

Communities, Highways and Environment Scrutiny Committee

9 June 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 Kenyon	Cllr Sharp
Cllr Ali	Cllr Kerry-Bedell	Cllr Cooper
Cllr Baldwin	Cllr Payne	Cllr Milne
Cllr Greenway	Cllr Quinn	

Apologies were received from Cllr Albury and Cllr N Dennis

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

Part I

1. Election of Chairman

1.1 Cllr Britton was proposed for the position of Chairman for one year by Cllr Ali and seconded by Cllr Greenway.

1.2 Resolved – that Cllr Britton is duly elected as Chairman of the Communities, Highways and Environment Scrutiny Committee for a period of one year.

2. Election of Vice-Chairman

2.1 Cllr Oakley was proposed for the position of Vice-Chairman for one year by Cllr Baldwin and seconded by Cllr Quinn.

2.2 Resolved – that Cllr Oakley is duly elected as Vice-Chairman of the Communities, Highways and Environment Scrutiny Committee for a period of one year.

3. Business Planning Group

3.1 Resolved – that the Committee appoints the following members to its Business Planning Group: Cllrs Britton, Oakley, Kenyon, Kerry-Bedell, Sharp.

4. Declarations of Interest

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

4.2 Cllr Kerry-Bedell declared a personal interest as a project manager for the Bourne Community Bus.

4.3 Cllr Sharp declared a personal interest as a member of Chichester District Council.

4.4 Cllr Britton declared a personal interest as member for Littlehampton Town and that the Littlehampton library sits within that division under agenda item no 9.

4.5 Cllrs Payne and Oakley declared a personal interest as a member of the Executive Task and Finish Group for Active Travel under agenda item no 10.

5. Urgent Matters

5.1 No urgent matters were raised.

6. Part II Matters

6.1 Committee Members agreed they were happy for agenda item no 16 to remain under Part II of the agenda.

7. Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee

7.1 Resolved – that the minutes of the Committee held on 6 March 2023 be approved as a correct record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

8. Responses to Recommendations

8.1 The Committee noted the responses to recommendations made at previous meetings. The Committee asked why recommendation 4 under the National Highways consultation on options for the A27 at Worthing and Lancing had not been carried through to the final County Council comments that were submitted. The Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport/Assistant Director Highways Transport and Planning were asked to provide a response.

8.2 The Committee were further updated that there had been no Government announcement on plans for food waste collection.

9. Performance and Resources Report 2022-23 - Quarter 4

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

Environment and Climate Change

9.2 The new Environment Agency guidelines on **disposal of persistent organic pollutants (POPs)** came into force in December 2022 and work was underway with the contractors and other waste disposal authorities to establish how much it might cost and find the best way of working. Members asked if this might give a renewed focus for reuse hubs across the county and were informed that the formation of another workshop at Worthing was being looked into.

9.3 The County Council had been ranked fourth out of 29 waste disposal authorities in 2021-22, up one place from the previous year. Members congratulated the Cabinet Member and officers but asked what we could learn from other authorities to increase our performance and ranking. The Cabinet Member reported that higher ranking authorities were those which gone ahead and introduced food waste collections. Announcements were still awaited from the Government on the compulsory introduction of food waste schemes.

9.4 Members were encouraged to attend the **Carbon Literacy training programme** for which the County Council is a Bronze award holder.

9.5 Members were very pleased to hear about the continuation of the collaborative project with Chichester College, Crawley College and Chichester University to improve engagement with 15-24 year old residents to encourage recycling and waste reduction behaviours. Members received assurance that the work would be a permanent feature as the student population changed over the coming years.

9.6 Members were very keen that school children be able to **visit the Material Recycling Facility (MRF)** and the Cabinet Member confirmed that primary school visits did take place, but it was often harder to attract secondary schools and that any support Members could give to encourage schools to visit would be welcomed. The cost of staffing and transporting children to the MRF had become more of a financial problem for schools and Members were very keen that information videos could be shared with schools and were informed that some already existed and could be revisited.

9.7 Grant funding for the **Local Nature Recovery Strategy** was for setting up but not running schemes. Officers would see what other Government funding was available, see what areas they were to focus on and what could be done in those areas.

9.8 Members discussed the importance of **recyclates** being clean otherwise a whole load of recycling could be rejected and end up in landfill sites. Dry paper/cardboard only should be added to recycling bins otherwise there can be contamination and rejected loads. Members felt there was a balance to be had between cleaning recyclates and wasting water. Members asked if plant pots could be recycled and were advised they could not in the current kerbside system but could go in hard plastic collections at recycling centres and that many garden centres collected and recycled plant pots.

