

Communities, Highways and Environment Scrutiny Committee

21 September 2022 – At a meeting of the Communities, Highways and Environment Scrutiny Committee held at 10.30 am at County Hall, Chichester, PO19 1RQ.

Present: Cllr Britton (Chairman)

Cllr Oakley
Cllr Albury
Cllr Ali
Cllr Greenway

Cllr Kenyon
Cllr Milne
Cllr Oppler
Cllr Oxlade, left at
1.06pm

Cllr Patel
Cllr Quinn
Cllr Cooper

Apologies were received from Cllr Baldwin

Absent:

Also in attendance: Cllr Crow, Cllr J Dennis and Cllr Urquhart

Part I

19. Declarations of Interest

19.1 In accordance with the County Council's code of conduct, the following declarations of interest were made:

- Cllr Oxlade declared a personal interest as an employee of Manor Royal under the Climate Change Strategy Delivery Update.
- Cllr Oakley declared a personal interest as a member of Chichester District Council, a waste collection authority, under the Performance and Resources Report.

20. Urgent Matters

20.1 No urgent matters were raised.

21. Minutes of the last meeting

21.1 The members were asked to agree the minutes of the meetings held on 10 June and 8 July 2022.

21.2 With regard to the minutes of 10 June 2022, comment was made that there needed to be reflection that footway and verge parking in rural and urban areas needed to be considered differently

21.3 Resolved – that the minutes of the Committee meeting held on 10 June 2022 be approved as correct record with the addition of the point raised under 21.2 above and signed by the Chairman.

21.4 Resolved – that the minutes of the Committee meeting held on 8 July 2022 be approved as a correct record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

22. Responses to Recommendations

22.1 The Committee noted the response to recommendations made at the meetings on 10 June and 8 July 2022.

22.2 A question was raised on the triggers for future work of the Bus Enhanced Partnership Plan Task and Finish Group (TFG). Officers reported that information on funded schemes was expected in October 2022, and there could be some work for the TFG following those outcomes on the schemes proposed and how they could be delivered.

23. Transport for the South-East Strategic Investment Plan Consultation

23.1 Mr Hemmings, Transport Policy and Planning Manager, introduced the report by informing the Committee that the County Council was part of the Transport for South East (TfSE), a sub-national transport body. The report is the County Council's draft response to the latest consultation by TfSE on the Draft Strategic Investment Plan (SIP). The SIP is a 30-year investment plan underpinned by a set of technical exercises and evaluations. A presentation on the item was shared and a copy is appended to the minutes.

23.2 Members of the Committee then asked questions and a summary of those comments, questions and answers follows.

23.3 It was felt that better **public transport** would be a key to help reaching zero carbon targets, however increased fares were making the option unaffordable for many people. Officers confirmed work was being done to find funding for fare subsidies.

23.4 Members asked how the SIP was taking in to account the dramatic increases in costs over the last few years? Officers confirmed that the estimates contained in the SIP were recently updated.

23.5 A Member stated that maintenance costs for highways were high and were likely to be unaffordable going forward and this would be of concern to residents across the county. Officers reported that they believed the costs may have been overestimated by TfSE and had indicated this to them.

23.6 Concerns were raised about the high aspirations and vagueness in the SIP and officers reported that the SIP is high-level long-term regional proposal to enable the Council, other planning authorities and stakeholders to plan for the investments that will give the outcomes desired. The County Council's 15-year transport plan and a series of 5-year plans for road and rail will also mesh with the SIP. The TfSE would present a voice to Government advising how they should in future invest to gain greater influence on investment programmes by speaking with one voice for the region.

23.7 TfSE had made assumptions about the scale of investment in active travel across the region. The scale of ambition in the SIP exceeds current spending and future maintenance would be unaffordable so investments would need to be prioritised. This had been highlighted to TfSE, who had been asked to apply consistency. TfSE's influence on the Government for funding of multi-modal routes could be invaluable.

