

Communities, Highways and Environment Scrutiny Committee

20 September 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 N Dennis	Cllr Payne
Cllr Albury	Cllr Greenway	Cllr Quinn
Cllr Ali, left at 2.10pm	Cllr Kenyon	
Cllr Baldwin	Cllr Kerry-Bedell	

Apologies were received from Cllr Sharp

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

Part I

17. Declarations of Interest

In accordance with the County Council's code of conduct the following declaration was made:

Cllr Ali declared a personal interest as a member of Crawley Borough Council and a member of their Planning Committee under agenda item no 5.

18. Urgent Matters

18.1 No urgent matters were raised.

19. Part I Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee

19.1 A member highlighted that under minute 9.22, recommendation 3, that the date should read March 2024.

19.2 Resolved – that the Part I minutes of the Committee held on 9 June 2023 be approved as a correct record, subject to the amendment as reflected in 19.1, and be signed by the Chairman.

20. Responses to Recommendations

20.1 The Committee noted the responses to recommendations made at previous meetings, subject to the same date change as highlighted under the minutes.

21. Performance and Resources Report 2023-24 - Quarter 1

21.1 Members reviewed Quarter 1 of the Performance and Resources Report 2023-24, which covered the period April-June 2023.

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

Communities

21.3 **Homes for Ukraine scheme** – Within the cohort of Ukrainian guests, many had been successful in finding private rented accommodation. Many had been able to arrange this themselves with support or advice and some had been supported with a rent deposit from the County Council. Many hosts are also happy to continue arrangements after the initial six months. Low numbers of Ukrainians are coming over now, and some are even returning to Ukraine.

21.4 The projects in the Library Service and Record Office that have received external funding will be made easily accessible to anyone online across a range of platforms. The Committee members were invited to meet the teams.

21.5 **KPI4** – The outcome could be a contact with a resident that leaves them in a better place to deal with digital security. Details of how data is collected, interventions determined, etc, is not available yet.

21.6 **KPI34** – A positive outcome of a contact with the **Community Hub** is not necessarily a final position of resolution but that a resident has been supplied with information, practical support, signposted to support or referred onwards to other services. Now that the Household Support Fund had been shared with other organisations much of the measures of success will be with those organisations. Members asked if they could see some detailed information on the returns that partners had seen on the funding. Officers reported that information from quarterly returns was now available covering several recent years and patterns could be highlighted. Members were invited to visit the Community Hub and experience what the team do.

21.7 Members noted the financial pressures caused by the continued increase in **excess deaths** since the pandemic and asked whether there were any patterns by demography or geography. The Committee were advised that some work had been done nationally that could be shared and had indicated an increase in the population, particularly in the older age groups. The challenge for the Registration Service was to ensure delivery of in-person appointments to register deaths, were in the right place to make this as easy as possible. The location of current registration offices were being reviewed taking into account new housing developments and growth areas in the county.

21.8 Since the **Coroner's Service** had transferred to the County Council from Sussex Police on 1 April 2023, there had been a focus on recruitment and training of staff to reduce the 23% vacancy rate.

21.9 The County Council has no responsibility for the conversion of hotels to accommodation for **asylum seekers**. Any incidents of homelessness would be presented to the district and borough councils. It was suggested

that a bite-sized briefing be run for Committee members, covering this topic and the Chairman welcomed that idea.

21.10 Trading Standards has recruited to two posts funded by Public Health to focus on the illicit sale of tobacco, vapes and alcohol to underage young people. They also worked proactively on information received and to educate traders.

21.11 Capital Programme Summary - The **Worthing Community Hub** had been completed, was fully operational and proving very popular with staff and visitors. The report entry related to capital investment and some final payments. Officers agreed to supply some information on usage of the hub with the next PRR report and provide an evaluation report on the performance of the hub.

21.12 Resolved – that the Committee:

1. Welcomes new KPI4 and looks forward to receiving more information on data and outcomes at a later date.
2. Acknowledges the continued support to Ukrainian guests and the team's proactive interactions with the guests and sponsors.
3. Acknowledges that the £9.7m Household Support Funding for 2023/24 is being distributed and would welcome a breakdown and information on how it is being audited.
4. Welcomes the offer to members to visit the Community Hub and looks forward to that opportunity.
5. Acknowledges how the continued increase in excess deaths since the pandemic is leading to an overspend but understands the reasons for it and the pressures that are upon the Coroner's Service. The Committee looks forward to seeing some of the data breaking down whether there are any patterns by demography of geography.
6. Welcomes the opportunity for a bite-sized session on support to Syrian and Afghan refugees for the Committee.
7. Welcomes the grants to the Library Service and Record Office and looks forward to meeting the teams working on the projects.
8. Acknowledges the work the Trading Standards team are doing around illegal vapes and acknowledges the problems that can be caused by the discarding of disposable vapes.
9. Acknowledges the success of the Worthing Community Hub and looks forward to receiving further information on usage of the hub in the next PRR report and an evaluation report on the performance of the hub.

