

PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Place Scrutiny Committee held Remotely via Teams or CC2, County Hall, Lewes on 17 March 2021.

PRESENT Councillors Bob Bowdler (Chair) Councillors John Barnes, Martin Clarke, Chris Dowling, Nigel Enever, Pat Rodohan, Stephen Shing, Andy Smith and Barry Taylor

LEAD MEMBERS Councillors Bill Bentley and Claire Dowling

ALSO PRESENT Phil Hall, Chief Operating Officer
Rupert Clubb, Director of Communities, Economy and Transport
James Harris, Assistant Director, Economy
Nick Skelton, Assistant Director Communities
Karl Taylor, Assistant Director Operations

18 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

18.1 The Committee RESOLVED to agree the minutes of the meeting held on 25 November 2020 as a correct record.

19 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

19.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Godfrey Daniel and Councillor Darren Grover. Apologies were also received from Councillor Rupert Simmons, Lead Member for Economy.

20 DISCLOSURES OF INTERESTS

20.1 There were none.

21 URGENT ITEMS

21.1 There were none notified.

22 RECONCILING POLICY, PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES (RPPR) 2021/22

22.1 The Chair introduced the report which is the Committee's opportunity to review it's input into the RPPR budget setting process for 2021/22 and consider any areas for inclusion in the Committee's future work programme. The Committee commented that they were happy with scrutiny's involvement in the RPPR process and went on to discuss elements of the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and areas for inclusion in the work programme which are summarised below.

Trading Standards

22.2 The Committee discussed the work of the Trading Standards team, and particularly the work to protect vulnerable people from rogue traders and the vital work on scams. It was noted that further savings are planned for the service and the Committee will want to explore the impact of those savings on service provision to ensure the sustainability of the Service.

22.3 The Director of Communities, Economy and Transport (CET) commented on the fantastic work the Team does and the work to protect the vulnerable through the National Scams Team, as well as the work with the Police and other agencies. The Lead Member for Communities and Safety outlined that the Covid19 pandemic had had an impact on the Service and its ability to carry out planned work and generate income. The work of the Trading Standards Team also has a strong relationship with community safety and the Police.

22.4 The Committee agreed to include request for a report on the work of the Trading Standards team in the work programme to examine how services are currently being provided, the impact of proposed savings on the sustainability of the service, and whether it is adequately funded to continue its work to protect the vulnerable and work with partners on community safety.

Access to the Internet and Digital Inclusion

22.5 One of the areas highlighted in the Committee's comments to Cabinet was the importance of access to the internet and digital inclusion. The Committee noted the good work of the Library Service to provide Covid secure access to the internet, which had provided a vital service for people wishing to apply for jobs or make benefits applications online who do not have internet access. The Committee also noted the importance of completing the work to provide the maximum internet coverage possible through the Superfast Broadband Project and the Council's support for the Gigabit Broadband Voucher scheme.

22.6 The Lead Member for Communities and Safety assured the Committee that the Library Service would continue the work to support digital inclusion, and outlined the support Library Service staff had given to other departments during the pandemic such as the community hubs, and had ensured the home delivery of library materials for those unable to use the digital library.

22.7 The Committee agreed that it would like a report later in the year to update the Committee on the delivery of the Broadband Project and the role of the Gigabit Voucher scheme in enabling access to broadband services by hard to reach properties and communities.

Government Funding for Highways

22.8 The Committee asked for an update on the impact of central Government funding announcements for highways, including the Council's £5.9million share of the £1.7 billion pothole fund, and whether this meant that the Council had received an increase in funding. The Director of Communities, Economy and Transport clarified that the pothole fund money was for one year only and capital spending on highways will be in line with the sums agreed by Cabinet and Full Council as part of the budget setting process. Some elements of the Department for Transport (DfT) grant are lower than the previous year (2020/21) but are higher than the levels received in 2019/20. Overall, capital spending on highways will be as stated in the capital programme and the pothole fund money will be used to support this. The available funding will be applied across the County guided by the priorities in the asset management plan.

