

Communities, Highways and Environment Scrutiny Committee

4 March 2024 – 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 (left 3.17pm) (Chairman)

Cllr Oakley	Cllr Hillier	Cllr Payne
Cllr Albury	Cllr N Jupp	Cllr Baxter, left 4pm
Cllr Baldwin	Cllr Kenyon	
Cllr N Dennis	Cllr Kerry-Bedell	

Apologies were received from Cllr Quinn and Cllr Sharp

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

49. Declarations of Interest

49.1 No interests were declared.

50. Urgent Matters

50.1 No urgent matters were raised.

51. Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee

51.1 Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 22 January 2024 be approved as a correct record and be signed by the Chairman.

51.2 A member who had missed the meeting raised a question on item 43.12 recommendation 1 asking what specific action was being taken and on recommendation 6 wished for more information. The Chairman undertook to follow up the questions and report back to Scrutiny Committee members.

52. Responses to Recommendations

52.1 The Committee noted the responses to recommendations made at previous meetings.

52.2 Cllr N Jupp did not understand the revised wording under the Major Schemes Lessons Learned item. He felt it sub-contractors should have the same contract standards and not "where possible". The Chairman agreed to refer this back to officers for a response as it did not adequately answer the concern.

52.3 A member asked about highways updates expected every 2 months had not been received and the Chairman agreed to follow up and another about the county-wide data on TRO/Community Highways Schemes

52.4 The Chairman also agreed to follow up with officers what would be done on traffic accidents in rural areas not being reported.

53. Performance and Resources Report - Quarter 3 - 2023/24

53.1 Members reviewed the Quarter 3 Policy and Resources Report and members of the Committee asked questions and a summary of those questions and answers follows.

Communities

53.2 The national issue of **excessive death rates** continued to be higher than the long-term average but was not continuing to grow and most recent data had showed a slight reduction.

53.3 Specialist training for front-line library staff on **managing difficult situations** continued to be rolled out to library staff and volunteers. Focus had been on the libraries most impacted and would be rolled out to part-time and Saturday staff along with volunteers in due course.

53.4 **Household Support Fund (HSF)** – The funding had been managed to ensure sufficient is available for quarter 4, which also covers the holiday activities and food programme (HAFF) for the Easter holidays. A decision is expected from Government in early March as to whether the HSF will continue. It was hoped that the increase in Government benefits from April 2024 would reduce the need for HSF.

53.5 **KPI 33 – Use of virtual/digital library services by residents** – The pandemic had seen an increase in the number of residents using online library services. Whilst the same number of books were being borrowed compared to pre-pandemic levels, the number of visits to libraries had reduced.

53.6 **KPI 34 – Community Hub provides positive outcomes for residents at first point of contact** – A definition of “a positive outcome for every caller” would be difficult as they all have an individual need. Measuring and tracking does take place but is not included in the PRR. A paper on the Community Hub would be coming to Scrutiny Committee soon and could include such information.

53.7 **Gypsy and Traveller site** – Pressure on the budget was largely to do with sewerage and the emptying of tanks, together with some reactive maintenance as the result of a power failure. With sites being close to water sources it was important to ensure drainage was maintained.

Environment

53.8 **KPI 22 – Equivalent tons of CO₂ emissions from WSCC activities** – The baseline was reduced at the beginning of the financial year by removing academy schools from the numbers. Work this year had been carried out through a staff survey on working practices to establish emissions from staff travel and commuting, which were not previously reflected. Data will get better over time and the base line will be reviewed

and adjusted in accordance with that information, for example this year the Fire and Rescue Service had supplied mileage details.

53.9 KPI 23 - Household waste recycled, reused or composted – The latest statistics published showed that West Sussex recycling rates are static, we remained fourth out of 29 disposal authorities. The three authorities above us all collect food waste, however collection rates had fallen for all authorities. Factors such as weather had impacted on green waste levels and the cost-of-living increases had impacted on people replacing belongings.

53.10 Persistent Organic Pollutants POPs – Costs remain high as the County Council has to dispose of these (e.g. stuffing in furniture), separately from normal waste at a proper facilities. For authorities with incinerators, they can send the POPs for burning to produce energy.

53.11 The value of **Recyclate** is always variable and would be highlighted when the budget was compiled.

53.12 Waste recycling volumes would always vary depending on different factors (e.g. the weather for green waste) and budgets have to be managed accordingly.

