was as expected.
5. The Chairman questioned if the longer, more complex calls mentioned previously would affect the ability to deliver efficiencies. The Executive Director of Customer and Communities said that the service had delivered significant efficiencies during the last five years noted that there were no efficiency profiles for this year. She added that although the financial outlook going forward was expected to be challenging, the ability to deal with efficiencies would not be affected.
6. The Chairman queried the average staff turnover and length of service within customer services. The Head of Customer Services noted that most staff stay for a year as roles within the department

were entry level and part of someone's development to remain with the service. The Chairman noted this reiterating the benefits of encouraging staff to stay and move on to roles within the organisation wherever possible

7. A Member asked what support was given to staff to prepare for roles within adult's social care. The Head of Customer Services explained that adult's and children's social care teams were embedded within the contact centre with staff often being promoted to within these social care teams having gained transferable skills from other areas of the contact centre.
8. A Member queried if the initial training provided to customer service staff would be suitable for Members who often find themselves in a customer facing role. The Head of Customer Services confirmed that Member inductions had highlighted the need for guidance on handling difficult situations and a new suite of training for Members was planned for the autumn. The Cabinet Member for Communities said Member development workshops were planned for September and October 2022 and it would be helpful to include some customer services training as part of those sessions.
9. A Member asked if school appeals training was available to Members. The Executive Director of Customer and Communities noted that suggestions from Members for topics to be included in the Member Development sessions planned for the autumn would help to provide information of use and allow the service to understand and support Member's needs. The Head of Customer Strategy and Registrations explained that that the annual complaints report had recently been to the Audit and Governance Committee to address some of the complexities that families had to navigate as part of the school appeals process and discussions to simplify some of the processes had taken place with that committee.
10. A Member said that training for Members in how to deal with people in distress was required. The Head of Customer Strategy and Registrations said that ensuring Members are aware of the support available to families would be addressed in the new training package available in the autumn.
11. A Member asked how peaks and troughs in demand were analysed and prepared for and what were the plans in place for a county wide emergency. The Head of Customer Services explained that data was analysed every half an hour to identify when to expect high and low call volumes. In the event of an emergency, staff would be redirected to accommodate cover as required. Business continuity plans had been drawn up to plan and inform in the event of a county wide emergency.

12. A Member asked what work was being undertaken with libraries, what was the role of the library service in providing customer support and were digitally excluded residents being considered in this area. The Head of Customer Strategy and Registrations confirmed that the need for cooperation between the library service and customer services function had been identified and the aim was for residents accessing the service through libraries to receive the same level of customer service as if they had telephoned the customer service centre. Training of the library workforce had been rolled out as part of the library transformation program in addition to linking up with the digital buddy infrastructure. The Cabinet Member for Communities said that Members would be signposted to areas where this service was prevalent to allow Members to guide residents to those libraries.
13. A Member queried if customer service staff were working from the office or home. The Head of Customer Services explained that the intention is for staff to be at the office for 40 per cent of their time and at home for 60 per cent of their time.
14. A Member asked for the road map to the website noted in the report to be shared with Members. The Head of Customer Strategy and Registrations said that a Cabinet Office accessibility audit was being developed to further inform future development and look at how inclusive the current website offer is, in addition to commissioned research with resident groups to identify what they would like to see from the digital offer, ensuring continued aim of inclusive and accessible information. The roadmap would be shared with Members when these pieces of work were concluded.
15. A Member asked if call centre information was shared with the districts and boroughs. The head of Customer Services confirmed that regular meetings were held with districts and boroughs to discuss cross over area with support offered each way to provide a seamless customer service provision in Surrey.
16. A Member said that a form of automation to integrate across the organisational boundaries would be beneficial. The Head of Customer Strategy and Registrations summarised work being undertaken at a strategic level to bridge some of the organisational gaps and create a more joined up experience for customers. Discussions were also taking place with districts and boroughs and health to ensure smarter and seamless navigation in the digital offer in addition to sharing expertise and capability.
17. A Member expressed concern around link workers and asked what that meant for Members. The Cabinet Member for Communities agreed to come back with further information