22.9 The Committee commented that it would be beneficial for the Committee to remain sighted on the levels of expenditure for highways maintenance and in particular for potholes and re-surfacing.

Highways Fault Reporting App

22.10 The Committee discussed whether there was scope to bid for money from the IT transformation programme to develop an app for reporting potholes and other highways defects to gain the benefits of utilising developments in artificial intelligence (AI) and make the process more efficient. This would improve the reporting process from the customer's perspective and make more efficient use of the Highway Stewards time. The Committee also noted that Members often had an expert knowledge of recurring potholes and other problems in their Divisions and it may be helpful for the Highways Reference Group to look at ways of capturing this information.

22.11 The Director of Communities, Economy and Transport responded that having an app for mobile phones and other devices would be good, but development costs can be expensive. The costs and benefits of developing an app would need to be assessed to ensure value for money. The Assistant Director Operations added that the timing of developing an app would need to be carefully considered to fit in with re-procurement of the highways maintenance contract and this is something that the Highways Reference Group could examine.

Support for Business

22.12 The Committee discussed the support for business that the Council is providing and the changes that have been brought about by the Covid19 pandemic. The Committee agreed that it would be helpful to have a report from the Economic Development team on their work to support businesses and the changes to economic regeneration work following the Covid19 pandemic and the impact of national lockdowns on the local economy.

Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP)

22.13 The Committee enquired if the pandemic had affected the budget forecasts used in the MTFP plan. The Chief Operating Officer outlined that up to date forecasts had been used for the February Budget Council meeting and are continually kept under review. There had been some Government funding announcements received after the Full Council meeting which will be used to update the MTFP and will be reported through Council Monitoring reports.

22.14 The Committee RESOLVED to agree:

- 1) That there were no suggested improvements to the RPPR process from a scrutiny perspective; and
- 2) to add the items referred to in paragraphs 22.4, 22.7 and 22.12 (above) to the future work programme for consideration by the new committee at the next Place Scrutiny Committee meeting.

23 ROAD SAFETY PROGRAMME - INTERIM OUTCOMES

23.1 The Assistant Director Communities introduced the report. He outlined that the Programme had involved working with the Behavioural Insights Team (BIT), the Sussex Safer Roads Partnership (SSRP) and other partners on pilot projects to reduce the number of Killed or Seriously Injured (KSI) crashes on the County's roads. The vast majority of KSI's and collisions are due to a driver carelessness and error in which speed is also a factor. The Programme has devised a number of trial schemes to change driver behaviour using behavioural science techniques.

23.2 The report provides information on the interim outcomes of two trials aimed at reducing re-offending for speeding. One used a redesigned Notice of Intended Prosecution (NIP) letter and leaflet in which a randomised trial resulted in 23% of people less likely to re-offend. The second trial involved sending out an anniversary letter a year after the original speeding offence

reminding people to continue to drive carefully within the speed limit. This was also successful in reducing re-offending levels. A third project targeted High Risk Routes where low cost measures such as changes to signs, road markings and speed limits were made to change the way the road appears to drivers to produce a 'self-explaining' road environment. This led to a decrease in the number of collisions on the eight sites that had a least 8 months post implementation crash data. Full results for all the trials will be reported later in the year.

23.3 The Committee welcomed the report and the encouraging results of the trial schemes. The Committee noted the innovative use of behavioural science techniques to change driver behaviour which is very important in order to reduce the number of KSI collisions in the County. A number of aspects of the report were discussed in more detail which are summarised below.

Behavioural Factors

23.4 The Committee commented that there may be a popular perception that speed is the only factor in causing collisions and other factors such as drink, drugs and driver error also need to be tackled. The Assistant Director Communities outlined the ongoing work of the Sussex Safer Roads Partnership which is crucial in tackling these issues through community engagement. The increased use of technology in the future will also play a part (e.g. driver behaviour monitoring through apps and 'black boxes'). He added that most people involved in KSI collisions are travelling close to their home address.

23.5 The Lead Member for Communities and Safety outlined that the character of the roads in East Sussex is also a factor and people need to pay attention when they are driving. The emphasis of the report is on the trials to change driver behaviour, which can be challenging. The results are encouraging and there is the opportunity to apply them wider than the County.