53.13 Solar and Battery Storage site at Halewick Lane – Due to the pause in the procurement process there had been a delay in delivery and therefore the anticipated income generation had not been realised. The business case has been reviewed at every stage to ensure it is still a viable project before proceeding to the next and would be revisited again following this most recent delay. Until a contractor is place there is no timeline for the project. Costs incurred so far had been from clearing the site and acquiring a National Grid connection.

53.14 A small proportion of waste goes to a Biffa landfill site in Redhill.
Action: Actual tonnage figures and percentages to be supplied to the Committee.

Capital Programme

53.15 4 - Flood Management – It had been hoped to complete flood alleviation work in the autumn 2023 but it had not been possible to get on site because of developer works preventing road space being available. It was hoped works would be completed before winter 2024.

Risk

53.16 CR76 – Water Neutrality – This remains a risk, but it was hoped that recent developments might lead to a way for building to take place. Some funding had been secured from the Government to employ specialist planning advisers on the situation. A member asked what could be done to support the building of schools in the area affected, and the supply of school places and the Cabinet Member reported that currently nothing could be done.

53.17 Resolved – That the Committee:

1. Raised concerns about recycle costs and the risk to budgets.
2. Questions whether the Scrutiny Committee should write to the Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee about the inability to provide school places under the current water neutrality position statement.

Highways and Transport

53.18 **KPI 18a and 18b – roads in good condition** – “Good condition” was defined by national criteria and is standardised nationally to allow comparison of figures. Condition is determined by inspection, whether a machine survey or a walking inspection records condition. The information is processed into a condition index. Members raised that footways and roads always came up at parish/town council meetings and it would be good for members to have background information for those meetings. Members were reminded that there was a lot of information on highways works on The Mine and The Bulletin. Also, the area depots would be hosting drop-in sessions for local members to meet the highways managers.

53.19 **KPI 19 – Highway defects repaired within required timescale** – The quality of repairs is inspected either by the Service or the contractor and there is a programme of auditing repairs. The difficulty comes in determining whether a problem is the same pothole or one very nearby.

53.20 **KPI 41 – Killed or serious injured** – A member asked whether officers were confident in the estimate per billion vehicle miles as any error could impact the data. Members were told the calculations go back several years, there was a slight change during Covid but only for a maximum of two years. It was more accurate to compare current statistics to pre-covid levels. Members were reminded that information was available for members on The Mine. A member asked whether the policy change in relation to speed limits had shown any impact on this KPI? It was advised that there had been an increase in requests for reduced speed limits, but it was considered that data over a greater period, say five years, would be needed to see if there had been an impact on road safety. A member asked if there were any measurable effects in areas that had introduced a 20 mph zones in the county. **Action:** Officers undertook to investigate if data on before and after the schemes were introduced to share with the Committee.

53.21 **Reduced uptake in National Concessionary Fares** – Since the pandemic the uptake by the elderly had not returned to earlier levels. There had been promotion of the concession and advertising, using partners like Age Concern to encourage the elderly and work in the Bus Improvement Partnership programme (BSIP). Bus operators reported that uptake by others, such as commuters and young people, had been good and numbers were above previous levels. This was most likely due to the current Government fare cap scheme. The Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport confirmed that funding was being put into flexi-buses in

really rural areas, to increase the frequency of bus routes in semi-rural areas and extending the time over which services were available.

53.22 Drainage – The Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport reported that it was not true to say that all drainage maintenance was on a 4-year cycle. Cycles were agreed to suit the need of the area. Priority jobs received quick inspection and treatment. This year, having had the highest rainfall ever levels in February, the water levels were abnormally high meaning ground water had nowhere to go, resulting in flooding. Intense rainfall could also lead to problems by washing debris into gullies and causing problems. Jetting had been increased after winter 2022 to get the priority 1, 2 and 3 jobs done before the next winter.

Capital Programme

53.23 1 – A29 Re-Alignment, Arun, Phase 1 – The Cabinet Member confirmed that additional funding had been profiled and a series of meetings were taking place on the way forward.

54. Major Incidents Affecting the Highways

54.1 The Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, Cllr Joy Dennis, introduced the report highlighting that most incidents had been weather related following heavy rainfall. Cllr J Dennis felt it was important to review how the incidents had been responded to and have the views of the Scrutiny Committee as there could well be more incidents in the future.

54.2 Members of the Committee gave comments and asked questions and a summary of those questions and answers follows.

54.3 A member who had experienced major incidents in their area felt it would be useful to convene a formal steering group involving the local member(s), officers and critically the Communications Team. This could also give weight, through the local members, to the views of residents on the impact of an incident and the response on the local community. The Cabinet Member considered this was a good idea as there were lots of informal meetings but no formal structured one which could handle communications with residents. Lessons had been learned on communications and it was suggested that a link to the County Council website to a list frequently asked questions would be useful for residents.

