

PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Place Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, County Hall, Lewes on 26 September 2023.

PRESENT Councillors Matthew Beaver (Chair) Councillors Chris Collier, Alan Hay, Julia Hilton (Vice Chair), Ian Hollidge, Eleanor Kirby-Green, Philip Lunn, Steve Murphy, Paul Redstone, Stephen Shing and David Tutt

LEAD MEMBERS Councillors Nick Bennett and Claire Dowling

ALSO PRESENT Philip Baker, Assistant Chief Executive
Rupert Clubb, Director of Communities, Economy and Transport
Ros Parker, Chief Operating Officer
Ian Gutsell, Chief Finance Officer
Karl Taylor, Assistant Director Operations
Justin Foster, Waste Team Manager
Ian Glover, Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Project Manager
Councillor Trevor Webb

9. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

9.1 The Committee RESOLVED to agree the minutes of the meeting held on 14 July 2023 as a correct record.

10. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

10.1 There were no apologies for absence.

11. DISCLOSURES OF INTERESTS

11.1 Councillor Alan Hay declared a personal non prejudicial interest under item 7, Electric Vehicle Charging verbal update, as he is a Project Lead working for National Grid. Councillor David Tutt declared a personal non prejudicial interest under item 8, Work Programme, as he sits on the Consumer Council for Southern Water.

12. URGENT ITEMS

12.1 There were none.

13. RECONCILING POLICY, PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES (RPPR) 2024/2025

13.1 The Senior Scrutiny Adviser introduced the report which summarises the Committee's involvement in the RPPR process and outlines the further meetings planned during the Autumn. The report provided the Committee with an opportunity to consider what further work or information is required to support the Committee's input into the RPPR budget setting process for the financial year 2024/25 and beyond.

13.2 The Committee discussed the report and raised a number of points which are summarised below.

13.3 The Committee members highlighted further areas of work or where more information is required as part of the work on the RPPR process. These included:

- Further information on the costs and feasibility of providing 20mph zones around schools and children's play areas.
- Further understanding of monitoring air quality in the County and in particular PM2.5 particulate air pollution.
- More information about the future of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and how the Council is going to support this activity in the future now that Government has announced that LEPs will be abolished, and their responsibilities transferred to upper tier local authorities.
- Rights of Way and the impact of inflation and Definitive Map Modification Orders. The Committee noted the additional information that had been provided and asked that it be considered at the RPPR Board in December.

13.4 The Director of Communities, Economy and Transport (CET) outlined that air quality monitoring is the responsibility of District and Borough councils and sought clarification as to whether the Committee was suggesting that East Sussex County Council (ESCC) starts monitoring air quality. It was clarified that the Committee was asking for information on which areas of East Sussex do not have PM2.5 monitoring. Committee members also commented that information on air quality is important when considering 20mph zones and Active Travel interventions such as School Streets, so that it can be considered when making decisions about Active Travel in the future.

13.5 Some Committee members commented on the tone of the wording in the State of the County report regarding the ageing population in East Sussex and the pressure on services this may lead to. The Committee noted that many older people contribute positively to the local economy and community life in East Sussex and asked if the State of the County report could mention their positive contribution to the County.

13.6 The Committee asked if the position regarding the forecast budget deficit of £28.4 million in 2024/25 is likely to improve or get worse. The Committee also asked if inflationary pressures on highway maintenance had been taken into account. The Chief Finance Officer outlined that the Quarter 1 Council Monitoring report shows the financial pressure the Council is under, with significant pressure on social care. There will be more clarity later in the year on the Council's budgetary position, but the position at present is challenging. The inflationary pressures on the highway maintenance budget have been built in and recognised in the budget forecasts.

13.7 The Committee noted the anticipated delays in the Government announcement on the funding settlement for local authorities.

13.8 The Committee RESOLVED to:

1) Note the report; and

2) Identified the items in paragraph 13.3 (above) for further consideration either at the December RPPR Board or through the Committee's future work programme.

14. FOOD WASTE & ENVIRONMENT ACT 2021 - VERBAL UPDATE

14.1 The Waste Team Manager provided a verbal update of the implications the Environment Act 2021 and the requirement to collect food waste. Since the last report to the Committee there have been a number of delays by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) in the announcement of details of the requirements of the food waste collection service.

