

Communities, Highways and Environment Scrutiny Committee

6 March 2023 – 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, Left 2pm
Cllr Greenway

Cllr Kenyon
Cllr Milne
Cllr Quinn

Cllr Sharp
Cllr Burgess

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

Also in attendance: Cllr Crow, Cllr Dennis and Cllr Urquhart. Cllr Sparkes for agenda item no 7.

50. Declarations of Interest

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

50.2 Cllr Sharp declared a personal interest as a member of Chichester District Council and as the sponsor of a Ukrainian guest under agenda item no 5.

50.3 Cllr Ali declared a personal interest as a member of Crawley Borough Council under agenda item no 5.

50.4 Cllr Oakley declared a personal interest as a member of Executive Task and Finish Group for Active Travel under agenda item no 5.

50.5 Cllr Oakley declared a personal interest as a member of Chichester District Council under agenda item no 7.

51. Urgent Matters

51.1 No urgent matters were raised.

52. Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee

52.1 Resolved – that the minutes of the Committee held on 23 January 2023 be approved as a correct record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

53. Responses to Recommendations

53.1 The committee noted the responses to recommendations made at previous meetings.

54. Performance and Resources Report 2022-23 - Quarter 3

Communities

54.1 The Cabinet Member for Community Support fire and Rescue, Cllr Crow, introduced the Communities section of the Performance and Resources Report (PRR). He highlighted the work of the newly formed Ukraine Support Team, the seasonal uplift for sponsors which had commenced in January 2023 from the Government funding, and the work of the Community Hub in assisting with the latest round of Household Support Funds. He also reported that libraries had helping with cost-of-living advice and assistance, as well as distributing essential toiletries packs. Some 277 residents had engaged in digital safety training and Trading Standards had been involved in a case with a business selling alcohol to a child volunteer without checking proof of age.

54.2 Cllr Crow highlighted that the report showed a slight underspend at December 2022, mostly due to staff vacancies. Work was in progress on an outstanding savings target on the development of adapted Library Service offer in conjunction with parish councils and officers would be looking to find a permanent solution.

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

54.4 Ukrainian guests under the **Homes for Ukrainians scheme** were being successfully matched with sponsors or homed using temporary accommodation. Assistance was being given to those guests who wanted to move into the private rental sector. The numbers of sponsors had remained steady.

54.5 The majority of Ukrainian children had been kept in their schools. Transport to school was being provided if children had to move location, in order to maintain education and links in the community. Some parents/children had opted to move, for example to more urban areas from rural ones. Decisions were made on individual basis or tailored to a family. Some children were able to continue their Ukrainian education online to take examinations and some children were being home schooled.

54.6 Records of Ukrainian guests in employment were not required as part of the Homes for Ukrainians scheme. Some Ukrainians were able to continue their work with Ukrainian companies by working online. A wrap around care support system was also being looked at to help single mothers move into employment.

54.7 The supermarket voucher scheme for Ukrainian guests had been set up with suppliers where they could be used easily. Officers noted the suggestion that it was not giving guests the opportunity to use small independent businesses for example Polish shops. The County Council had investigated an option of pre-paid top-up cards but that had proved very costly to the County Council.

54.8 The County Council had commissioned learning courses for this cohort from the start of the scheme. Options included online group work and English classes which were available to hundreds of guests. Members questioned whether online learning reduced social contact for the

attendees and how mental health could be supported. This was an area discussed up 4- and 6-month conversations along with other challenges faced by the guests.

54.9 The **Household Support Fund** had only been in existence since the pandemic, about 18 months, and the County Council received £4.8m for 6 months. Consideration was given to how to use the funding most effectively and the authority had set up holiday school meal voucher scheme for children entitled to free school meals and would be continuing this. Some funding was shared with district and borough councils to help on a local level. The aim was to support residents in a more fundamental way with other services and support to prevent families having to turn again to household support. Officers agreed to look at providing information under KPI 34 in the PRR on how many families the Community Hub had supported.

54.10 The footfall in **libraries** was still slowly rising but was not back to pre-pandemic levels. The main loss of income had been from the hiring of DVDs but with a change in habits formed over the pandemic that was not expected to improve. Work on alternative streams of income generation were being investigated.