Rural Unclassified Roads

23.6 Several members of the Committee highlighted the issue of people driving too fast on narrow and sometimes challenging unclassified rural roads, which typically have the national speed limit of 60 mph. They commented that they would support a blanket lower 40 mph limit on such roads and suggested approaching the Local Government Association (LGA) and the Department for Transport about taking this approach. Many of the neighbouring local authorities have higher speed roads and drivers need to adjust to the driving conditions when they enter East Sussex.

Trial Schemes suspended due to Covid

23.7 The Committee enquired about the trial scheme for motorcyclists and the other trial involving young drivers that had been affected by Covid19 measures. The Assistant Director Communities explained that work on these trials had been paused and is due to continue later this year. In the case of the scheme for motorcyclists a different approach is needed as the original intention was to engage with motorcyclists at events. The team is working with Sussex Police and the Behavioural Insights Team on a different approach which uses the registration process for the "In Case of Emergency" scheme that many motorcyclists participate in.

Baseline KSI Information

23.8 The Committee discussed the baseline KSI information and asked why the East Sussex figures were higher than the England average. The Assistant Director Communities explained that part of the reason is the characteristics of the road network in East Sussex where there is a low number of dual carriageways, many rural roads and roads which require more attention to drive on. The other factor is historically there have been issues with the consistency in the way collision data is recorded in different areas. This has now been standardised so consistency will improve in the future. The Assistant Director Communities agreed that it would be more helpful

to look at the KSI data for comparable shire counties. The Committee added that it might also be helpful to look at Fire Service records of collisions they attend. The Assistant Director Communities responded that the team is happy to work with the SSRP to look at this.

High Risk Routes

23.9 The Committee asked if there were issues with the road infrastructure on the High Risk Routes which have led to crashes. The Assistant Director Communities outlined that all KSI collisions are investigated by Sussex Police to identify the cause. In 90% of the cases the cause is attributed to driver error and it is not the County's roads which are causing crashes.

23.10 The High Risk Routes were identified by analysing collision data to see where there were higher levels of KSIs and by looking at their suitability for low cost traffic management interventions. The trial has looked at low cost measures to help drivers drive more safely and create 'self-explained' road environments. This is so the driver is aware of the road environment and character and is able to moderate their driving so that it is appropriate to the potential hazards present.

23.11 In total 25 High Risk Routes were identified, and 16 schemes were implemented. The report provides the results from the 8 schemes where there is at least 8 months post implementation crash data. It was clarified that the A26 Crowborough to Uckfield route was not included in the trial as there were other routes with higher crash levels. A full list of the routes can be shared with the Committee.

23.12 The Committee RESOLVED to:

- 1) Welcome the report and congratulate officers on the work that had been undertaken to reduce KSI collisions in East Sussex;
- 2) Note the positive interim outcomes of the East Sussex County Council Road Safety Programme;
- 3) Receive a final report on the outcomes of the Programme later in the year.

24 SCRUTINY REVIEW OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SCHOOL TRAVEL PLANS - UPDATE

24.1 The Assistant Director Economy introduced the report which is an update on the progress made in implementing the recommendations of the review. Appendix 2 of the report sets on the progress on the recommendations compared with the previous update received by the Committee in November 2019. There has been a successful implementation of all the recommendations, some of which are complete (such as the work to provide information and advice on the 'C Zone' part of the web site for schools), whilst others are ongoing in nature. The Team have been successful in securing funding to support this work and steps have been taken to ensure planning conditions are applied where it is appropriate to do so (e.g. Claverham Community College and Hailsham Community College). As part of the continuing work in this area the 'School Streets' pilots are now in place and will commence shortly.

24.2 The Committee noted the progress on implementing the recommendations and indicated that they were pleased with the progress that had been made. The Lead Member for Transport and Environment, who had been part of the review, outlined the topic for the review had arisen from Member's experience on the Planning Committee. She commented that it was pleasing to see the progress that had been made and noted that there was an opportunity to take this work forward through the 'School Streets' pilots.