18. A Member asked how prepared the service was to support calls from residents considering the cost-of-living crisis. The Head of Customer Services was confident a comprehensive service was being offered to residents contacting the service with staff having received training from the Citizens Advice Bureau to answer this type of enquiry specifically. Communications work had begun to provide leaflets for residents using food banks or surgeries signposting them to the support available.
19. A Member asked if a list of officers noting their remits and areas of expertise could be provided to Members so that they can contact the officer relevant to their query easily. The Head Customer Strategy and Registrations said that data could not be captured if Members approached officers directly which would affect the insight required to improve. A Member casework guide was available on the Member Portal, providing information on the key pathways and advising Members of the processes in place. The Cabinet Member for Communities confirmed the response time for the current process was five working days which is often exceeded.
20. A Member queried if there was a back-up system incorporating communications and access to data and if so, had it been tested. The Head of Customer Services explained that resilience was much improved since the pandemic with staff now able to work from home. Risk around the telephony system remained and ways of building resilience in that area were being considered with the prioritisation of social care areas which held the greatest risk. All systems were tested quarterly.
21. A Member queried if the five-day response time related to highways calls. The Head of Customer Services said that the response time for highways was 10 days. A Member said that she had an example of a query awaiting a response after three weeks. The Head of Customer Services asked for the information of this call so that it could be investigated. The Head of Customer Strategy and Registrations added that work was being undertaken with regard to the Environment, Transport and Infrastructure directorate around their customer improvement plan which included a review of response times.
22. A Member asked if an analysis had taken place to determine if queries received through the live chat took longer to deal with than a phone call. The Head of Customer Strategy and Registrations confirmed the focus to roll out the live chat function further as a result of positive resident feedback and support of the live chat following recent commissioned research undertaken with residents with autism and people experiencing mental health issues. [does not seem like the question was answered – perhaps add to the request for further information heading at the end]

23. A Member, in relation to staff retention asked if a training needs assessment took place regularly and queried if there was a career path available to staff to improve retention. The Head of Customer Services confirmed that a team based within the contact centre trained other teams within Surrey County Council in addition to customer service staff. Agents were met individually to ensure they had access to the skills, knowledge and information required and were encouraged through career pathways. Staff were encouraged to develop skills relevant to any favoured subject area.
24. A Vice Chairman, in referring to the Select Committee's previous recommendation around benchmarking, asked what had been learnt from the exercise. The Head of Customer Services confirmed that a wide group of councils had signed up to take part in the benchmarking group, meeting every four to six weeks and Surrey County Councils results compared favourably, particularly around areas of online uptake. The Head of Customer Services committed to share the detail with the Committee following the meeting. The Executive Director of Customer and Communities added that exercise had created avenues to focus on in certain areas.
25. A Member commended the focus on quality rather than quantity and asked if benchmarking the accessibility of the service in comparison with the NHS had been considered. The Executive Director of Customer and Communities said that officers were awaiting the results of an accessibility audit from the Cabinet office which would help to inform and continue the focus on ensuring the service is accessible as possible across all customer contact channels.

**RESOLVED:**

The Resources and Performance Select Committee:

1. Asks that, building on previous successful visit offer to Members, the Service encourages and offer a further opportunity to visit the customer services centre to all Members.
2. Requests that advice and effective signposting about cost-of-living queries continue to be provided to relevant callers/residents by the customer services team.
3. Asks the Service continues to take possible actions (training, development, career progression pathway/advice, secondment, cross-working opportunities etc.) to improve staff turnover rate in customer services. This will not only help increase job satisfaction and enable the SCC/Service to become the employer of choice in a competitive job market but also enhance the quality and effectiveness of the service provided to residents.

4. Requests (welcomes, if already planned) a Members information session by the Service; and more information about live chat programme.

Request for further information:

- More information about link workers, benchmarking data including areas that required more focus.