54.11 The £3.4m overspend in the **Coroner's Service** had been due to an excess of deaths over the Christmas period. This had been reflected nationally. Storage had been needed for longer as people had not wanted to move forward with arrangements over the holiday period. Such excessive periods were generally balanced out by periods of less over the year. It was difficult to predict how many deaths relevant to the Coroner might occur but part of the business plan was to have fixed and additional resources that could be called upon and this had been implemented at Christmas. The cost of inquests run by the Coroners Service varied, with costs of the Shoreham air crash inquest being significant.

54.12 Officers were unaware of Trading Standards supplying information to the Police who delivered presentations to community groups on **online safety**. A written update would be provided to Committee members.

54.13 The **Community Support Hub** was currently funded from a non-ringfenced Covid grant which would end on 31 March 2023. The hub was a temporary situation designed to support whatever work was needed with grant funding from those schemes. Officers were confident there would be ongoing work with grant programmes to continue operation.

Projected **staff vacancy** savings of £0.540m related to unfilled vacancies and the service was struggling like the rest of the County Council to fill posts. There was also an uplift to a budget included that was not now required.

54.14 Resolved – that the Committee:

1. Welcomed the continued strong support for Ukrainian guests.
2. Were reassured you had explored alternatives to the supermarket voucher scheme but were pleased you would

consider noted the suggestion that it was not giving guests the opportunity to use small independent businesses.

3. Noted the issues around education and mental health service access.
4. Were reassured that via the Household Support Fund, School Meals Vouchers would be continue to available for children in the school holidays.
5. Understood how habits had changed in the use of libraries over recent years but were assured to hear that footfall rising again and that work was under way on how alternative income streams could raise revenue.
6. Were interested to understand how an extended bank holiday period could have so much impact on the costs of the Coroners Service.
7. Understood the continued issues of recruitment that existed in the service and the impact that has on service provision.
8. Acknowledged the conclusion of the Covid grant funding on 31 March 2023 but hoped to hear about how funding could be gained for the continuation of the Community Hub.

Environment

54.15 The Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change, Cllr Urquhart, introduced the report highlighting that the Halewick Lane battery storage project was progressing well, the Manor Royal Energy Company would have its public launch on 7 March 2023 – this would be the first business park local energy company in the country. Work continues on the three nationally significant infrastructure projects – Rampion 2, Gatwick second runway and A27 bypass.

54.16 The increased inflation rate has had a £1.8m impact on contracts. Increased utility costs have been offset by additional income raised by the solar farms of £2.2m. Recycling income has been slightly reduced due to the volatility of markets and the Cabinet Member had been flagging this for over a year. A receipt of £1.7m had been received after a contract settlement negotiation agreed several years previously. An early report from Quarter 4 was that the County Council had received £2.3m grant funding from the Government towards the decarbonisation of the estate and work would begin as soon as possible.

54.17 Assistant Director Environment and Public Protection, Mr Read, updated the Committee that the Government was yet to make an announcement on the collection and management of food waste. Food waste is the largest outstanding area for household waste collection. Household collections of textiles could be considered with district and borough councils in the future. In the future the Government could put responsibility back towards producers for items such as mattresses and carpets to make them from more recyclable products.

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

54.19 The **Community Food Hubs** had been hugely successful, and plans were being put in place to extend the project for a further year. Work on funding was underway and it was hoped there would be an announcement soon. Closer working with district and borough councils aimed to ensure activities were not duplicated. A trial of education and cookery was going well.

54.20 **KPI22 - CO² emissions from WSCC Activities** – The very low levels of officer travel experienced over the pandemic period were increasing but were not back to pre-2020 levels. Progress was being made at the work on electrifying the County Council's fleet vehicles and the highways service were going to be the first part of the organisation moving over to electrified vehicles.

54.21 **On-street public recycling bins** very often had a high levels of contamination, and it was felt important by members to get the recycling message across to the public.

54.22 The County Council often did not get sufficient notification of consultations, to enable officers to ensure the right officer was available at the right time to draw up and submit responses, particularly for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects. The Planning Inspector could look at the adequacy of consultations and the County Council can raise concerns at that point.

