

Communities, Highways and Environment Scrutiny Committee

18 November 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 Ali
Cllr Greenway

Cllr Kenyon
Cllr Milne
Cllr Patel

Cllr Quinn
Cllr Burgess, am only

Apologies were received from Cllr Albury, Cllr Baldwin, Cllr Oppler and Cllr Oxlade

Also in attendance: Cllr Crow, Cllr J Dennis (pm only) and Cllr Urquhart (pm only)

29. Declarations of Interest

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

29.2 Cllr Oakley declared a personal interest as a member of Chichester District Council, a waste collection authority, under agenda item 6 and as a member of the Executive Task Force Group for Walking and Cycling and a Chichester District Council appointment to the Portsmouth Water Customer Scrutiny Panel and the Water Resources South-East Customer Challenge Group under agenda item 8(b).

29.3 Cllr Ali declared a personal interest as a member of Crawley Borough Council under agenda items 5 and 6.

29.4 Cllr Burgess declared a personal interest as a member of Crawley Borough Council under agenda items 5 and 6.

30. Urgent Matters

30.1 No urgent matters were raised.

31. Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee

31.1 The members were asked to agree the minutes of the meeting held on 21 September 2022.

31.2 Members requested the following updates to the minutes.

31.3 Under minute 23.4, first sentence, remove the word prices and make the word cost into costs.

31.4 Under minute 23.5 a member asked that the minute be clarified.

31.5 With regard to minute 22.2 members were updated that the information on the funded schemes for the Bus Enhanced Partnership Plan was now expected in January 2023.

31.6 With regard to minute 23.12 officers confirmed that the breakdown of responders to the Transport for the South-East consultation on the Strategic Investment Plan were not yet available.

32. Responses to Recommendations

32.1 The Committee noted the responses to recommendations made at the meeting on 21 September 2022.

32.2 A member highlighted that under Transport for the South-East Strategic Investment Plan Consultation – recommendation 2 – that availability and connectivity were just as important as cost and that work should be done to fundamentally change the service.

32.3 Clarification was also sought from officers under recommendation 6 as it was felt the response did not address the point made in the minutes.

33. Digital Crime

33.1 The Cabinet Member for Community Support, Fire and Rescue, Cllr Crow, introduced the item, reminding members that one of the priorities in Our Council's Plan was to keep people safe from vulnerable situations and this item would demonstrate how digital crime would apply to that. Victims of digital crime have impacts for the County Council. There was a direct correlation between people who become victims of digital crime and people who need services and assistance from the County Council, whether they were children or adults.

33.2 Cllr Crow also asked members to help promote good messages to local communities using the Stay Safe pages on the County Council website and social media. The County Council has a Stay Safe account on Twitter and messages can be retweeted. The 36 libraries were a valuable front door for vulnerable people and those who like face to face contact and staff are well trained to provide good advice and signpost people to other support.

33.3 The Committee received presentations from officers and external witnesses PC Lawrie, Financial Abuse Safeguarding Officer for Operation Signature at the Sussex and Surrey Police Specialist Crime Command and Mrs Booker, Director of Police, MOD and Local Government Programmes at Get Safe Online. Mrs Booker said she worked with organisations across the United Kingdom and that the Safer West Sussex Safer Partnership was much more active than anywhere else she worked with.

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

33.5 Committee members were shocked to hear that in the 7–10-year-old age group self-generated sexual imagery was up 235% and was the

fastest growing age group of concern. Officers reported that this had been because much younger children were using digital technology, groomers had developed more sophisticated ways of contacting children, pandemic lockdowns had impacted, a lack of parental control and loss of school support.

33.6 The **Digital Safety Package** and associated training is available to schools for a fee. The Education for Safeguarding Programme, through a recent funding scheme was hoped to cover costs until 2024. Officers would be undertaking a survey in the New Year to establish if schools have heard of the package and to understand why they were not subscribing. Members asked for a list of schools not signed up by division so that local members could encourage schools to do so. Information is also regularly shared with schools via the Headteachers' letter, resources are offered for assemblies, updates on risk or threat information shared, as well as the upcoming West Sussex Children's Safeguarding Conference which school staff were anticipated to be in attendance.