9.9 **Recyclate rates** are subject to sharp increases and decreases due to many factors, e.g. bad weather means less garden waste is collected, dry weather means less grass cutting, a lot of clearing of storage areas and DIY projects took place during the pandemic, but with the increase in the cost of materials people may now be deterred from DIY projects. Recycling and waste tonnage rates were often seen as an indicator of how the economy was performing.

9.10 **Asset Decarbonisation** – Increases in inflation had led to an escalation in costs. Officers are reviewing schemes to see what can

realistically be achieved with the SALIX grant funding by its deadline of 31 March 2024.

9.11 It was hoped to have a policy on **climate-positive investment work** by the end of 2023. Discussions were taking place with departments to formulate the best approach. The Committee would consider scrutinising this in 2024.

9.12 The **Tangmere solar farm** was constrained by the capacity of the grid connections and feed in tariffs, however space and funding were available for a battery installation. Officers were researching the best options to optimise income.

9.13 Members were interested to know if there was evidence as to how **air pollution** was affected by changes in practice e.g. cycling or walking instead of taking the car. Air pollution is monitored by district and borough councils, and they would see the impact of many measures on the areas they monitor. There were currently no measures around the impact of electric vehicles on air pollution. Members asked if extra efforts towards electric vehicle chargepoint provision could be made in air pollution hotspots, ahead of other areas to try and reduce levels of pollution. Members were informed that this would be a responsibility of local district and borough councils and where they could, they should lobby those organisations.

9.14 Resolved – that the Committee:

1. Welcomes the education of school children by visits to the MRF site and would try to encourage more. They would also welcome publicity and promotion of the videos available for schools to use for those students who cannot attend tours.
2. Would be interested to hear about the impact of the new Environment Agency guidelines on the disposal of persistent organic pollutants (POPs) and any cost implications it might have.
3. Would welcome updates on the establishment of any new reuse shops.
4. Congratulates the Cabinet Member Environment and Climate Change and officers for being ranked fourth out of 29 disposal authorities for 2021-22 and hoped the level could be maintained or bettered in 2022-23.
5. Welcomes the collaborative project with Chichester College, Crawley College and Chichester University to improve engagement with 15-24-year-olds to demonstrate positive recycling and waste reduction behaviours.
6. Congratulates the Cabinet Member and officers for the Manor Royal Local Energy Company being shortlisted for an award and looked forward to hearing the outcome.

7. Acknowledges the importance of cleanliness and dryness of recyclates to avoid contamination of loads, and encourages the Cabinet Member to investigate whether the public has been adequately informed about how clean recyclate had to be in order to be considered uncontaminated.

Communities

9.15 **Afghan Relocation and Assistance Scheme** – The service is working to expedite evidence to house Afghan refugees into permanent housing in the county or externally, as the Home Office is seeking to cease the Bridging Hotel Funding. The scheme also provides support with getting children into education, language classes and further education as well as wrap around care.

9.16 **Inquests** – Luckily large inquests, like Shoreham Air Show, do not happen often, but when they do occur the Coroner's Service has to fund them from within existing budgets.

9.17 The **Community Support Hub** is now primarily supporting residents with concerns around the cost-of-living crisis. The pandemic is still having a disproportionate impact across communities, with some areas still experiencing high levels of covid which can impact on social connectivity and isolation.

9.18 Members asked if the **excessive death rates** were connected to Covid, long covid, a lack of treatment or diagnosis during the pandemic. The Cabinet Member did not have that information and the Chairman acknowledged it might be a question for the Health and Adult Services Scrutiny Committee.

9.19 The **Household Support Fund** (HSF) is a one-off offer for residents with no other option. Officers signpost residents to longer term advice and support to avoid rereferrals. The HSF is however seeing an increased demand in requests for food due to the high inflation of prices.

9.20 **Trading Standards – Proceeds of Crime Act** (POCA) – The Cabinet Member undertook to provide the Committee an update on what initiatives the proceeds of crime would be reinvested into to tackle crime and support the public.

9.21 A Member praised a recent webinar on **online fraud** they had attended and asked how the service targeted specific areas of the population. The Cabinet Member reported that in advertising seminars they can be directed at the family and friends of potential victims encouraging them to pass the information on. There are range of e-newsletters and this topic will be discussed at the September meeting.

