

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR ECONOMY, TRANSPORT AND ENVIRONMENT

MINUTES of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee for Economy, Transport and Environment held at County Hall, Lewes on 6 June 2011

PRESENT Councillors Stogdon (Chairman), Daniel, Fawthrop (Vice-Chairman), Freeman, Howson, Rodohan and Taylor.

Scrutiny Lead Officer Paul Dean, Scrutiny Manager

ALSO PRESENT Rupert Clubb, Director of Economy, Transport and Environment
Mo Hemsley, Assistant Director, Resources
Andy Robertson, Assistant Director Economy Transport and Environment
Kieran McNamara, Assistant Director, Economy and Community Services
Roger Williams, Head of Transport Operations, Economy, Transport and Environment, for item 6 (see minute 4)
Stephen Potter, Environmental Strategist, Economy, Transport and Environment, for item 7 (see minute 5)
Nick Claxton, Flood Risk Management STO, Economy, Transport and Environment, for item 8 (see minute 6)

Also in attendance: Chris Downs of Halcrow (consultants for the PFRA study and the Eastbourne Area Surface Water Management Plan), for item 8 (see minute 6).

The Chairman paid tribute to Councillors Belsey and Dowling, who had left the committee, for their contributions over the last year and welcomed Councillors Howson and Taylor to the Committee.

1. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

1.1 RESOLVED – to approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 9 March 2011.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2.1 Councillor Rodohan declared a personal, non prejudicial interest in all matters related to economic development as a member of the Federation of Small Businesses.

3. REPORTS

3.1 Copies of the reports referred to below are included in the minute book.

4. COMMUNITY TRANSPORT (CT) PROJECT

4.1 The Committee welcomed a comprehensive report by the Director of Economy, Transport and Environment on the range of Community Transport pilot schemes funded by

the County Council. The report answered some specific questions posed by the Committee at its meeting on 16 June 2010 when it last considered the matter.

4.2 The Committee drew the following observations, conclusions and lessons learnt from the report and discussion:

- The pilot CT schemes have generated 26,000 new passenger journeys in areas of the county that are not served by regular transport services.
- Pilot scheme applications are assessed for sustainability by examining:
 - Estimated fares and passenger numbers
 - The degree of local support
 - The likelihood of being able to access other sources of funding such as parish councils.
- Most of the applications received have been funded to a total of £132,000 for 10 schemes since April 2009; some £100,000 has been focused on a range of publicity initiatives as well as engaging the third sector to help CT operators become more sustainable.. Bids for capital expenditure, such as the purchase of a minibus, have not been successful.
- Successful and sustainable CT schemes require significant community buy in and proactive community initiation. All CT schemes involve local consultation early on and proceed on the basis of evidenced local need; but, very often, passenger numbers do not materialise on a scale indicated by the consultation. It is now widely recognised that much greater in-depth local knowledge and insight is needed to judge the likely success of a CT scheme.
- The best value for money schemes are:
 - voluntary car schemes (eg. Plumpton) with some using the voluntary and community sector and
 - schemes with a high degree of patronage such as Wealdlink which has attracted support from a number of parish and town councils.
- A recent County Council transport procurement exercise has resulted in more contracts being awarded to CT operators than ever before, particularly for home to school and adult social care transport. The Council's relationship with the CT sector has improved significantly over the last year and this too has led to a much more effective integration of CT and bus services.
- Most CT schemes do not provide cheap transport; the subsidy in some cases being as much as £10 per passenger journey. This is particularly so for schemes using leased vehicles and paid drivers; these schemes work best when operators are prepared to subsidise less profitable CT elements; but even there, costs remain relatively high but can be justified on the grounds that most users live in isolated areas and CT, for them, provides a 'lifeline'.
- Taxi vouchers or other forms of subsidised taxi journeys are not considered to be a suitable alternative to CT schemes because:
 - Payment for a taxi journey is for a single, one-off service; this is unsustainable in the long term as no other benefit accrues (such as income to the operator who can use it to invest in future services)
 - Most taxis in East Sussex are already fully utilised at peak periods.
- Members are not always informed when transport schemes cease and requested that this communications gap be addressed.
- Future developments planned for CT include:

- Greater engagement and closer working with the voluntary and community sector to develop better ways of engaging with communities when assessing transport needs
- Closer working with the NHS and West Sussex County Council to examine the scope to expand CT schemes into their activities
- Better engagement with parish councils to enable them to accurately assess local CT need through effective consultation, conducting effective surveys and presenting reasoned conclusions.

