

ECONOMY, TRANSPORT AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Economy, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Committee held at Committee Room, County Hall, Lewes on 1 July 2015.

PRESENT: Councillors Richard Stogdon (Chair), Mike Pursglove (Vice Chair), John Hodges, Pat Rodohan, Rosalyn St. Pierre and Barry Taylor

LEAD MEMBER Councillor Carl Maynard (Lead Member for Transport and Environment)

ALSO PRESENT Rupert Clubb, Director of Communities, Economy and Transport
Nick Skelton, Assistant Director Communities
Karl Taylor, Assistant Director Operations
Brian Banks, Team Manager - Road Safety

Senior Democratic Services Officer: Martin Jenks
Democratic Services Officer: Simon Bailey

1 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 18 MARCH 2015

1.1 The minutes of the meetings held on Wednesday 18 March 2015 were agreed.

1.2 RESOLVED – to approve as a correct record the minutes of the meetings held on 18 March 2015.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Claire Dowling.

3 DISCLOSURES OF INTERESTS

3.1 Councillor Hodges declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in agenda item 5 as he is Vice Chair of the Hastings Academies Trust. Councillor St. Pierre declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in agenda item 5 as she is a Governor of South Malling School.

4 URGENT ITEMS

4.1 None notified.

5 SCRUTINY REVIEW OF SCHOOL CROSSING PATROL ALTERNATIVE FUNDING - THE SIX MONTH UPDATE REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE REVIEW

5.1 The Assistant Director, Communities introduced the report. The report provides an update on the implementation of the recommendations of the Scrutiny Review contained in appendix 2 of the report. There are twenty eight school crossing patrol sites funded by East Sussex County Council (ESCC), which meet the Council's funding policy criteria.

5.2 In response to recommendation 6 of the Scrutiny Review, a questionnaire has been sent out to the ESCC funded sites to seek views about a change to funding whereby academies would pay for the school crossing patrol. The Road Safety Team has received fifteen responses to the questionnaire. Of the ten responses from ESCC maintained schools, eight were in favour of academies funding school crossing patrols themselves. Of the five responses from academies, none were in favour of a change in funding.

5.3 The Committee discussed the progress in implementing the recommendations of the Scrutiny Review. A summary of the main points that were raised is outlined below.

Budget Implications

5.4 The net budget for school crossing patrols is £82,000 per year. This represents £122,000 in costs and £40,000 in income from sponsorship (mainly from Parish Councils) and schools. The removal of funding from school crossing patrol sites that did not meet the policy criteria has resulted in a £22,000 a year saving, which falls short of the anticipated £50,000 a year savings. This shortfall will be made up from elsewhere within the departmental budget. The department has not held discussions with the Children's Services Department about the funding school crossing patrols as it is not corporate policy to shunt costs from one department to another under the One Council approach.

Use of Volunteers

5.5 There are twenty one school crossing patrol sites that do not meet the policy criteria for ESCC funding which the Road Safety Team supervises and monitors. Eight of these sites are staffed by volunteers where the Road Safety Team provides training, uniform, police checks and risk assessments as well as supervision. The use of volunteers is challenging in terms of supervision. There are 23 volunteers involved with these eight sites and the Road Safety Team aims to check the operation of each crossing patrol at least once a term. There is no evidence to suggest that there are any problems that arise from the use of volunteers.

5.6 There is no statutory obligation on ESCC to provide school crossing patrols. However, ESCC is the only body who can approve school crossing patrols in its role as Highways Authority. Consequently ESCC has a responsibility to ensure that school crossings are operated safely, and providing supervision is a way of meeting this requirement.

5.7 The Road Safety Team has a pool of relief crossing patrol officers to cover staff absences and when patrol officers leave. It is not easy to recruit new crossing patrol officers as the hours are short and they need to be local to the site. Most crossing patrol officers do not take up the role for the money that is paid.