9.22 Resolved – that the Committee:

1. Notes the support for refugees and their integration into the wider community.

2. Notes the increase in Registration Service revenue, due solely to marriage ceremonies, and the successful relocation of the registration office into Littlehampton Library. They welcomed that officers were looking to see if other areas might benefit from a similar option.
3. Is pleased to hear the Household Support Fund was extended to March 2023
4. Welcomes the initiatives around online fraud and digital safety for residents.
5. Looks forward to receiving information from the Cabinet Member on Trading Standards – Proceeds of Crime Act (POCA) plans and what activities will be re-invested in to tackle crime and support the public.
6. Notes Members concerns on excessive death levels and their causes but acknowledges this might be an item for the Health and Adults Services Scrutiny Committee to investigate.

Highways and Transport

9.23 Training is available on **e-bikes** usage, although it is focussed on younger children, but it was hoped to secure more funding to offer a wider range of courses including more for adults, in order to encourage active travel.

9.24 **KPI 17** – Length of new cycle infrastructure – The Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport reported that there was confidence that the 2025 target of 30km would be met and that there was a clear plan connected with the Active Travel strategy.

9.25 **KPI 18** – percentage length of A and B roads that require maintenance – It was highlighted that although the target is an annual reduction, since 2014 the figure had been slowly rising and confidence was sought that the figure would reduce in the longer term. The Cabinet Member confirmed that this was being reviewed. Officers would also be assessing the road network following the severe weather conditions in 2022 and over the next two years considering the increase in size of HGVs, larger agricultural and electric vehicles on less well constructed roads. Updates to the National Adaptability Programme were awaited, providing guidance on road design standards. Until received, the existing standards would continue to be used.

9.26 **KPI 19** – Highway defects repaired within required timescale – It was not clear why the indicator data ran to February 2023 and not March 2023. Mr Davey explained that defects, once reported through the online system, were reviewed by an officer to determine the remedial action required. He agreed to take away comments to the team that repairs were often not completed on time, to review the process and report back to the Committee on where improvements could be made. Members questioned the 93.1% performance measure which they felt residents would not recognise. It was highlighted that the required timescale was

28 days, and often residents would expect this to be sooner. The Cabinet Member acknowledged this and reported the service would like to this measure to be even better, but it had been a challenging time with a huge increase in the number of defects, recent severe weather conditions, etc. A member suggested it would be a good idea to highlight where significant works would be happening in the future, e.g. road signs, communications, etc, so that residents can be aware.

9.27 **KPI 41** – Killed and seriously injured casualties – The target was originally set in the County Council’s Road Safety Strategy but could be amended to split out the number of deaths from the number of serious injuries. Data on the severity of injury is available on the County Council website but there is a considerable lag between an accident being reported to the Police, investigated, then nationally audited before it can be collated into the overall figures. **Action:** Officers agreed to provide the Committee with an update to March 2022. Currently data was not split out for accidents involving electric scooters but could be in the future. Officers confirmed that accident hotspots were reviewed to determine the best process in terms of road safety.

9.28 Members were concerned that **bus patronage** had not fully recovered to its pre-Covid levels. Usage was at lower levels along the coastal strip of the county compared to more rural areas and campaigns were underway to raise confidence but it was expected it would take time for patronage levels to fully recover.

9.29 The County Council is at the forefront of rolling out **electric vehicle infrastructure**. Lessons learned in the first phase of chargepoint roll out would be reflected in the next phase. It would be difficult to put charge points in lamp-posts as most in the county are positioned at the back of the footway which would result in trailing cables.

9.30 Officers confirmed there was a different prioritisation process for **flooding issues** compared to safety defects. The considerable backlog of drainage defects across the county were being addressed in priority order, focussing on priority 1 issues first.

9.31 Capital – **A29 Realignment**, Arun, Phase 1 – This project was RAG rated as red as officers were yet to identify the delivery mechanism or funding associated with the scheme. Phases 1 and 2 are intrinsically linked and a paper was being compiled to summarise the funding and deliver options available.

9.32 **Corporate Risk 11** – Skills shortages – The Cabinet Member reported that staffing was better in some areas than others, which put more pressure on existing staff. This was a national issue, and not unique to West Sussex.

9.33 Resolved – that the Committee:

1. Acknowledges the increasing costs around PFI street lighting and the lower take-up of concessionary bus fares.

2. Acknowledges the Committee's concerns around KPIs 18, 19 and 41, in relation to e-bikes, e-scooters, and blackspots.
3. Highlights the difference between looking at the score of a KPI versus resident perception.
4. Appreciates the challenges that have been caused by staff shortages.
5. Welcomes spot checking on the work of contractors.
6. Welcomes the work on making communications more effective for residents.
7. Acknowledges challenges to future design standards for road networks and the challenges for C and D classified roads and the sustainability of all highways routes.
8. Looks forward to receiving updated information on KPI41, including the split between the number of deaths and serious injuries.