23.8 Members raised concerns on whether local planning could undermine some of the ambition in the SIP e.g. the impact of a second runway at Gatwick Airport and new roads serving new developments. Officers reported that the TfSE approach is different to local plan and strategic transport type studies. It is not a specific set of proposals but a model to understand the connection between economy and the transport model e.g. how an investment in transport could lead to economic growth. The County Council works closely with local planning authorities to give transport guidance, considering if there is a better way to introduce a development to give a more sustainable infrastructure. If developments could be located properly this could reduce the need for travel and provide more sustainable land use.

23.9 Members highlighted concerns of their residents on congestion points, and questioned the deliverability of projects, particularly the A27 and A29, and asked that the also A27 be included.

23.10 Members asked how the recent change in working patterns had been taken into account, and whether the new mobility patterns e.g. the use of e-bikes and e-scooters would help reduce vehicle trips? Officers reported that work patterns had not been considered and Government legislation was still needed on the use of e-scooters before there could be the opportunity of using active travel options.

23.11 Members highlighted that the overall funding capability needed to ensure transport system resilience to climatic events, e.g. flooding, heated railway lines, land shrinkage. Officers reported that assumptions had been made at an early stage including climate change and the resilience of network corridors.

23.12 Officers informed members that the consultation responses had been given through an online platform and that two weeks previously over 500 different responses had been received. A breakdown of responders was not available but was expected by the end of October.

23.13 Resolved – That the Committee:

1. Thanked officers for guiding the Committee through the report and answering questions.
2. Acknowledged concern about the ongoing costs of public transport and how that contributes to public transport perhaps being prohibitive to members of the public. They would welcome officers looking at how public transport could be made a more attractive option to use.

3. Expressed concerns about aspirations within the SIP, around mitigating pinch points on busy highways within the county e.g. on the A27 and A29.
4. Expressed concerns around the vagueness and aspirations of the SIP and now understood how the SIP could influence the Government in the longer term. Remained concerned about the influence of future local planning decisions, and wished to understand who takes the initiative.
5. Raised concerns about the vehicle fleet, especially in relation to decarbonisation, and about the deliverability of the aspirations of the SIP.
6. Wished that on page 24 of the agenda papers, in the first bullet highlighting the need to safeguard strategic active travel routes from interdiction by incremental development, second bullet point, that concerns about maintenance costs be extended to all highway assets, not just active travel, and that the third bullet point be extended to include Chichester as well as the Worthing/Lancing area.
7. Wished to ensure the alignment between the SIP and shorter-term local plans and development management processes.
8. Highlighted the risk to overall funding capability of the need to ensure transport systems are resilient to climate change and the need to maintain the existing network.

24. Climate Change Strategy Delivery Update

24.1 The Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change, Cllr Urquhart, introduced the item, reminding members of the County Council's commitment to be net zero on carbon emissions by 2030. This commitment underpinned all operations and the Council Plan, and the report set out progress, focussing on the County Council estate, and the challenges faced.

24.2 The Assistant Director (Environment and Public Protection), Mr Read, outlined that the Committee's views were being sought on whether the right linkages were being made, whether the approach was coherent, whether the right data was being collected and whether the authority remained on track to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030.

24.3 Members of the Committee then asked questions and a summary of those questions and answers follows.

24.4 Although most UK local authorities had adopted a climate change policy or equivalent, there was a wide variation in priorities, targets, and timelines. Currently there was no national standard set of data to enable **benchmarking**. Through discussion with other authorities in the South East 7 group (SE7) and other groups it was hoped to be able to benchmark where we could. It was agreed data needed to consider carbon reduction as well as cost elements.

24.5 The most effective way of spending money was not just to invest in reducing direct emissions but, for example, to look to reduce the dependency on fossil fuels in the longer term. The development of a medium-term strategy over the next 6-12 months would help identify the projects over which the Council has control. A large amount of emissions arise from the County Council's supply chain. We have identified the top 25 contractors and are starting to examine how it could be feasible to reduce the emissions associated with them. We are also working to ensure, through the Procurement Team, better contracts with future suppliers, many of whom are working towards similar goals. Transport for pupils with special educational needs was identified as an area for potential improvement.