Environment

21.13 Members asked if there was a difference in recycling volumes between urban and rural sites. The Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change agreed to share some statistics and a comparison of West Sussex rates with disposal authority neighbours.

21.14 A member asked if information was available on the trend of tonnages to landfill over the last year. The Cabinet Member thought it was between 7% and 8% and said that since 2017 landfill waste had reduced from 44% to 7% but would confirm data for the Committee.

21.15 The response to the latest round of the Solar Together scheme had been good. The bulk buying scheme reduces the installation price to residents; however the biggest problem was suppliers having enough installers to do the work.

21.16 The Halewick Lane battery storage project had been put on hold during the pandemic and the start of the war in Ukraine when prices fluctuated. Those price increases had led to a contractor walking away, resulting in the procurement process having to be restarted. The project had been reassessed and it was believed it could be delivered within budget. It was hoped a better Government procurement framework would help deliver what was required. It was hoped that the shortfall in anticipated income generation would be offset by good performance in the County Council's solar farms but this remained a risk.

21.17 The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) had published data showing that fly-tipping had reduced by 5% in the year to March 2022. Data on fly-tipping within the county was available by district and borough, but varied depending on how proactive each authority was. It was not clear how much fly-tipping was taking place on County Council land. The Cabinet Member agreed to share data that was available with the Committee.

21.18 Risk CR76 – A member asked if **water neutrality** was affecting any specific education projects. The Cabinet Member reported that the Natural England water neutrality Position Statement was affecting all developments, not just housing. Projects within the north water supply zone would need to show there would be no increase in water consumption or provide offset measures. The Cabinet Member agreed to investigate whether water neutrality was having an impact on educational projects within the north water supply zone and report back to the Committee.

21.19 Resolved – that the Committee:

1. Congratulates the Energy Services team for winning the 'Enabler' award at the 2023 Association of Decentralised Energy Awards for the Re-energise Manor Royal project.
2. Is pleased to hear that the booking system at six of the household recycling centres is working well and looks forward to

receiving data comparing rates at rural and urban sites, and disposal authority neighbours.

3. Appreciates the reduction in the amount of waste going to landfill since 2018 and would welcome data comparing the last few years.
4. Acknowledges the apparent decrease in fly-tipping but would welcome data based on West Sussex from the Cabinet Member, particularly for fly-tipping on County Council land.
5. Looks forward to hearing from the Cabinet Member whether there are any implications from the Water Neutrality Position Statement on the delivery of education projects in the north water supply zone.
6. Acknowledges the potential financial risk caused by the delays to the Halewick Lane battery storage project.

Highways and Transport

21.20 The winter weather did not seem to be showing any direct correlation to delays to the planned maintenance programme. Problem areas were being funded to try and protect the network e.g. surface dressing and micro-asphalt to extend the life of surfaces. Members asked that if schemes were delayed that residents be kept informed. Officers confirmed that they tried to make residents aware where they could using signage, contacts within the community and social media.

21.21 Members were assured that a robust triage system was in place to deal with an increase in customer enquiries of 42% compared with quarter one of 2022-23. The new reporting tool was more effective and flexible than the previous app.

21.22 Through the Bus Service Improvement Plan a new service route had been introduced between Littlehampton and Chichester and a new young person's fare discount was expected to start from September. The Enhanced Partnership Board discusses patronage and how to encourage older people back to the bus network. The Government £2 capped bus fare had produced a significant improvement on travel numbers. Members were encouraged to feed any bus reliability issues through the Cabinet Member or the Bus Transport Team.

21.23 Following Phase 1 of the roll-out of **on-street electric vehicle charge points** a decision had been made to not restrict EV charging spaces to EV vehicles, for example there may be only 2 out of 6 spaces which have a TRO deeming them for EV charging only. Consideration needed to be given to those who had company vehicles but no off-road parking to charge in. The programme was on target for 2030 and currently 131 sites were out for consultation.

21.24 Members sought to understand how permits for works were monitored and enforcement undertaken where needed. They were reassured that there were staff assigned to monitor permitted works to

ensure they were operating within their permit limits. Where areas of non-compliance were found, fixed penalty notices could be issued. The Government was being lobbied about the level of fixed penalty notices as they were not sufficiently high enough to encourage a change in behaviour. Members were reminded they could report areas of concern to the Members Highways email box. A member day session on 6 December would include an explanation of the **Lane Rentals** programme and members were encouraged to attend.

21.25 **KPI19** – A member asked what the time limit was for contractors to repair defects they had caused themselves, and what penalties were available for exceeding these timescales. Officers reported that KPI19 referred to reactive maintenance, and not to planned maintenance, but that performance in respect of planned maintenance work was monitored. Across the planned maintenance delivered under the relevant contract in the last two years, the failure/defect rate was significantly less than 1%. There were complexities around scheduling the rectification of defects, but the ambition remained to have this work completed as soon as practicable. The industry-wide standard contract used for this contract ceased to include penalty clauses around ten years ago. The ultimate sanction was that a continually under-performing contractor would not be allowed to tender for works in the future.