54.23 Resolved – that the Committee:

1. Welcomed the news on the Manor Royal Energy Company business park local energy company launch, which would be the first in the country.
2. Acknowledged the increased income generated by the solar farms.
3. Acknowledged that the volatility in the recycling market was affecting income.
4. Welcomed the grant funding received from the Government for the continued decarbonisation of the estate.
5. Acknowledged the service were still awaiting information from the Government on the collection and management of food waste.
6. Welcomed the news that work was in progress to extend the Community Food Hub project and looked forward to there being closer collaboration between the County Council and district and borough councils.

7. Understood the difficulties with demarcation of responsibilities for recycling in the community between district and borough councils and the County Council.
8. Welcomed the receipt of monies agreed under a contract settlement negotiation.
9. Welcomed the progress of moving the county fleet over to electric vehicles starting with the Highways Services.
10. Noted the short consultation periods and lack of forward notice, and the influence of the Planning Inspector in raising this with those running Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects in particular.

Highways and Transport

54.24 The Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, Cllr Dennis, introduced the report highlighting the potential dip in the condition of A and B roads. Spending of £20m this year was hoped to bring standards back up by quarter 4. The trajectory of killed and seriously injured casualties was better than previously. Financial pressures remained the same as the previous quarter, with energy costs the most significant challenge, in terms of street lighting.

54.25 The new **Speed Limit Policy** was being used and some applications had been approved. Data would be available later in the year.

54.26 **KPI17 – Length of new cycle infrastructure** – This KPI would be reviewed in the light of the work being done by the Active Travel Task and Finish Group. Members asked if consideration could be given to whether it would be better to record the number of people using cycle lanes rather than the length of lanes available. Also, whether the quality of the length could be measured more accurately and consider whether it contributed to the local network. Whichever method was used it was important to encourage usage. Officers reported that information was collected on carriageway condition and for footways but not specifically for cycle facilities.

54.27 **KPI18 – Percentage length of A and B roads that require maintenance** – This data is based on an annual survey rather than quarterly. This meant the impact on the road network by recent weather events and environmental factors would not show until the next survey had been completed.

54.28 **KPI19 – Highway Defects** – Data showed that number of potholes in the same quarter last year had increased but the service had caught up over the year and confidence was high that the same would happen this year.

54.29 **KPI41 – Killed and seriously injured casualties** – This measure is reported annually and could be broken down by Police categories as report data was received from them.

54.30 The new **online reporting tool** was moving to phase two of online improvement. Feedback received on performance so far would be considered, such as information on why cases were closed. Members were welcome to contribute feedback to officers.

54.31 The new Transport Plan would include a wish to **decarbonise** and new projects would have to demonstrate their commitment to that and biodiversity net gain. There would always be a difficulty with long running road projects when requirements changed during their life-time.

54.32 Members were keen that communications with members of the public were both before and after consultation, keeping them informed on the next steps, for example whether the scheme going ahead or looking at alternative options. Officers reported that information on consultations and schemes of work were on the County Council website but would investigate what other briefings, for example for local members, were possible.

54.33 Officers reported that there were some areas where there were difficulties in filling **staff vacancies** internally, for example some specialist posts, but work with WSP, a term consultant, had meant it had been possible to back fill some areas of work. For the immediate future staff had been round to undertake work but it did put pressure on teams and there was a continual review of the things we would like to do given the staffing numbers. Capacity was keeping on top of day-to-day work but it gave less capacity to look wholistically at long term working.

54.34 Officers were not aware of any Compulsory Purchase Order issues in major projects causing cost issues.

54.35 Resolved – that the Committee:

1. Acknowledges the issues around performance on A and B roads and is pleased to hear about the high level of spending on road maintenance.
2. Welcomes that the online reporting system will be enhanced and improved following feedback.
3. Looks forward to hearing from the Task and Finish Group on active travel. (KPI17) later in the year.
4. Highlights the importance of communications with communities on major schemes.
5. Acknowledges the issues around Compulsory Purchase Orders on major projects.