14.2 It is understood that the Extended Producer Responsibility for Packaging (EPRP) reforms, which were originally planned for 2024, will be delayed by a further year to October 2025. The decision to delay the EPRP reforms comes alongside the decision to delay consistent household recycling plans (until after EPRP). It is expected that the introduction of mandated food waste collection will also be delayed, as it was previously indicated that guidance would follow EPRP reforms and is likely to be sometime after 2026.

14.3 The recycling consistency programme will now be known as 'simpler recycling', and this includes food waste collections. The District and Borough councils who will be responsible for collecting food waste are awaiting details on the timelines and funding. Further details are also awaited on what kerbside recycling materials will have to be collected and what bins will need to be provided. This may have an impact on ESCC as the Waste Disposal Authority (WDA), if there are new materials that have to be recycled. It is also expected that there will be some clarity on charges for garden waste as this varies from council to council.

14.4 In terms of residual 'black bag' or 'black bin' waste there may be limits to the frequency of collections required. However, food waste will be collected weekly. The Council already has the Woodlands composting facility that processes all the councils garden waste and the food waste from Lewes District Council. The team is waiting for clarity on the changes to food waste collections before going ahead with any changes to this facility and modifications to waste transfer stations needed to deal with additional food waste.

14.5 The Waste Team Manager extended an invitation to all Committee members to visit the various waste disposal facilities, to get an appreciation of the work the Team undertakes.

14.6 The Committee discussed the update and asked a number of questions. A summary of the comments made is given below.

Timescales for the introduction of food waste collections

14.7 It was clarified that the Extended Producer Responsibility for Packaging (EPRP) reforms have been pushed back to 2025 and the introduction food waste collections will follow some time in 2026. It is not possible to charge for food waste as it is part of residual waste, which has to be collected free of charge. Food waste collections will be weekly.

Garden waste collections

14.8 It was also clarified that the collection of garden waste is discretionary. The Waste Team Manager commented that all the District and Borough councils in East Sussex (who are the waste collection authorities) currently charge for collecting garden waste, but this may change if the Government decides to regulate charges.

Demand for food waste collections

14.9 Some Committee members commented that they thought there would be a low demand for food waste collections due to cost of living factors and the fact that people are producing less food waste. Perhaps it would be better value for money to provide education activities on food waste minimisation and ask the Government to delay the introduction of food waste collections in the current economic environment. The Chair noted that there are different types of food waste such as from excess purchased food and waste from food preparation.

14.10 The Waste Team Manager outlined that there is a lot of food waste in the residual waste that is collected at present. The Team will be doing a composition analysis exercise later this year to look at the different types of food waste in the residual waste. He also commented that the introduction of food waste collection systems can bring about behaviour change and have an impact on the amount of waste as people become more aware of the food and money they are throwing away.

Impacts of the delay in introducing food waste collections

14.11 The Committee expressed concerns about the delay and the impact this would have on waste contract procurement and carbon emissions from vehicles. The Waste Team Manager outlined that the main impact would be on those authorities who are at the end of their contracts, and on waste collection authorities who may have to change vehicles and bins. As far as ESCC is concerned, it is in a good position to deal with food waste as it has the Woodlands site, but some modifications will be needed to waste transfer stations.

Joint Waste and Recycling Committee

14.12 The Committee asked if there is a role through the Joint Waste and Recycling Committee to promote the message to reduce food waste. The Waste Team Manager commented that there are communications programmes about waste minimisation and discussions can be held with colleagues in the Joint Waste and Recycling Committee about this.

Content of future report

14.13 The Committee asked if the future update report in March 2024 could cover how communal food waste bins will be provided and maintained, and include details of the composition analysis of the black bin, residual waste.