4.3 RESOLVED – (1) to note the significant progress made on the pilot community transport initiative and the lessons learned;

(2) to request that Members be kept abreast of progress of CT schemes operating in their area, especially if there are difficulties or a likely withdrawal of service; and,

(3) to endorse the proposed approach to be taken for managing future community transport projects.

5. ENVIRONMENT STRATEGY FOR EAST SUSSEX

5.1 The Committee received a report by the Director of Economy, Transport and Environment which invited Members to make comments on an amended draft Environment Strategy. The strategy was just the beginning of a process and in due course a number of sub-strategies or implementation plans would be developed.

5.2 The Committee suggested that the clarity and impact of the Strategy would be improved by ensuring that the style and language used makes it accessible to the average East Sussex resident; in particular the strategy should ideally:

- Emphasise the need to reduce energy consumption in practical terms (with illustrations of financial savings for a family of taking certain courses of action) rather than referring to the need to reduce CO₂ emissions which is much less meaningful.
- Link global warming and the consequent likelihood of extreme weather events with the impact on winter maintenance or other consequences that have a direct effect on people's lives; this will help to graphically illustrate how we will all need to adapt and evolve new ways of tackling the emerging problems.
- Painting a clear picture about the difference this Strategy will make to tourism, the local economy and jobs in East Sussex.
- Tackle the cynics' perspective head on rather than provide just one side of the argument.
- Highlight the wealth of important information contained in the Strategy by referring to key facts in the opening foreword.
- Provide a clearer indication of the overall thrust or direction of the Strategy.

5.3 RESOLVED – to (1) submit the suggestions on the draft Environment Strategy for East Sussex as outlined in paragraph 5.2; and

(2) consider future updates on the sub-strategies and implementation plans together with performance indicators developed to measure the success of the Strategy.

6. EAST SUSSEX PRELIMINARY FLOOD RISK ASSESSMENT (PFRA)

6.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Economy, Transport and Environment and received a presentation on the draft findings of the Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment for East Sussex.

6.2 Preparing the Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment (PFRA) is the first step of a set of new responsibilities laid upon the County Council as a Lead Flood Risk Authority under the UK Flood Risk Regulations (2009). Current estimates are that only part of the costs of meeting these responsibilities will be covered by government grants leaving some £200,000 per year to be found from County Council budgets.

6.3 RESOLVED – To (1) note the contents of the report, supporting material and presentation;

(2) endorse the draft findings of the East Sussex Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment;

(3) endorse any representations made by the County Council, through the ‘South East 7’ group and elsewhere, to Government concerning the adequacy of the resources available to undertake the new duty; and

(4) to receive future updates as appropriate.

7. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

7.1 The Committee considered the Committee’s work programme for the forthcoming year.

7.2 RESOLVED – to

(1) Establish a mini scrutiny review board on **Trees and woodlands** to:

a) Take an overview of all the County Council’s current tree policies in place to consider whether they are doing the right job; and to assess and understand any current problems and issues in their implementation.

b) Consider whether, given the removal of the funding for the parish tree wardens, effective alternative support is being given to supporting volunteer work in planting and managing trees and to see whether anything more can be done in this respect to further Big Society aims.

c) Review the action being taken to deal with Dutch Elm Disease (DED) including improvements being made to the framework contract for removal and destruction of affected trees.

Membership: Councillors Stogdon (Chairman), Daniel, Fawthrop and Rodohan.

(2) Include an additional point in the **Parking Strategy in East Sussex** item (on the agenda on 23 November 2011) on the demographic impact of residents’ parking schemes in town centres; and

(3) Note that the whole Committee is continuing to review different road maintenance contract models as part of its ongoing support to the **Highways Contract Re-procurement Project**; a forthcoming visit to Northamptonshire is scheduled for 16 June.

Additionally, the Committee will be casting an eye over the emerging performance indicators being developed in respect of the extension of the current highways contract.

(4) Note that the scope of the Committee now includes: **emergency planning** in addition to **economic development, trading standards** and **travellers**.

8. FORWARD PLAN

8.1 The Committee considered the Forward Plan for the period 8 June 2011 to 30 September 2011. Members were reminded of the need to monitor the Forward Plan when it was published online to identify any queries or concerns at an early stage. Requests for information should be raised with the listed contact officer and any scrutiny issues with the Scrutiny Manager.

9. NEXT MEETING

9.1 Members noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on 14 September 2011.