55. Proposal for Additional Highway Revenue Funding 2023-24

55.1 The Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, Cllr Dennis, introduced the report saying that she was pleased to be able report an increase in the core budget to cover the impact of inflationary pressures which had impacted highways disproportionately, but also some one-off

additional funding. Recent unusual weather patterns had meant that systems were not coping and as the service had become very reactive to urgent situations it had created backlogs in other equally important areas. One area of importance was the riparian duties of every householder whose property abutted the highway. Recent events had shown a lack of understanding by the general public of their responsibilities and those of the County Council. Proposals in the report aimed to address this problem more strongly.

55.2 The Committee received a presentation on the proposals for the distribution of the additional funding.

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

55.4 A new County Council **communications strategy** was being worked up to keep the public better informed and Highways have been very involved. Officers would like to increase the amount of social media reporting.

55.5 There is a process in place on **Riparian duties** and enforcement will be an option if it is needed. Work has taken place for many years with landowners to try and resolve flooding issues, especially those which impact properties or the highways network. There can be difficulties in establishing ownership of land and the funding will support this process.

55.6 The Flood Risk Team is working with different agencies who have flooding responsibilities, for example the Environment Agency on river flooding. Water boards were also starting to get active on surface water.

55.7 **Staff morale** was quite low with many staff working overtime due to the large increase in work needed but it was hoped this extra funding could help to improve that as staff were keen to reduce the backlog.

55.8 Officers confirmed that they were fully aware of where **drainage hotspots** were. If members felt new hotspots were arising, they were asked to feed information through to the area teams. Sometimes these hotspots were not resolved as quickly as would be liked as they were intertwined with riparian responsibilities. Members were keen to know of any planned drainage works in their area and have the communications shared with them. Cllr Dennis said she would speak to officers to see if information could be included with the high-level works programme information which was shared in the weekly publication The Bulletin.

55.9 A Member questioned the difference between mechanical options available with the Jet Patcher and the Pothole Pro and officers agreed to share a briefing with the Committee members on the differences.

55.10 The funding allocated for **additional tree work** did not include any work on trees suffering from Ash Die Back disease, which was being dealt with in a separate project.

55.11 Over the last ten years vehicle numbers had increased tremendously and caused damage to road surfaces. Electric vehicles were

also heavy vehicles and would cause an impact on the road surface. The proposal is about reactive work and a separate piece of work was being done on the Asset Management approach.

55.12 Cllr Dennis confirmed that any underspend in 2023-24 could be rolled over the next financial year and that the additional works would have no impact on community highways schemes.

55.13 Resolved - that the Committee:

1. Welcomes the proposals and appreciates the work done to develop them, and the speed at which it was undertaken.
2. Expressed concerns about the need to improve the communications strategy, including proactive engagement with the local member(s)
3. Notes the approach to riparian issues.
4. Notes the concerns around the identification of hotspots and how they are prioritised.
5. Stresses the importance of preventative work.
6. Agrees that work done with the Environment Agency and the water companies is very important.
7. Welcomes the wide scope of maintenance and investigative work planned.
8. Acknowledges that electric vehicles are currently heavier than the equivalent conventional model, and the implications for the road network.

56. Emerging views on the National Highways consultation on options for the A27 at Worthing and Lancing

56.1 The Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, Cllr Dennis, introduced the report saying that the A27 was a road high on the national agenda with pinch points at Chichester, Arundel, Worthing and Lancing. Cllr Dennis said she would have liked to have seen a bigger ambition for the Worthing and Lancing section of the A27 but recognised that funding was not currently available for a large scheme, and the proposals put forward by National Highways were only intended to be a temporary solution.

56.2 The Transport Planning and Policy Manager, Mr Hemmings, shared a presentation which talked through the consultation proposals along with a summary of the options, performance against scheme objectives and emerging conclusions. Mr Hemmings reported that the ambitions were reflected in the Transport for South East's Strategic Investment Plan which the Committee had considered at their meeting on 21 September 2022.

56.3 Committee Members heard a witness statement by Cllr Sparkes, Member for Cissbury, and a written statement from Cllr Smith, Member for Broadwater.