33.7 Work is ongoing to share information via the monthly Staying Safe Online e-newsletter, which is also shared by internal and external networks e.g the library services newsletter, neighbourhood watch groups, digital ambassadors, parish, district and borough councils. Work had taken place with the National Health Service (NHS) to produce a poster for all GP surgeries, and the Digital Safety team were exploring getting the message on to digital screens in surgeries. The Police share a lot of literature with residents and the Fire Services' wellbeing visits had also shared information and made referrals for several years. Members suggested that sharing at annual parish meetings and community groups would be a good idea.

33.8 **Trading Standards** could take down websites, but sometimes they needed to contact the head offices of large companies which could take time. Where there is no head office the National Trading Standards (NTS) crime team can help. The main source of reporting comes from Citizens Advice. They also worked with district and borough planning teams to disrupt rogue traders who breached planning law.

33.9 **Banks** heavily subsidise online safety programmes through Get Safe Online as well as having their own safety procedures, e.g. they were the first to introduce cross-channel banking protocol, all bank staff are trained to call 999 for suspicious transactions in branch, if fraud is suspected payments are frozen for 72 hours and the Police contacted, and they provide regular advice for customers. Additionally, the Bank Notification Scheme can be used to identify vulnerable customers.

33.10 **Digital Ambassadors** are recruited via newsletters, press releases, radio interviews etc. A lot of interest is expressed but often people drop out once they know what is involved e.g. training.

33.11 The figure that 80% of fraud went unreported came from the British Crime Survey. There was no indication that any reductions in Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) were affecting the ability to identify victims, gain intelligence or share information. Priority had always been given to visiting victims for the past 8 years and there was no indication

that this would change. There was no data for reducing incidents of fraud, but other metrics were used to measure effectiveness and performance. It was key that all instances of online fraud should be reported to Action Fraud ([Action Fraud](#) / 0300 123 2040).

33.12 General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) had not affected the sharing of information. The Safer West Sussex Partnership has agreements for sharing protocols, particularly for information that legislation required them to share. Scammers were quick to respond to events e.g. when the Government announced energy support payments fraudsters were quick to see opportunities. The Partnership acted quickly to get information on this new area of fraud through the intelligence network. The teams rely on services such as Meals on Wheels, patient transport, etc, being the eyes and ears of the community.

33.13 Libraries are a “key front” door for vulnerable residents, a safe secure digital access and staff had received training from the Digital Safety team. Members were reassured that library staff were able to meet demand at the moment, but intensity of demand and complexity would have to be monitored in the future.

33.14 The Online Safety Bill is still at parliamentary stage and there is no set date for its introduction. Monitoring of current compliance and reporting rests with the Information Commissioner. Members asked who defined harm and how and against what (and whose) criteria, and the language used for these criteria? Who decided what mitigation we should take and how? Against what (and whose) criteria? How could we measure our success? Officers identified the current legal definitions around “harm” and adult and children safeguarding, and hoped that the Online Safety Bill would clarify some of these questions.

33.15 Cllr Crow thanked the members for their comments and questions and the officers and witnesses for their answers. It demonstrated that a lot was going on and gave food for thought on what more could be done to further increase the awareness of residents, what more the County Council can do to prevent victims of fraud and how to deal with threats that change over time.

33.16 Resolved – That the Committee:

1. Thanked the officers and guests for supporting the agenda item and for the impressive amount of work undertaken to protect people from harm and digital crime.
2. Felt that there was a need for greater awareness of the Digital Safety Package amongst schools and would welcome a list of schools who had not signed up, by division, so that local members could encourage schools to do so.
3. Acknowledged the philosophical concerns raised.
4. Acknowledged the ongoing challenges Trading Standards faced with online ordering and goods moving across borders.