### **31/21 UPDATE ON THE ROLL OUT OF DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE IN SURREY [Item 6]**

Witnesses:

Michael Coughlin, Executive Director, Partnerships, Prosperity and Growth

Rhiannon Mort, Head of Economic Infrastructure

Katie Brennan, Digital Infrastructure, Senior Project Manager

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

1. The Executive Director, Partnerships Prosperity and Growth introduced the report confirming that the 'digital infrastructure' noted in the paper referred to e.g. the cabling, fibre, networks, transmitters, masts/poles and hardware that is required to enable software, applications and digital technologies to operate at their optimum level in the interests of ensuring Surrey's residents, communities, economy and public agencies can fully benefit from them.
2. The Chairman asked how permitted development rights affected Surrey County Council, particularly in relation to highways. The Digital Infrastructure, Senior Project Manager confirmed that in Surrey, borough and district councils were the local planning authorities, carrying out specific planning functions and managing permitted developments for their area. Most communication apparatus came under permitted development rights enshrined in national planning legislation determined by government, not local authorities.
3. There are two types of permitted development; the majority of telephone and broadband access apparatus such as cabinets and telegraph poles fall under 'permitted development', where the supplier contacts the local planning authority 28 days prior to starting works with no planning or prior approval from the local planning authority being required. The second category is 'permitted development requiring prior approval'. In this instance, the only factors the local district or borough planning authority can consider were details around the site, height, topography and appearance of the proposed apparatus.

4. New legislation brought in in April 2022 meant that 4G and 5G masts up to 30 metres were now dealt with by district and borough councils under permitted development requiring prior approval. Masts were being increased to 25 metres on conservation areas and highways except for areas of special scientific interest and rules had been relaxed around the width and the height of existing ground-based masts being replaced in addition to the amendment to rules around masts on buildings and radio equipment housing.

Where masts/poles were being located on highways land, Surrey County Council, as the local highway authority, would be invited by the local district or borough planning authority to comment on the highway safety aspects only, but would not have powers to comment on the suitability of a location in respect of aesthetics.

Separately from the planning legislation, if a communications supplier intended to break the surface of the public highway to install new ducts, chambers, cabinets or poles, the company would be required to seek a permit application to Surrey County Council as the local planning authority and all permit applications were considered with the principles and rules of the permit scheme and road network availability for the proposed works to take place. For any applications indicating the installation of any new above ground assets, confirmation should be sought from the communication supplier that the necessary notifications have been submitted to the local planning authority to the required time scales prior to any installation.

5. The Chairman asked for clarification around the permissions aspect of permitted development. The Digital Infrastructure, Senior Project Manager explained that a supplier installing a 30-metre mast would be required to submit a permitted development with the prior approval requirement to the appropriate district or borough Council as the planning authority. This would have previously required submission of a full planning application but had now been moved into permitted development with the requirement for prior approval from the local planning authority as part of that process.
6. The Chairman summarised that the recent legislation changes affected apparatus up to 29 metres and could only be refused by a private landowner, not Surrey County Council, highways or local residents. The Digital Infrastructure, Senior Project Manager added that the supplier would have to obtain a wayleave from the landowner before the installation could take place.
7. The Digital Infrastructure, Senior Project Manager highlighted the possible resources challenges if the local planning authority were to receive notifications for hundreds of new cabinets in a short space of time with Surrey County Council highways and street works team receiving a similar number of permanent applications. To alleviate



any risks, early engagement with the districts and boroughs, suppliers, highways and street works teams had been undertaken to discuss the process and avoid delays as legally suppliers only must notify the local planning authority 28 days before works commence.

Tony Samuels left the meeting at 12:00pm

8. A Vice Chairman asked what the three main challenges were faced by Surrey County Council in this area. The Head of Economic Infrastructure summarised the main challenges as i) the resourcing of the process by County, district and borough councils, ii) the critical importance of close engagement and positive working relationships with the districts and boroughs to deal with residents queries received by Surrey County Council regarding this complicated area and iii) the major shift from the previous super-fast programme that Surrey County Council had had an active role in delivering, to the gigabit speed program in which the government had instructed Building Digital UK (BDUK) to take a lead role in terms of roll out of infrastructure.
9. A Member said that they were aware of a proposal to site a mast within 150 metres of a local school and asked if that was permitted. The Digital Infrastructure, Senior Project Manager suggested that the Member should contact the local district or borough council planning authority for advice.
10. A Member, in relation to the restoration of footpaths being disturbed by contractors, asked if there was a strategy around communications with contractors. The Digital Infrastructure, Senior Project Manager confirmed that there was, but that for specific issues and locations suggested that the Member should contact the traffic and street works manager. The Member suggested that the Committee give this area further consideration. The Chairman noted the request.
11. A Vice Chairman, while acknowledging that the detail of the roll out of digital infrastructure was not the responsibility of Surrey County Council, questioned whether a county-wide strategy going beyond the county councils core responsibilities could be beneficial and complement Surrey County Council's promotion of digital infrastructure. The Executive Director, Partnerships, Prosperity and Growth explained that BDUK and the government largely direct the national strategy, creating the market conditions which dictate what will happen in Surrey to a significant extent. Surrey County Council were actively working to lobby and influence BDUK and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to shape that within a vision for digital in the County. BDUK create and issue to the market a series of 'lots' to which commercial and local community groups respond, to secure the implementation of what has been broadly dictated from national government. As a