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

56.5 It had been concluded in the report that there were concerns about the effectiveness of the options in tackling road safety and it was felt that none of the options put forward by National Highways would significantly benefit non-motorised users, for example cyclists. Officers reported that the 'additional opportunities' (involving active travel, bus service and infrastructure improvements) identified by National Highways were in line with the West Sussex Transport Plan. Members were also concerned about the impact of the road improvements on community severance, particularly for people who do not have access to a car. Some members requested the provision of safe crossings of the A27, particularly where communities were severed, and that arrangements were compliant with Department for Transport's Local traffic Note 1.20 (cycle infrastructure design guidance).

56.6 Several members expressed doubts that the options put forward by National Highways would be sufficiently beneficial to outweigh the disruption that would be caused during construction. Members raised concerns about where traffic would be diverted while the measures were being implemented, particularly large lorries. Officers reported that traffic would need to continue to use the A27 corridor and the consultation gave no information on road closures or diversionary routes as this would be developed at a later stage of the project.

56.7 The proposal to close the Hadley Avenue junction with the A27 in Option 2 would allow a longer distance of two lanes of traffic to get more traffic through the junction before merging to a single lane. It was recognised by members, as highlighted by Cllr Sparkes, that the closure could cause problems for residents and services such as the household recycling and waste collections in Hadley Avenue that would need to take alternative routes.

56.8 The evidence that the options could decrease journey times could be outweighed by the projected increase in the number of accidents, which could delay the flow of traffic.

56.9 Members questioned whether or not National Highways considered other Local Plans, planning approvals or proposals or the County Council's plans and policies, when preparing its scheme proposals. Members also asked whether the scale of improvements and their impacts would imply that the south coast had reached the end of its development potential. Officers responded that stopping developments was inconsistent with national policy and that separate schemes are identified in Local Plans to mitigate development.

56.10 Traffic modelling undertaken by National Highways would have taken information on traffic flows in existing areas, with information about population, and where vehicles were travelling to and from, planning

assumptions, and modelled it to test different transport intervention and options replicating real life conditions. The models would need to be updated over time as other changes (e.g. planning decisions) were made in the areas concerned.

56.11 Cllr Sparkes reported to the Committee that, based on previous experience, switching off the traffic lights at the Grove Lodge Roundabout would make a smoother flow of traffic, with lower pollution levels. When the lights had broken previously it had mostly been the summer holidays when there had been lower levels of usage. Members of the Committee suggested that this arrangement could be trialled. Officers reported that National Highways did consider options to remove traffic signals at Grove Lodge junction, but the traffic signals were key to allowing safe pedestrian crossings to and from Worthing College. Residents could lobby National Highways directly with these suggestions if they wished.

56.12 Resolved - That the Committee:

1. Is unconvinced that the scale of the disruption caused by implementing the proposals is justified by the forecast benefits.
2. Considers that the impact on the locality should be given greater weight in the consultation response.
3. Considers that the consultation response should take account of local plan mitigations.
4. Considers that the capacity of the A27 through West Sussex does not appear to be able to support the demands created by the scale of development that the government is expecting local planning authorities to deliver.
5. Considers that proposals aimed at people that do not have access to a car should be safe and compliant with the Department for Transport's Local Traffic Note 1/20, and aim to minimise community severance.

57. Work Programme Planning and Possible Items for Future Scrutiny

57.1 The Committee reviewed the most recent Forward Plan of key decisions and work programme.

57.2 The Chairman highlighted that following the meeting of the Business Planning Group on 27 February 2023, it had been agreed that the Bus Enhanced Partnership Plan Task and Finish Group should meet again to consider the approach to the bus network review and to monitor progress in delivering Bus Service Improvement Plans so that an item might be brought to the Committee to consider in September. The Chairman asked the Committee if they were happy for the Task and Finish Group's terms of reference be widened to cover this additional work.

57.3 Resolved – that the Committee were happy for the Enhanced Partnership Plan Task and Finish Group to reconvene to consider the approach to the bus network review and to monitor progress in delivering

Bus Service Improvement Plans and that the terms of reference be widened to cover this activity.

57.4 Committee members considered the items listed in the work programme for the next meeting to be held on 9 June 2023 and were informed that the item on the Corporate Policy on Offsetting Emissions might be removed.

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 next meeting would be held on 9 June 2023 at 10.30am.

The meeting ended at 4.00 pm

Chairman