Light Controlled Crossings

5.8 Recommendation 1 of the Scrutiny Review refers to light controlled crossings. The capital cost of a light controlled crossing is between £50,000 and £80,000 depending on the location. This means that the payback period for a typical light controlled crossing (under an invest to save proposal) would be twelve to fifteen years (excluding maintenance costs). Therefore it is unlikely that the replacement of school crossing patrols with light controlled crossing can be cost justified.

5.9 The Committee asked if it would be possible to include information on the factors that determine the costs of a light controlled crossing in the sponsorship pack. The Road Safety Manager said he would try and develop a range of indicative costs that could be included in the pack and the Community Match Fund information to assist those wishing to fund a light controlled crossing.

Sponsorship

5.10 Since the Scrutiny Review there have been no enquiries from schools regarding sponsorship. The Road Safety Team is working with the Marketing and Communications department to update the sponsorship pack for schools (recommendation 2). Making sponsorship more attractive to sponsors is difficult as there is limited opportunity to display branding and logos on the crossing patrol uniform. When working on the highway safety standards require a high percentage of reflective material on the uniform to be visible to drivers. Information will be included in the pack on the use of signs and road signs for sponsorship.

Future School Crossing Patrol Provision

5.11 The impact of the Scrutiny Review has been to provide a more robust process for funding school crossing patrols that do not meet the ESCC policy criteria for funding. The current school crossing patrol policy position is defensible and in line with national guidelines. Any change in the policy criteria would need a strong evidence base to be developed to support the change, and may expose ESCC to legal challenge.

5.12 RESOLVED: It was resolved to agree the recommendations of the report to:
Note the progress made on the implementation of the recommendations of the Scrutiny Review.

6 ROAD SAFETY UPDATE REPORT

6.1 The Assistant Director, Communities introduced the report. The total number of road accidents where someone was killed or seriously injured (KSI) has increased over the last reporting period. However, the number of fatalities has decreased. An analysis of the cause of these accidents shows that 90% are due to driver behaviour. This factor drives the rationale behind the work programmes that have been put in place by the Sussex Safer Roads Partnership (SSRP) to reduce the number of accidents.

6.2 The Road Safety Team receives around four thousand enquiries a year and is made up of three sub teams, whose functions are described in appendix 3 of the report. The three sub teams are:

- Road Safety Engineering Team
- Road Safety Education Team
- Local Traffic and Safety Team

6.3 The Road Safety Team is currently consulting with the Sussex Police on the priorities to spend an additional £125,000 provided by Public Health for speed limit reductions. This continues the work of a wider countywide review of speed limits. A further allocation of £1 million has been made available from the Public Health budget to develop a programme aimed at reducing road accidents and KSIs through education and developing a better evidence base.

KSI Definition and Reporting

6.4 The Department for Transport (DfT) definition is used for KSI reporting and this includes fractures, burns and hospitalisations as a result of a road accident. Sussex Police are working to make reporting more consistent by introducing accident classifications which are input via a tablet device. This removes the reliance on the reporting officer to accurately describe or classify the type of injury.

6.5 It is accepted that there is a degree of under reporting of accidents where people may report an injury later when they visit a hospital or GP. If a person does not report an injury to the Police, it will not be included in the statistics. The Public Health team are aware of this issue, but this is the same nationally. The DfT are looking at the issue of under reporting of road accidents as they believe only 80% of serious injuries and 75% of slight injuries are being reported. However, it is worth bearing in mind that the UK has one of the most robust accident reporting systems in the world.

Impact of the Ageing Population on KSIs

6.6 The number of elderly residents in the County and the number of pedestrian injuries is not a significant factor in the increase of KSI figures, which are in line with national trends. The SSRP does not have precise figures on the number of elderly drivers, but it is thought that the proportion of elderly drivers is not the reason for the increase in KSI figures. However, as the population demographic changes and the number of elderly drivers increases, it may become a growing issue.

6.7 At present elderly drivers over the age of 70 have to self-certify that they are fit to drive every three years. Doctors will refer people to the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) if they think someone is not fit to drive. Sussex Police have a small team of two officers who visit and talk to elderly drivers about their fitness to drive.