54.4 It was noted that no resources were allocated in the highways budget for major events, and this needed to be considered as part of the Emergency Planning response. A member suggested that the Highways Service should have a specific contingency set aside in the budget for major incidents. The Cllr J Dennis reported that expenditure incurred during a major incident was primarily capital but could also be revenue costs. Currently expenditure was currently covered from a general contingency fund, but the Cabinet Member would consider whether there was a better way forward. The costs for ongoing incidents, like Pulborough, were not possible to predict and could only be established once the incident was resolved.

54.5 Diversionary routes are set up in accordance with the Roads and Streetworks Act using a hierarchy of roads. It is recommended to keep traffic diversions to A roads, but B roads can be used where appropriate. Traffic management measures are put in place straight away. Some satellite navigation systems pick up delays and closures quicker than others which can impact journeys through incident areas. Large vehicles and heavy goods vehicles should use a dedicated satnav service which can avoid narrow roads or low bridges. Local traffic usually found unsuitable routes through local knowledge. The Service would also put out information signs such as "businesses open as usual". The Service was aware of the damage that an increased number of vehicles could cause to routes used as diversions.

54.6 Disruption to bus services during incidents was discussed with bus operators to ensure sensible diversionary routes were available for the affected bus services to use. Cllr J Dennis reminded members that there were also community buses available which have a much more flexible service.

54.7 Members felt incidents were likely to become more common and asked what the service could do to help communities be more prepared for severe weather incidents. Cllr J Dennis reported that work was taking place on riparian responsibilities, with communications going out on how to prepare for flooding and drainage issues, and undertook to ask the Service to focus communications on areas that were currently bad.

54.8 A major incident can have a big impact on business as usual in the Service as staff are moved from functions considered a lesser priority. Part of the additional funding for 2024-25 would be spent on increasing staffing and resources. Pressure on staff has led to low morale but staff were being supported and were buoyed by the additional resources committed. The Committee also discussed incidents of anti-social behaviour towards highways staff and contractors and heard how staff were being helped to deal with these events.

54.9 The Service had learnt lessons during the A29 Pulborough incident on the limitations of powers to undertake work on private land. On the whole landowners are extremely co-operative. Every incident is different, and legislation does not cover all possibilities. Discussions are underway with the Department for Transport on issues experienced to suggest changes that could give local authorities more flexibility. The Service will discuss with other local authorities to see how they have managed similar incidents.

54.10 Resolved – That the Committee:

1. Recommends a formal steering group be established following a major incident, to involve the local member(s), to give residents a voice and would welcome an update on how this is progressing.
2. Recommends that a dedicated allocation of funding be made available to deal with future major incidents and would welcome

the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport giving thought to how this might be done.

3. Welcomes the idea of a classification of what constitutes a major incident so that actions can be instigated quickly and looks forward to hearing further on this.
4. Welcomes that the Service works with bus operators to ensure bus services can continue to operate during major incidents.
5. Welcomes that the Service are working with residents and landowners to set expectations and provide advice on how to prepare for extreme weather events and looks forward to having feedback on how that has been received.
6. Acknowledges the impact extreme weather events have had on the highways network, the large increase in the number of enquiries received by the Service and appreciates all the hard work put in by highways staff over the last few winters.

55. Additional Highway Revenue Expenditure 2024/25

55.1 The Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, Cllr J Dennis, introduced the report informing the Committee that on top of the inflationary increase to budget, an additional £4m revenue funding had been made available for the Service. The report looked at how the additional funding for 2023-24 had been spent, what had been learnt and how that fed into proposals for the additional funding for 2024-25. The aim had been to focus the funding on areas that would have the greatest impact.

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

55.3 A member asked what quality control was in place for defects in the highway and repeat problems on drainage and flooding. Officers reported that repairs were audited with over 20,000 safety defects being reviewed since the start of the contract. It was hoped to increase the inspection team to be more proactive with auditing. Work teams take photographs of sites before and after as a record of the work done. The Service welcomed customers feeding back on the quality of repairs. Reactive drainage and visits are noted on the work system so data is building up.

55.4 Some of the additional resources from 2023-24 had been put into reactive drainage jetting and CCTV to work on reducing a significant backlog. Other problems had been identified during the course of this work. Additional resource has been added for 2024-25 to maintain this work. It was anticipated there would be a backlog of about 8,000 cases, down from the previous year's 11,500 cases.