24.6 The Smarter Working Programme had looked at the future demand for office space and highlighted the need for smaller, more modern working accommodation. The Council did not want to spend funds on decarbonising buildings which had no long-term future. To eliminate the dependency on fossil fuels, schemes were being considered, such as removing and replacing gas boilers with more modern efficient options (reducing heat leakage) and alternative energy sources, e.g. solar power. At the next update officers would provide some specific case studies for buildings.

24.7 Whilst good progress was being made in County Council buildings more work was needed on the wide range of **commercial assets** owned. These can vary from a parcel of empty land to a fully functioning office block. Work is in hand to survey all assets, to assess contractual conditions and durations of occupancy, in order see how carbon emission reductions can be handled. Areas of good practice would be shared with other tenants to help and encourage them.

24.8 For areas where there is low confidence in the data, often caused by the absence of data, data sets could often be obtained from other areas, e.g. suppliers, who often held data and this also helped send a signal that the Council wants to take action. This meant that areas of low confidence could be prioritised. Discussions with Cabinet and the executive leadership also helped to focus limited resources to areas that could show a demonstrable difference.

24.9 **Partnership working** takes place through the Inter-Authority Climate Change Board, chaired by the Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change, Cllr Urquhart, and attended by representatives from district and borough councils, the South Downs National Park Authority, and other stakeholders. The option of community engagement through online tools is being explored. This could start conversations to help understand community priorities. Discussions with the NHS are also underway and these will subsequently expand to include private sector partners.

24.10 Once County Council estate buildings are disposed of there would be no responsibility for any environmental impact. Any new building on sites sold would need to meet the higher carbon standards that now exist. Academy schools have their own distinct governance and would do their

own scrutinising and monitoring of carbon emissions. With the Government's aim that all schools become academies in future, there might be no future specific duty for the County Council unless there was a maintenance agreement in place, through which agreement could be sought to enhance any future measures.

24.11 A model is being built on **carbon sequestration** through tree planting and other options. It is likely that there will not be enough County Council land for the offsetting required and work would need to be done in collaboration with others. A Member asked if planting trees for carbon sequestration would have any impact on balancing the number of trees removed from highways land for reasons of safety or disease.

24.12 Climate change has been part of the **decision-making** process for some time now and is considered in every decision made within the Council. Work is also being done to build climate change considerations into the business planning process.

24.13 The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member and officers for the report and for answering questions so fully.

24.14 Resolved – That the Committee recognised there were no national standard datasets but that officers were striving to establish data of a high standard.

25. Performance and Resources Report 2022-23 - Quarter 1

Communities

25.1 The Cabinet Member for Community Support, Fire and Rescue, Cllr Crow, reported that business was getting back to pre-pandemic levels but there were still a lot of challenges to both staffing and workload.

25.2 The Assistant Director (Communities), Mrs King, reported that customer demand was rising, particularly for the Ceremonies team, but also in libraries. This had put pressure on staffing levels and some services were struggling to meet the demand of customers due to challenges on recruiting staff. The Coroner's Service was under pressure due to the level of need.

25.3 Mrs King reported that the Homes for Ukraine scheme had not been in the business plan and there had been no workforce ready to respond. The directorate had modelled their response on the pandemic response and gathered colleagues from across the directorate and remodelled. She had been very proud of the outcome.

25.4 Mrs King reported that the increase in demand for ceremonies had raised income, which had been used to offset losses such as video rentals in libraries. Officers were looking at changes in customer behaviour in order to provide the best service to customers.

25.5 Members of the Committee then asked questions and a summary of those questions and answers follows.

25.6 **Homes for Ukraine Scheme** – When the national online portal launched, a lot of interest had been expressed by West Sussex residents, leading to a very busy time in April and May. Expressions of interest continue to feed through but many who initially expressed an interest in hosting have not taken the matter further. Many hosts are keen to continue support beyond the initial 6 months of the scheme. New guests continue to arrive through various schemes e.g. the unaccompanied minors pathway, and extended family scheme. Records are held on the guests within the Homes for Ukraine Scheme and all guests have 4-monthly check-ins from their date of arrival and each guest has a tailored package. Information is fed back to the Government on the grant scheme. Within this scheme there have been minimal safeguarding issues presented.

25.7 Other **refugee schemes** are based on a tariff model with an allocation per individual where the Government identifies the cost over several years. The directorate ensures costs do not impact on the County Council by ensuring the money achieves the most it can.