21.26 Reactive work should be done quickly, and the Service was looking to provide a better response to customer enquiries. Some members of staff had recently returned to the Service, after being transferred across from Capita, and it was hoped that their integration would lead to better processes for dealing with enquiries. The Assistant Director was happy to hear from Members where things were not be dealt with in a timely manner.

21.27 **KPI41** – The data for quarter 1 which states that there had been a 16% increase on the 2021 data. Further [Road collision and casualty data](#) can be found on the County Council website. Sussex Police report that the top five reasons for killed and seriously injured casualties were:

1. Failed to look properly.
2. Careless or reckless driving.
3. Failed to judge another person's path or speed.
4. Loss of control.
5. Impaired by alcohol.

21.28 Members asked if there could be further information on the split of incidents on A roads and minor roads. The Cabinet Member agreed to do an analysis by road type to see where there were concentrations of incidents. It was also agreed to analyse data on speed limits, e.g. 20 mph, to see whether speed reduction could lead to reductions in casualties.

21.29 Officers also agreed to explore better promotion of the County Council's Road Safety Facebook page.

Finance

21.30 The projected overspending on the **Street Lighting PFI** was due to the significant increase in energy costs. It was hoped the slight reduction in energy costs would help reduce the projected overspend.

21.31 A member asked whether long term financial pressures, such as the temporary traffic arrangements needed following the landslip in Pulborough, would have an impact on the highways budget. Officers reported that the traffic control equipment was owned by the County Council so no additional costs would be incurred. Work was still underway with landowners to risk assess the site, to make good the site, and open it to 2-way traffic again.

Capital Programme

21.32 **1 A29 re-alignment, Arun, Phase 1** – The Cabinet Member agreed to look into the impact if additional funding was not forthcoming and the impact that might have on new housing delivery.

21.33 **7 Crawley Station gateway project** – It had been disappointing that plans had not been finalised before the funding deadline, however some complementary work in the area had been approved by the DfT and would be taken forward.

21.34 Resolved – that the Committee:

1. Acknowledges the overspends on the Street Light PFI Contract and the reduced uptake in National Concessionary Fares.
2. Welcomes the liaison with bus companies, including cross-boundary, and the significant impact of the £2 bus fare.
3. Notes with interest KPI19 and the trial launch of 'right first time' and looks forward to following progress through the future quarterly reports.
4. Notes with interest the Live Labs Two project looking at how mowed plant material from roadsides can be used for biofuels and road materials and looks forward to future updates.
5. Notes the additional funding secured for electric vehicle on-street parking bays.
6. Acknowledges the increase of resident reporting and pressures upon customer service capacity and thanks the service teams who have done their best since last winter and appreciate the real improvements seen.

22. Highways Asset Management Strategy

22.1 The Committee received a presentation on highlights from the report in the agenda pack and members of the Committee asked questions and a summary of those questions and answers follows.

22.2 The Highway Asset Management Strategy is a mandatory requirement. The previous Strategy has been updated yearly but it was felt now was the time for a full bottom-up review which would run through to summer 2024. The opportunity would be taken to consider what we would like to do, what is appropriate within resources and budget and how to manage assets for best value. Innovation is always a challenge but looking at processes would enable the best practice to be brought to the fore and bring on a culture change.

22.3 The Strategy would enable areas with differing needs to be treated differently. For example, a treelined street with a bus route along it would need different treatment to one without a bus route. These differing needs would be established through consultation and assessment.

22.4 Quality assurance would be incorporated into the Strategy enabling performance to be measured.

22.5 The service has a comprehensive knowledge of most assets, but some areas still need closer review. Members were keen to know how resilience to climate change and its impact on resources would be built into the strategy. This would be part of the review and members would be able to challenge the service if they did not feel it was adequately reflected.

22.6 Resolved – that the Committee:

1. Supports the direction of travel and thinking undertaken but understands the challenges ahead including the desire to seek value for money and manage assets within the resources available.
2. Looks forward reviewing the Policy and Strategy in summer 2024, looking to see that the Service have challenged themselves enough and consulted with stakeholders, customers and members.

23. Work Programme Planning and Possible Items for Future Scrutiny

23.1 Members agreed the draft work programme with the following changes under Issues yet to be timetabled:

23.2 **A27 Chichester** – whether there was any information from strategic planning on when there might be something for the Committee to scrutinise.

23.3 **Asset Management Strategy** – Date be moved to later in 2024 following the discussion under agenda item no 22.

24. Requests for Call-in

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

25. Date of Next Meeting

25.1 The date of the next meeting would be held on 17 November 2023 at 10.30am.

PART II

26. Exclusion of Press and Public

26.1 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, or Schedule 12a, of the Act by virtual 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.

27. Part II Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee

27.1 Resolved – that the Part II minutes of the Committee held on 9 June 2023 be approved as a correct record and be signed by the Chairman.

The meeting ended at 3.02 pm

Chairman