14.14 The Committee RESOLVED to note the verbal update.

15. ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING - VERBAL UPDATE

15.1 The Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Project Manager gave verbal update on the progress being made to install a network of public electric vehicle (EV) charging points across East Sussex. An initial study was undertaken with the Strategic Property Asset Collaboration in East Sussex (SPACES) Partnership with work centred around five key stages:

- Context Gathering
- Stakeholder Engagement
- Electric Vehicle (EV) Growth Forecasts
- Site Identification & Prioritisation
- Routes to Delivery

15.2 The work has taken a multi-step process to identify potential on-street and mixed hub locations for EV charging points. This has looked at information from a range of sources including Census data to identify areas of housing (such as terraced houses and flats) which do not have off-street parking, and existing charge point locations. This resulted in the identification of 52 priority on-street charging areas covering more than 350 streets, and 51 feasible sites for charging hubs (including the County Hall public car park).

15.3 Following the identification of the initial list of sites, consultation was undertaken with the District and Borough councils and UK Power Networks to further refine the list of locations taking into account factors such as:

- Where off-street parking is not available
- Proximity to existing available charging infrastructure
- Power supply
- Pavement widths and location of existing street furniture

15.4 As a result, more than 280 potential locations have been identified that are able to host over 2,000 charging points to provide good coverage across the county. A final assessment of the locations will be undertaken by the provider once they have been procured. The network of on-street charging points will be in addition to the EV charging facilities being provided by the District and Borough councils as well as those on private property such as supermarkets, rail stations, petrol station forecourts and privately run car parks.

15.5 Funding has been secured through the Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) scheme and East Sussex has secured an allocation of £4.441million in funding following an expression of interest application that was made in March 2023. East Sussex is in tranche 1 and will be paid 90% of the funding in 2023/24 after submitting a second stage business plan application by the end of November 2023. The other 10% will be released after approval of the procurement contract with the provider. In addition £586,000 enabling funding has been provided by the Government to pay for project management resources and support for the procurement and implementation of the project.

15.6 There are two options for the operating model for the delivery of the charging point network:

- A concession model – which has less financial risk, as the operational risk is with the concession who is responsible for operating and maintaining the network of charge points.
- Own and operate model – this is where the operation costs rest with the local authority and there is likely to be a higher financial risk.

15.7 The intention is to procure the EV charging point network as a concession during 2023/24 with a 12 - 30 month delivery timescale commencing in quarter 1 or quarter 2 of 2024/25. This will deliver around 2,000 charging points and 10 rapid charge hubs at an estimated cost of delivery of £9 million (approximately £4 million from LEVI finding and £5million private sector investment). There will be an 'open book' agreement with the concession where information on costs and income is shared. The draft EV charge point strategy will also be included in the supporting information for the draft Local Transport Plan, which will go out to public consultation later in the year.

15.8 The Committee discussed the update and asked if it would be possible to have a copy of the presentation. A summary of the discussion and points raised is given below.

EV charging network capacity

15.9 The Committee asked about the capacity of the proposed charging network infrastructure and how the number of charging points relate to the number of electric vehicles on the road. The Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Project Manager responded that the proposed network would provide around 60% of the capacity required, but the recent Government announcement on moving back the deadline for the cessation of sales of new petrol and diesel vehicles to 2035 may have an impact on the uptake of electric vehicles and providers' decisions about investment.

Pricing

15.10 The Committee asked if there was an indication of the pricing that will be used by the concession, because if it is too high it may act as a barrier to people switching to electric vehicles, especially as charging at home can be relatively cheap. The Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Project Manager outlined that there had been no indication of the price per kilowatt hour as yet, but the open book agreement will mean that ESCC will have some influence over tariffs.

Cable channels across the pavement

15.11 The Committee understands that other local authorities (e.g. Oxford) have been looking at the use of cable channels across the pavement to allow residents to plug in their cars to charge them from their home where they have no off-street parking, and asked if this is something ESCC is exploring. The Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Project Manager explained that this is not something that ESCC has looked at yet but could conduct some trials. There is no funding to implement this, but a scheme similar to where residents request and pay for dropped kerbs could be explored.

Rapid Chargers

15.12 The Committee understands that most of the on-street provision will be slower 7 kilowatt hour charging points which will need a connection to the grid. It asked what the planned provision is for rapid charging that could be used by tourists and other user groups such as taxis who need rapid chargers. The Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Project Manager responded that the provision of 10 high speed charging hubs will address this need. Each rapid charge point site will have four sockets and each socket can service six to eight vehicles a day.