5. Asked that the finalised report on the results and analysis of the county-wide parent/carer online safety survey be shared with the Committee.

34. Performance and Resources Report 2022-23 - Quarter 2

Communities

34.1 The Cabinet Member for Community Support, Fire and Rescue, Cllr Crow, highlighted the success of Trading Standards in receiving money back from the American authorities to pass back to around 30 local scam victims. He also reported that performance measures 4, 33 and 34 were rated green and that the in-year financial variance had narrowed. One of the savings targets remained outstanding but options were being explored to ensure it would be realised in the next financial year.

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

34.3 **Ukrainian support** – Cllr Crow confirmed that all sponsors and guests were contacted at the 4-month point to ensure things were going well and see if sponsor and guests wanted to continue beyond the initial six-month period. In West Sussex, over 80% of sponsors were keen to continue and the Ukrainian Support Team were working to rematch the other 20%. The 80% figure was higher than the national average. The support team were keen to keep guests out of temporary accommodation and arrange matches with new sponsors. It was not felt there would be a sudden rise in guest numbers needing support, and that team resources would be able to manage.

34.4 **Countering Extremism** training for taxi drivers – officers agreed to provide a written response on how the Countering Extremism team would train all taxi drivers across West Sussex, as was required under their license arrangements with the district and borough councils, including performance data on achievements to date.

34.5 **Library Services** - Cllr Crow reported that footfall was not back to pre-pandemic levels but that the number of books being borrowed was. Fewer people were using library computers and staff were looking at ways to encourage people back.

34.6 Key Performance Indicator (KPI) 34 – **Community Hub** – Cllr Crow confirmed that the Community Hub had been awarded the same amount of funding from the Household Support Fund for the next six months and would work to ensure the money lasted the full time. Cllr Crow felt there was adequate resource to keep up with demand, although he anticipated pressures due to staff vacancies but felt they were not at a level to cause concern. The team were also working with people who had made repeated requests to address the reasons why they needed support.

34.7 **Libraries and archives income** – was still at a lower level than pre-pandemic levels, but some staff vacancies helped mitigate that. The Library Service were looking what could be done in individual libraries to raise revenues.

34.8 Resolved - The Committee:

1. Acknowledged the good performance under KPIs 4, 33 and 34.
2. Acknowledged the continued support to Ukrainian refugees.
3. Acknowledged that the Library Service was looking at income streams for libraries going forward.
4. Acknowledged that Community Services were looking at how service demand differed pre and post-Covid.
5. Continued to support the Library Service.

Environment

34.9 The Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change, Cllr Urquhart introduced the report highlighting that recycling efforts had been boosted by all sites (except Midhurst) accepting hard plastics and she thanked residents for taking up this valuable service. However, this was expected to be counterbalanced by a reduction in green waste due to the high temperatures over the summer and the reduction in the value of paper recycle.

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

34.11 A **1-2-3 Collection** trial had been started by Mid Sussex District Council following the trial in the Arun district. This was being funded by the County Council as Government advice was still awaited.

34.12 **Combined Heat and Power** (CHP) – Officers updated that since the report CHP was now fully operational at Parkside and subject to a few matters of building control which would soon be signed off, the project closed down.

34.13 Resolved - The Committee:

1. Acknowledged the Heat Decarbonisation Plans for another 40 sites following a successful bid the Government's Low Carbon Skills fund (Phase 3).
2. Understood the funding issues for food recycling, but that where trials had taken place, they had been popular and successful.
3. Acknowledged progress with CHP at the Parkside offices in Horsham.

Highways and Transport

34.14 The Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, Cllr Dennis, introduced the report and thanked officers in the service and financial staff who had undertaken work on contracts to minimise additional costs in the

difficult economic climate, particularly without impacting on services. The report clearly showed the impact of increasing energy prices. The inflationary costs were higher than budgeted for and although officers had been managing the impact, the situation was unlikely to improve as the financial year progressed. Cllr Dennis was pleased to highlight that KPI 19 - **highway defects repaired in the required time scale** - had moved from red to green, primarily due to improvements in working with the contractors.