25.8 It was difficult to measure how judicial sentences, as the outcome of **Trading Standards investigations**, were proving a deterrent to others. Successful outcomes were always publicised to raise public awareness. Information would be sought through the National Trading Standards (NATS).

25.9 **Communities Hub** – The hub was transitioning well from its initial Covid-facing service to more general information e.g. cost of living, callers seeking government grants, etc. The team were skilled and talented people who could be trained to answer questions on any subject. The team are trained to understand and reflect on tone, trigger words, and help to explain what is going on to callers.

Environment and Climate Change

25.10 Members of the Committee asked questions and a summary of those questions and answers follows.

25.11 The **1-2-3 collections trial** in partnership with Arun District Council had gone extremely well and another trial was being run in Mid Sussex. District and borough councils were awaiting an announcement from Government on future proposals before committing to such schemes. A report detailing the outcomes of the trial could be shared with the Committee. Lobbying of Government continued by the Cabinet Member who had written to the new Secretary of State, through consultation responses and through the Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transport (ADEPT) via their current president Mr Read, Assistant Director of Environment and Public Protection.

25.12 The **Solar Together Sussex** scheme had reached a milestone of 1,000 installations during the reporting quarter. It was reported that suppliers were struggling to get sufficient staff and components to complete installations, so the project had been paused until spring 2023. The County Council in partnership with district and borough councils

received a commission for installations. The County Council receipt goes into the fuel poverty fund and the district and borough councils used their income to promote and market the next round of the scheme.

25.13 It was hoped to open a **Re-Use Shop** in a southern centre and ways were being explored with the sub-contractor of the waste sites. Due to space constraints and health and safety it would not be possible to have a re-use shop at every household waste recycling centre.

Highways and Transport

25.14 The Assistant Director (Highways Transport and Planning), Mr Davey, reported that report gave a good summary of the key issues the portfolio was dealing with. Like other portfolios staffing capacity was a major concern. He reported much effort was being put in to changing the approach to recruitment. He reported that that there had been a good uptake of apprenticeship roles. The impact of the increasing energy costs had started to show in the quarter and efforts were being made to address this however there was capacity in the County Council budget to accommodate the rise in costs in year.

25.15 Members of the Committee asked questions and a summary of those questions and answers follows.

25.16 **Bus Service Improvement Plan** – It was confirmed that the consultations which had taken place had been on the bus station improvements in Horsham and a bus lane in Manor Royal, Crawley.

25.17 **KPI 18 Percentage length of A and B roads that require maintenance** – It was confirmed that the data was an average of information over a period of time rather than being based on a benign winter.

25.18 **KPI 41 Killed or seriously injured casualties** – It was difficult to prove that the road safety schemes delivered had a direct impact on the number of road casualties, but it was hoped that by making the overall road network safer that a reduction in injuries would be seen.

25.19 **A29 Road Scheme** – For the northern section the County Council had agreed to work with the housing developers to provide the road. However, the developers were having difficulty in acquiring the land for the scheme, so a compulsory purchase process had commenced. The southern section is expected to be funded by the housing developers which would be impacted by the viability of their developments, however there was confidence the scheme would be delivered.

25.20 **A284 Road Scheme** – There was confidence that the scheme would be delivered despite recent price increases.

25.21 The Government had continued to fund support for the **English National Concessionary Travel Scheme** for this financial year. Further announcements were awaited. Data suggested there was still a reduction in bus patronage.

26. Work Programme Planning and Possible Items for Future Scrutiny

26.1 The Committee received a tabled copy of the most recent Forward Plan of Key Decisions dated 15 September 2022, copy appended to these minutes, and Work Programme from the Business Planning Group.

26.2 A request was received for a progress report on the A27 Arundel bypass to highlight at what point the next steps might become visible.

27. Requests for Call-in

27.1 There had been no requests for call in to the Scrutiny Committee within its constitutional remit since the date of the last meeting.

28. Date of Next Meeting

28.1 The next meeting would be held on 18 November 2022 at 10.30am.

The meeting ended at 2.25 pm

Chairman