Charging technology

15.13 It was clarified that the proposed network will be focussed on delivering value for money at scale and will use existing technologies. There is some standardisation of connectors and adapters are available to ensure the charging points are compatible with most electric vehicles. There is some work taking place to explore utilising alternative power sources such as solar and as charging and battery technology changes the Council can consider this at a later date. The Committee observed that the later date for phasing out new petrol and diesel vehicles may reduce the demand for EVs and increase prices, which may affect the market and predictions about EV use.

Location of on-street charging points

15.14 The Committee identified that this will be a key issue and asked if the impact on the public realm and on-street parking had been considered and whether there is any work to combine locations with car share clubs and e-bike charging. The Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Project Manager outlined that the team have talked to car clubs, taxi operators and the District and Borough councils about the location of charging points and the rapid charging hubs which would serve car clubs and taxis. In terms of the public realm, there will be some additional infrastructure needed at the kerbside for charging points and infrastructure will be shared where possible. The use of road offsets is also being considered. Some Committee members urged the team not to take up road space unnecessarily with charging points and highlighted that there may be concerns about the impact on on-street parking and the public realm which will need to be considered carefully. The Committee suggested that the impact on the public realm (e.g. parking policy, link to public transport, cycle storage etc.) is something that should be included in any future report.

15.15 The Committee asked what consideration there had been of providing charging points in off-street locations such as community centres etc. The Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Project Manager outlined that the focus of the project had been on on-street locations where there is no other provision or off-street parking available. The team is happy to explore other potential sites such as community centres with the District and Borough councils.

15.16 The Committee asked about the availability of information about the location of charging points. The Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Project Manager responded that the team has been looking at information portals that provide information about charge point locations. The project also has its own directory of charge point locations in East Sussex and is developing an East Sussex app showing charge point locations which is part of the funding that has been allocated.

15.17 The Committee RESOLVED to note the verbal update.

16. WORK PROGRAMME

16.1 The Committee discussed the work programme and any items that it might wish to include in the future scrutiny work of the Committee. The Committee agreed that it would be good to prepare some written questions for Southern Water in advance of the update on storm overflows and sewage spills at the next meeting in November. The Committee noted that the Wealden District Council Overview and Scrutiny committee had recently received a presentation from South East Water on the interruption of water supplies in the north of the county that occurred earlier in the year. The Committee asked if it would be possible to distribute a copy of the minutes of this meeting to the Committee for information.

16.2 The Committee also discussed having an update report of the Bus Service Improvement Programme (BSIP) as some Committee members had noticed a decline in the reliability of services and there was a wish to have an evaluation of the Flexibus service (also discussed under the RPPR item earlier on the agenda).

16.3 The Committee agreed to hold further detailed discussions on the work programme at the work planning Away Day, which was being held after the Committee meeting.

Reference Group and Review Board Updates

16.4 The Committee received verbal updates from Cllr Paul Redstone, Chair of the Local Transport Plan (LTP) Reference Group and from Cllr Ian Hollidge, Chair of the review board undertaking the Scrutiny Review of Pothole Management.

Hailsham Wastewater Treatment Works site visit

16.5 Councillor Steve Murphy provided a verbal update on the site visit to Southern Water's Hailsham North, Wastewater Treatment Works (WTWs) attended by four members of the Committee. The site visit was very interesting and provided a lot of answers to questions about wastewater treatment. It was pleasing to hear about the £30 million investment that had been made in additional sewage treatment units at both Hailsham North and Hailsham South WTWs. It was evident that staff continually seek ways to improve the service and if there are any spills, enquiries are held to establish the reasons for the spill and identify any actions or lessons learnt.

16.6 The Committee RESOLVED to:

- 1) Agree the amendments to the work programme contained in paragraphs 13.8, 16.1 and 16.2 above;
- 2) Note the upcoming items on East Sussex County Council's (ESCC) Forward Plan in appendix 2 of the report; and
- 3) Note the updates from the Review Board, Working Group and Reference Groups contained in section 3 of the report.

The meeting ended at 11.59 am.

Councillor Matthew Beaver (Chair)