

Communities, Highways and Environment Scrutiny Committee

8 July 2022 – At a virtual meeting of the Communities, Highways and Environment Scrutiny Committee held at 2.15 pm.

Present: Cllr Britton (Chairman)

Cllr Oakley
Cllr Albury
Cllr Ali

Cllr Baldwin
Cllr Greenway
Cllr Milne

Cllr Oppler
Cllr Patel, left at 2.45pm
Cllr Burgess

Apologies were received from Cllr Oxlade, Cllr Quinn, Cllr Baxter, Cllr J Dennis and Cllr Urquhart and Cllr Urquhart.

Also in attendance: Cllr Crow

13. Declarations of Interest

13.1 No declarations of interest were made.

14. Urgent Matters

14.1 No urgent matters were raised.

15. Performance and Resources Report - Quarter 4

15.1 The Cabinet Member for Community Support, Fire and Rescue, Cllr Crow, introduced the item, giving some background on fourth quarter portfolio performance for the Committee. He reported that the three Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the Communities element of the portfolio were reporting green and reporting an underspend. Certain areas were running under-staffed, which had contributed to the underspend, but this was not sustainable in the longer-term

15.2 The Assistant Director (Communities), Mrs King, highlighted the impact for the Community Hub of switching between delivery of the COVID-19 Local Tracing Partnership, to delivering the Homes for Ukraine response alongside continued support for the vulnerable and those experiencing financial hardship. Attention was drawn to the efforts underway to recruit staff to the Registration Service, now that the Service has returned to face-to-face delivery, following the pandemic.

15.3 Members of the Committee then asked questions and a summary of those questions and answers follows:

- The model for the **Community Hub** allowed for flexibility in how staff are deployed and can be scaled up/down depending on requirements. The time taken to respond to telephone calls was not currently monitored but all staff are allocated to the single number. Once the Customer Service Centre has been brought back in-house, monitoring along these lines should be possible. Much of the Hub's work involves direct intervention/practical assistance but there is also a degree of signposting residents to

a variety of other services. KPI 34 related in the main to unique interactions, not unique individuals.

- **Trading Standards** intervention is an interaction – a phone call, written communication or, more usually, a visit. A formal record of any interaction is always made.
- The movement of **Registration Service** staff from office to office, based on demand, could be determined locally. However, forecasting demand was challenging. The ability to register deaths over the phone was a legal Coronavirus easement, which has since lapsed.
- Increased use of the **e-library** offer was partially driven by the pandemic which 'supercharged' the number of new customers utilising this service. Use of the physical library assets and services had not yet fully recovered to pre-pandemic levels but
- Performance data reporting included both aspects of service access in terms of people using digital services remotely as well as accessing whilst within the library either from their own devices or using the Public Access Computers.

15.4 The Assistant Director (Environment and Public Protection), Mr Read, highlighted that no new risks or major issues had arisen during the quarter. Agreement had been reached with Biffa for the processing of food waste, despite the continuing absence of detail from the government, which was also perpetuating uncertainty for the Districts and Boroughs. Waste volumes and electricity generation had remained stable. The booking system operating at some Recycling Centres continued to operate successfully and the implementation of same day bookings had been widely welcomed. Work on decarbonisation of the estate was progressing and aligned with the Smarter Working programme.

15.5 Members of the Committee then asked questions and a summary of those questions and answers follows:

- No changes in performance had arisen due to the change in **solar farm** Operation and Maintenance contractors.
- The reporting on **KPI 23** would always be delayed, because measurement relied on collation of a lot of data from various sources and only happened at the time when material was actually recycled (and not upon collection).
- Hard plastics are now being accepted at some **Recycling Centres**, and it was planned to roll this out to most sites subject to space. The connectivity of the sites was being improved in order to get the full benefit of same-day booking. The impact of Covid and variations in the state of the economy made it difficult to tease out the impact of the booking system on site usage. Use patterns were not greatly different between booking and non-booking sites and it was clear that the system had served to

smooth out peak attendance times. The avoidance of congestion has been a major improvement for local business and residents.

- **Faygate** is a closed landfill site, with ongoing mitigation in place to manage the post-closure period of its life cycle.
- Work is progressing on a **decarbonisation programme** for 47 of the top 50 emitting buildings in the corporate estate. The programme should be completed by 2030. Revenue benefits will rise commensurate with avoiding the impacts of rising gas and electricity prices.

15.6 The Assistant Director (Highways Transport and Planning), Mr Davey, highlighted the ongoing red performance against KPI 19. It was expected that the indicator would be green after the next quarter. KPI 41 remained red. An Executive Task and Finish Group was helping the Cabinet Member develop a new Road Safety Strategy, which was planned to be ready for consultation later this year. The underspend in the revenue budget was primarily due to reductions in the reimbursement payments to bus companies, due to the pandemic.

15.7 Members of the Committee then asked questions and a summary of those questions and answers follows:

- KPI 18 showed a deterioration in the **condition of A and B roads**, due to historical under-investment in the maintenance budget. This supported residents' observation that the quality of roads was worsening.
- Staffing availability was currently not affecting our ability to **monitor the quality of repairs**. The benefits of new maintenance/repair equipment would be seen in subsequent quarters, but perhaps not for 1-2 years. The benefits of the large capital programme of resurfacing and repair work would also be manifested as a reduced number of defects in future years.
- Regarding KPI 41, the data on the **causes of road accidents** was provided by Sussex Police. It was not always clear where the condition and design of the road had been a factor, but these constituted a small proportion of the overall number of accidents.
- The reduced numbers of **bus journeys** (the overall numbers being yet to recover to pre-pandemic levels) being taken may reduce the viability of commercially operated bus routes.
- Within the current contractual arrangements, the contractor is obliged to fix the potholes identified by the Council. There is no leeway to repair any other nearby potholes found in the process of fixing the identified defect. Other ways of working are not straightforward and have attendant problems. However, new working practices are being trialled.

15.8 Resolved – That the Committee:

1. Acknowledged the benefits of the Community Hub, and in particular its flexibility. Acknowledged that an intervention is a formal event, and noted that there needs to be an audit trail of outcomes from interventions, across the portfolio.
2. Noted that planning was underway for when the contract with authority's energy broker expired in spring 2023. Welcomed the increased income generated from the solar farms.
3. Noted the factors contributing to the red performance on KPI 19 (Highway Defects Repaired Within the Required Timescale). Requested that a senior representative of the contractor be invited to attend Committee for members to get a better understanding of the challenges, in case the Committee could suggest different ways of addressing these. Acknowledged the high levels of maintenance investment in the 22/23 budget.
4. Highlighted the impact a reduction in income could have on the bus network.
5. Requested that the Chairman highlight at Performance and Finance Scrutiny Committee the risks to the Council's ability to delivery services due to staff availability (Covid sickness absence, but also recruitment challenges in the post-Covid labour market) and inflation.

16. Business Planning Group

16.1 The Committee noted the membership of the Business Planning Group as Councillors Britton, Oakley, Kenyon, Oxlade and Milne. The Chairman thanked Councillor Albury for his service.

17. Requests for Call-in

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

18. Date of Next Meeting

18.1 The next meeting would be held on 21 September 2022 at 10.30am.

The meeting ended at 4.12 pm

Chairman