

REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR ECONOMY, TRANSPORT AND ENVIRONMENT

The Economy, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Committee met on 18 March 2013.

Present: Councillors Stogdon (Chairman), Terry Fawthrop (Vice-Chairman), Jon Freeman, Philip Howson, Pat Rodohan and Barry Taylor.

Also present: Councillor Lock (Lead Member for Economy).

1. Scrutiny review of street works in East Sussex

1.1 The Economy, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Committee has completed its Scrutiny Review of Street Works in East Sussex. A copy of the Committee's full report has previously been circulated to all members and is available on request from Andy Cottell (Tel: 01273 481955).

1.2 Utility companies responsible for gas, water, electricity and sewerage, and ESCC itself, between them carry out the vast majority of street works on our highways. The County Council, acting as Highway Authority, has the power to coordinate street works (on the non trunk roads) and, where appropriate, to fine or prosecute utility companies if their works overrun or reinstatements fail the inspections tests.

1.3 The Review found evidence that dialogue between the Council and utility companies isn't always as effective as it could be, making the Council's co-ordination role difficult. Advertisement of street works to local communities is problematic in many respects. Most significantly, after works are completed the quality of many reinstatements is demonstrably poor and has left a legacy of significant ongoing problems on the East Sussex highways network.

1.4 The Economy, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Committee **recommends** to the County Council –

1.4.1. As part of their requirement to cooperate, utility companies should share their annual operating plans with the Council as soon as they have been agreed.

1.4.2 The Highways team should share its resurfacing programmes with the Highways Development Control team to help prevent utility connections for new developments from disrupting newly resurfaced roads, for example.

1.4.3 The County Council should attend meetings of stakeholders organised by relevant utility companies to gain early notice of draft operating plans.

1.4.4 The Review Board supports the introduction of a shared permit scheme for East Sussex and Surrey; the extent to which the expected benefits of the scheme in reducing disruption are realised should be monitored carefully, and reported to scrutiny in due course.

1.4.5 The Council should encourage utility companies to adopt the kinds of positive publicity and communication practices followed by Southern Water and Southern Gas Networks regarding: branding, information on signs, and problem reporting.

1.4.6 The Council should collect and publish utility companies' communication performance, the objective being to encourage the poor performers to improve, or risk a negative response amongst their wider stakeholder group.

1.4.7 Utility companies should be urged to inform local councillors of projected street works in their area, and consider sharing their internal newsletters and communications with staff about expected standards when carrying out street works.

1.4.8 The Council should undertake coring tests on a higher percentage of highway reinstatements, but targeted more towards utility companies that have a historically high failure rate.

1.4.9 The Council should collect and publish utility companies' reinstatement performance information based on the coring programme results.

1.4.10 The Council should compare highway reinstatement coring test results work with those of neighbouring authorities to help determine and tackle the underlying reasons for poor reinstatement performance.

1.4.11 Where reinstatements persistently fail to meet Department for Transport specifications and alternative or 'soft' approaches fail to result in improvements, the Council should not hesitate to prosecute the companies responsible for every failed reinstatement; and, publicise the outcome of such action.

1.4.12 The use of temporary reinstatements of highway works should be actively discouraged. Where they are essential, those responsible should ensure their works identify the relevant utility company and the anticipated date of the full reinstatement.

1.4.13 The Council should develop and introduce a code of conduct between the Council and utility companies with an appropriately high level of political endorsement and involvement.

[See also report of the Cabinet, paragraph 2]

Richard Stogdon
(Chairman)

1 July 2013