consequence, SCC has an influencing role, rather than strategic control over the programme.

12. A Vice-Chairman queried if there were examples of best practice, designs and locations that could be suggested to digital suppliers to provide a more acceptable appearance to residents. The Digital Infrastructure, Senior Project Manager said that the government had started to look into monopoles, which were thin, black poles, however other design elements had not been investigated to date but examples of best practice could be sought.
13. A Member asked what could be done to encourage installation of 18 and 15 metre masts at existing sites and to ensure that residents were consulted regarding the appearance. The Digital Infrastructure, Senior Project confirmed that these masts would fall under prior approval, with decisions arising from engagement by the district or borough local planning authority with the supplier.
14. A Member queried if the difficulties around permitted development were a national problem and if so, could the Local Government Association (LGA) carry out a lobbying role on behalf of Councils across the country to address issues with masts and poles. The Executive Director, Partnerships and Prosperity and Growth said that the latest LGA activity around this subject would be investigated adding that it was important to be mindful of the sovereign responsibilities and boundaries in terms of the functions of district and borough councils.
15. A Vice Chairman, in relation to the gigabit programme, queried how it was being determined and on what basis would any priority be allocated to it? The Digital Infrastructure, Senior Project Manager explained that the government announced a series of phased procurement lots that were being undertaken as part of project Gigabit. These lots had been identified loosely around county boundaries, placed into phases and had been identified by BDUK as having the most need.
16. The Chairman summarised the issues raised by Members about the roll out and concerns around the planning regime in place and said that the committee would commit to liaise with the districts and boroughs and provide support if required. The Chairman noted the complex subject area and thanked officers for sharing their knowledge and expertise.

**Resolved:**

The Resources and Performance Select Committee:

1. Asks that the Cabinet Member for Transport and Infrastructure along with Executive Director Partnerships, Prosperity and Growth highlights the issues raised by the Committee around mast and pole size and locations, with the Surrey district and borough Chief Executives and Planning Officers to consider and take forward as part of their sovereign statutory and planning functions. These issues include the desirability of early and proper consultation with residents and divisional members likely to be affected by new masts or infrastructure and the publication on their websites of the local planning rules.
2. Requests that the Cabinet Member for Transport and Infrastructure together with Executive Director Partnerships, Prosperity and Growth raises with district and borough councils the potential merits of lobbying the Government/relevant authorities via appropriate available forums (LGA, CCN etc.) for more effective powers and guidance to be provided to local authorities to better respond to any reasonable concerns raised by residents.
3. Requests early sight, via email, of the report to Cabinet Member for Transport and Infrastructure to seek approval for the SCC project to make available SCC's assets to support the 5G roll out and other wireless technologies.
4. In relation to points 1 and 2, the Select Committee requests a briefing note on progress at the appropriate time but no later than 31 December 2022.
5. Asks the Cabinet Member for Transport and Infrastructure to have a briefing note prepared by 30 September 2022 to provide the committee with information on what legislation Statutory Undertakers must conform to in terms of repairs to the public highway after their works and what activities are carried out by the Council's Streetworks team to ensure that Statutory Undertakers meet these requirements.

**32/21 FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME AND RECOMMENDATION TRACKER [Item 7]**

The Select Committee noted the Recommendation Tracker and the Forward Work Programme.

**33/21 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING [Item 8]**

The Committee noted its next meeting would be held on 7 October 2022.

Meeting ended at: 12:51pm

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**Chairman**