10. Active Travel Strategy

10.1 The Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, Cllr J Dennis, introduced the report saying it sought support from the Committee to move to a phase of stakeholder and public engagement on the newly drafted Active Travel Strategy.

10.2 The Active Travel Task and Finish Group (TFG) had been chaired by Cllr McDonald and Cllrs Oakley and Payne had been members. They reported that the TFG had met almost monthly over the last year and had considered areas of interest, reflecting on the changing Government and Active Travel England emphasis away from cycling to walking and wheeling to replace personalised motorised journeys. They thanked officers for their work supporting members of the TFG.

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

10.4 The Active Travel Strategy is a strategic document, and an action plan would flow from this. Members asked what thought had been given to issues such as the lack of pavements in rural areas, parental concerns, fragmented communities with non-motor links, equestrian links including horse crossing places, changing behaviours, obstacles such as delivery vans parking on pavements and cycle lanes, increasing connectivity and fragmentation of the Rights of Way Network. Officers agreed to consider these matters for inclusion in the action plan and as strategic infrastructure plans for walking and cycling were reviewed over the coming months. Specifically for rights of way however there was a separate strategy – The Rights of Way Management Plan - which should deal with these matters.

10.5 Members welcomed the move away from measuring the length of new cycling infrastructure to a target relating to the increased active travel at sites where new infrastructure had been introduced but would be interested to see more detail on the percentage of new or upgraded work done, and functional routes versus tourist/recreational routes. Officers agreed to investigate measuring usage in these ways.

10.6 Members were keen that **Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs)** were linked to the Active Travel Strategy so that the County Council could understand what aspirations there were at local levels to feed into its delivery work as the highway authority.

10.7 Members were advised that many schools had expressed interest in the **School Streets Trial** supported by Sustrans. The schemes were primarily led by the schools and it took commitment and resources on their side. A member highlighted that the entire journey to school needed protecting, not just the area outside school gates.

10.8 The suggestion was made that **consultation** should be made with the West Sussex Youth cabinet, sixth form and college students, as well as schools, as these are the people Active Travel England were interested in targeting.

10.9 Members welcomed that **electric bikes and scooters** had been taken into account in the strategy, despite the technology still being in its infancy and scooters not being legal modes of transport in public places, and that thought would be given to how these modes of transport might work for the future.

10.10 The **maintenance of active travel networks** was beyond the scope of this report, but members were keen that vegetation encroachment of travel routes did not deter users and officers were asked to review this. Such matters are dealt with via existing safety inspection and asset management plans and would need to be considered alongside general maintenance of the highway.

10.11 Members welcomed closer working with planning authorities on applications for new developments and LCWIPs, and suggested relationships with third party land or public landowners, e.g. district and borough councils, should be enhanced.

10.12 Resolved – that the Committee:

1. Gives its support to proceeding with stakeholder and public engagement on the draft Active Travel Strategy.
2. Asks that officers consider issues such as the lack of pavements in rural areas, parental concerns, fragmented communities with non-motor links, equestrian links including horse crossing places, changing behaviours, obstacles such as delivery vans parking on pavements and cycle lanes, increasing connectivity in the draft Strategy, where they do not normally fall within the remit of existing strategies, such as the Integrated Parking Strategy or the Highway Asset Management Strategy.

3. Welcomes that officers will investigate ways to measure the usage of new infrastructure.

4. Asks that officers review vegetation encroachment of travel routes.

11. Library Service Customer Digital Offer Task and Finish Group

11.1 The Committee noted the decision of the Business Planning Group to establish a Task and Finish Group to scrutinise proposed changes to the Library Services' public access computers and the membership set out in the agenda.

12. Work Programme Planning and Possible Items for Future Scrutiny

12.1 Members reviewed the draft work programme from BPG and agreed to add:

- the Rights of Way Management Plan to look at fragmentation of the network
- the Highways resilience item scheduled for BPG to review in April 2024 should also cover any lessons learned
- the Land Use policy to be discussed when the Climate Change Strategy is next considered.

13. Requests for Call-in

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

14. Date of Next Meeting

14.1 The next meeting would be held on 20 September at 10.30am.

PART II

15. Exclusion of Press and Public

15.1 Resolved – That under Section 100(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in part I, of Schedule 12A, of the Act by virtue of the paragraph specified under the item and that, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption of that information outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

Exempt: Paragraph 3.

16. Highways Contract Procurement

The Committee explored the County Council's proposed approach to the Highways Contract procurement and posed questions to the Cabinet Member and officers.

The meeting ended at 4.02 pm

Chairman