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

34.16 The funding of £17.4m, if received from the Government for the **Bus Service Improvement Plan**, would be ringfenced.

34.17 KPI 41 – **Killed and seriously injured casualties per billion vehicle miles** – Cllr Dennis reported officers would be looking at streets with schools to make sure children would be safe when travelling to school. A member asked whether data was available on how many of these incidents were down to road maintenance and design rather than driver behaviour. Cllr Dennis agreed to look to see if some data might be available for future narratives for KPI 41.

34.18 **National Concessionary Fares** - Cllr Dennis reported that a number of operators were finding the financial climate challenging, and officers were looking to work with them in promoting bus services, for example for the elderly through Age Concern.

34.19 Resolved – That the Committee:

1. Were pleased to see the improvement of KPI 19 highway defects repaired in the required time scale.
2. Note the remarks on cycle paths
3. Supports bus routes
4. Look forward, in due course, to the separation of data on fatalities and their causes.

35. Speed Limit Policy

35.1 The Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, Cllr J Dennis, introduced the report saying it had been her key priority to review this policy, particularly for rural roads.

35.2 Cllr Richardson, the Chairman of the Task and Finish Group (TFG) that had looked at the speed limit policy, reported that TFG had reviewed the existing policy, which dated back to 2010 and found it restrictive and lacking the flexibility to facilitate a common-sense approach.

35.3 The Committee received a presentation and explanation from Mr Stark, the Road Safety Group Manager, on the basis for the proposed changes. Those included the proposed relaxation of criteria and threshold

at which speed limits could be introduced, and looked to a more hierarchical consideration of road use, e.g. are there schools, vulnerable road users, etc, and refining the definition of a village.

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

35.5 The new policy is more flexible and would look at applications on a case-by-case basis considering whether engineering enforcements could help reduce speed, what is appropriate for the function of the road (e.g. a shopping parade, doctor's surgery), before any decision to lower a speed limit is made. A member asked that wording be re-checked to make it clear that excessive average speed on a stretch of road would no longer be used as a reason not doing anything. Officers reported the policy had been written in a positive, flexible manner but it was agreed to review the wording for clarity.

35.6 The Committee asked whether data on killed or seriously injured casualties could be broken down by category e.g. driver, pedestrian, etc, could be made available.

35.7 Resolved – That the Committee:

1. Welcomed the revised Speed Limit Policy and thanked Cllr Dennis, Cllr Richardson and the TFG members, and officers for their work.
2. Asked that the policy be looked at again for clarity for applicants, to make it clear that excessive average speed on a stretch of road would no longer be used as a reason for not taking action.
3. Sought further information on killed and serious injured numbers by categories. In particular detailing how many of these could have been mitigated by factors within the County Council's control.

36. Work Programme Planning and Possible Items for Future Scrutiny

36.1 The Committee agreed the Work Programme proposed by the Business Planning Group and asked that the following items also be considered.

36.2 **Fragmentation of the rights of way network**, particularly for equestrian users. It was suggested this could be part of the scrutiny of the Active Travel Strategy to consider how the strategy enables connectivity with the rights of way network.

36.3 **CPZ Policy review** – responses to the Horsham consultation had been way below the 50% limit set and therefore no action would be taken. The Committee asked if this could be considered as part of the policy review.

36.4 Consultations on long term **water management plans** by water companies and how this might be shared with the Scrutiny Committee or

members. It was considered that it was a matter for district and borough councils but was felt that maybe a Member Day could be held for all members involving representatives from water companies. The chairman agreed to discuss this suggestion with the Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change.

37. Requests for Call-in

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

38. Date of Next Meeting

38.1 The next meeting would be held on 23 January 2023 at 10.30am.

The meeting ended at 3.22 pm

Chairman