24.3 It was clarified that the 'School Streets' pilots are being funded through the second tranche of the Active Travel fund. The impact and effects of the pilots will be monitored and evaluated before considering the next steps to be taken. It is difficult to say at present whether

the pilot schemes will be made permanent or expanded as this will be dependent on the outcome of the pilots and the availability of funding. However, 'School Streets' could be included as part of the work on the revised Local Transport Plan (LTP).

24.4 The Committee RESOLVED to note the updates in relation to the agreed recommendations identified through the scrutiny review of the effectiveness of School Travel Plans, as set out in Appendix 2 of the report.

25 WORK PROGRAMME

25.1 The Committee noted that the composition of the Committee may change following the County Council elections in May. However, the Committee considered that it would be worth sign posting a number of issues to the incoming Committee by including reports and suggested topics for scrutiny reviews in the work programme. The new Committee will then be able to consider them when it looks at the work programme at the next meeting in June 2021.

Highways Reference Group

25.2 The Committee agreed that it would be good to keep the membership of the Highways Reference Group as close to the current membership as possible to ensure continuity. It was agreed to delegate authority to the Chair of the Place Scrutiny Committee, in consultation with the Vice Chair, to reconvene the Highways Reference Group after the May elections and appoint members to the Group if necessary before the Committee meets in June 2021.

Future Reports

25.3 The Committee discussed the need to follow up on the work on Climate Change and the progress in changes to working practices for council staff post Covid19. It was noted that the first monitoring report for the Scrutiny Review of Becoming a Carbon Neutral Council is scheduled for the November 2021 meeting, but it would be helpful to have an earlier update on the changes in working practices.

25.4 The Chief Operating Officer commented that as most staff will not be returning to the office until September it would be difficult to give a complete picture to the Committee of the changes. Work is currently being undertaken on the Workstyles programme which is looking at changes to office space, technology and working practices such as increased working from home. The Committee agreed to have a verbal update at the June meeting on the direction of travel and work to date on Workstyles programme, followed by a written report in the Autumn on the lessons learnt from Covid and the changes to working practices.

25.5 The Committee agreed to request a report on Trading Standards as discussed under the RPPR item to examine the current work, focus and sustainability of the Service. The Committee also endorsed the earlier discussion and agreement under the RPPR item to request a report on the Council's work to support businesses and economic regeneration post Covid19.

Topics for Scrutiny Reviews

Communications

25.6 The Committee discussed the possibility of reviewing the Councils Communications function to explore the work they are currently undertaking, the use of new technologies/social media and the impact that any potential future savings would have on this function. It was agreed to add this as a potential scrutiny review topic to the work programme.

Highway Licence Fees

25.7 The Committee discussed the possibility of reviewing the scale of fees charged to Parish and Town Councils for placing items on the highway and other highways works. Such councils range in size and the budget or precept they are able to set. For some councils who wish to work with ESCC to provide facilities for their communities, the scale of highway licence fees relative to their budget can be a barrier to projects proceeding. This is an issue that has been raised by Parish Councils with several of the Committee members.

25.8 The Assistant Director Operations outlined that the scale of licence fees charged by East Sussex Highways on behalf of the Council is set by the Council. If objects are placed on the highway, they have to be licenced under the requirements of the Highways Act. The Council charges fees to cover the administration costs of issuing the licence and the cost of enforcement. Fees charged are retained by the contractor to pay for the licencing service. The level of fees and fee increases can be reviewed through the RPPR process.

25.9 The Committee agreed to add a review of highway licence fees to the potential scrutiny review topics in the Committee's work programme.

Forward Plan

25.10 Under this item the Chair asked if it would be possible for the Committee to have a briefing note on the use of Apprenticeships and details of the Kickstart programme to help young people into employment. In particular, are Apprenticeships targeted at young people or can anyone access them.

25.11 The Committee RESOLVED to amend the work programme in line with paragraph 22.14 of the minutes and paragraphs, 25.4, 25.5, 25.6 and 25.9 above.

The meeting ended at 12.00 pm.

Councillor Bob Bowdler (Chair)