55.5 A member highlighted a concern for cyclists was not just potholes but the edge of the road itself. The Cllr J Dennis reported that in rural areas there had been an increase in usage and erosion of verges. Work was underway to explore other funding options.

55.6 The 'value added defect repair' trial would involve a select number of highway inspectors and gangs looking to see if dealing with defects in close proximity, that do not yet meet the investigatory criteria for being dealt with, at the same time added value to a defect repair. Trial details were not yet available. Feedback on performance would be sought from the community.

55.7 There was confidence that the additional funding for 2023-24 would be spent within the year. A member asked, as the budget rise for 2024-25 was less than inflation, was it considered adequate? Officers reported they would always be in the position of being able to spend more money on the highways, as could many other County Council services.

55.8 Recruitment of additional staff had been undertaken with a longer-term commitment to keep roles like riparian duty-related officers. The Service was also reviewing different ways of working, digitisation and efficiencies. Low staff morale was being addressed by supporting staff with external resources if needed, and pausing activities if necessary. A recent away-day had helped staff morale, with managers and the Cabinet Member joining to support staff.

55.9 A member asked to what degree the Operation Watershed criteria needed adjusting to give greater weight to issues faced on the highway? The Cllr J Dennis agreed to discuss with the Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change.

55.10 Resolved – That the Committee:

1. Extends their thanks the highways team, across all divisions, for everything they do.
2. Welcomes that managers and Cabinet Member are doing all they can to ensure staff morale does not dip, including dealing with anti-social behaviour towards staff.
3. Recommends the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport speaks to the Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change on the Operation Watershed criteria to give greater weight to issues faced on the highway.
4. Would welcome a proactive plan for the Committee to monitor the additional funding for 2024-25.
5. Acknowledges that the additional funding has been needed to enable clearing of a backlog of cases, but more funding will be needed going forward.

55.11 The Chairman left the meeting and the Vice-Chairman took over the role of Chairman.

56. Active Travel School Streets Trial

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

56.2 The trial had involved three schools as two had dropped out at the last minute. Around 13 other schools had expressed interest in the School Streets project.

56.3 The trials were working well for schools both on main roads and in self-contained areas with people keeping to the restrictions. Work would be undertaken to collect perception surveys at the schools to understand how travel had changed but early data showed significant improvement and the environment in front of all three schools was better. Work would continue with all three trial schools once the trial period ended with monitoring through sensors placed in the highway within the school's free zone.

56.4 The final feedback and decision report would be reviewed by the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport. A copy would be appended to the Active Travel Strategy when reviewed by the Committee.

56.5 The current pilots run with only signage. There were no plans currently to do marshalled road closures as that required a lot of school community engagement.

56.6 There are two levels of enforcement, firstly through civil parking enforcement with the district and borough councils, and potentially, in the future should the County Council introduce a Moving Traffic Enforcement policy, using Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) equipment.

56.7 A member asked if any parking arrangements had been made with, for example, community centres and village halls, for displaced parking. Officers reported that it had not been possible to identify any venues for the pilots but was aware that some other schools had taken this approach and it worked well.

56.8 Members suggested an all-member briefing session to explain the project, once the results from the pilots were ready.

56.9 Resolved – That the Committee:

1. Welcomes the good news so far from the three trial schools which seemed to bring about a change in walking and wheeling habits.
2. Acknowledges that some school areas may require civil parking enforcement and that in the future, if a Moving Traffic Enforcement policy is introduced, there could be an opportunity to use ANPR equipment, but that the authority would have to investigate cost implications.
3. Welcomes the opportunity of an all-member session on the School Streets Project to widen knowledge and understanding of what is involved.

57. Work Programme Planning and Possible Items for Future Scrutiny

57.1 The Committee reviewed the Work Programme and the Forward Plan of key decisions and:

57.2 Asked BPG to look at the decision for the Halewick Lane battery storage site for its suitability for scrutiny by the Committee.

57.3 Asked for the scrutiny committee to look at the monitoring of repairs to highway defects to ensure all monitors met the same standard. Consider whether an all-member session would be appropriate so all members were given the opportunity to be involved.

57.4 Asked that highways flood prevention mitigation be considered by BPG for areas of scrutiny.

57.5 Asked that the conclusions from the February and June Water Summits be considered by BPG for areas of scrutiny.

57.6 Asked that the quality of road and pavement repairs from utility companies, e.g. broadband suppliers, be reviewed. BPG to consider whether this could be picked up under the Lane Rental item at the June meeting.

58. Requests for Call-in

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

59. Date of Next Meeting

59.1 The date of the next meeting would be held on 14 June 2024.

The meeting ended at 3.55 pm

Chairman