Approaches to KSI Reduction

6.8 The Committee noted that KSI figures are still going up despite the effort and resources that have gone into road safety. It is the Committee's view that the work that is being undertaken to reduce road accidents, does not appear to be producing the desired reduction in road accident injuries. The Director of Communities, Economy and Transport commented that the trend in five year rolling averages shows a reduction in KSI figures. However, in comparison with last year's figures the number of KSIs has gone up. The DfT believe there are a number of factors, such as the recession and weather conditions, that have led to this increase nationally.

Enforcement

6.9 The Committee considers that absence of enforcement by the Police as one of the key issues in road safety. Enforcement shapes driver behaviour which is a key element in reducing road accidents. It is the Committee's view that this lack of enforcement is not being addressed and is evident in the many petitions requesting speed limit reductions, the provision of road crossings and other road safety measures that go to Lead Member meetings. Often the Council will say no to these requests, which entail a lot of officer time and resources that could be used more effectively elsewhere.

6.10 The Committee commented that with the prospect of declining capital and revenue budgets in the future, ESCC will have less ability to assess and implement traffic calming and other road safety engineering schemes. The Director of Communities, Economy and Transport commented that it is also likely that Sussex Police will have less resources for road safety enforcement in the future as policing priorities change.

6.11 Past Police enforcement campaigns have had an impact on KSI figures. The Committee asked if it would be possible to spend £330,000 of the £1million Public Health funding on a high profile enforcement campaign to see what the impact on KSIs would be. The Director of Communities, Economy and Transport commented that the impact of enforcement on driver behaviour is time limited. Usually the change in driver behaviour is temporary (6-9 months) whilst enforcement activity is taking place. The key to reducing KSI figures will be interventions that bring about a permanent change in driver behaviour.

Driver Behaviour

6.12 It is the Committee's view that if driver behaviour is the major cause of accidents, then this needs to be targeted through education and enforcement. Driver behaviour includes aspects such as excessive speed, substance misuse, inexperience, and new factors such as the use of mobile devices whilst driving.

6.13 The work of the SSRP is focussed around changing driver behaviour and working with vulnerable groups such as young drivers, cyclists, and motorcycle users. Following recent budget savings, ESCC does not financially contribute to the work of the SSRP. The majority of SSRP funding comes from the surplus generated from driver awareness training programmes. The Road Safety Team makes a non-monetary contribution to the SSRP with one full time equivalent (FTE) post working on the delivery of SSRP programmes.

Public Health Programme Work.

6.14 The Committee noted that a joint Scrutiny Board has been established to enable Scrutiny input into the three year Public Health funded programme to reduce road accidents and improve road safety. The Programme will review previous road safety work as well as including input from the Scrutiny Committee.

6.15 RESOLVED: It was resolved to agree the recommendations of the report to:
Note the progress made by the Road Safety Team and support the progress made with the SSRP and in working with local Community Safety Partnerships.

7 SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

7.1 The Committee discussed the work programme and the reports that will be presented at future meetings. It was agreed amend the work programme to:

- include a discussion of the impact of the Airports Commission recommendation in the Strategic Infrastructure report that will be coming to the Committee at the November meeting; and
- arrange an informal meeting for the Committee to have an initial discussion of Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources (RPPR) process to follow the Lead Member meeting in either September or October.

7.2 It was noted that a meeting of the Highways Reference Group was being held at the conclusion of the Scrutiny meeting, and a meeting of the Rights of Way and Countryside Site strategic commissioning Review Board meeting will be held on 21 July 2015.

MEETING TO BE HELD ON 30 SEPTEMBER 2015

- Economic Development
A detailed appraisal of the impact and overall effectiveness of the Rural Growth and Employment Fund (RuGEF), ESCC Capital Budget for Growth, and Regional Growth Fund (RGF) programmes, looking at how different businesses have benefitted and the effectiveness of the programme.
- Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources (RPPR).
The Committee will start looking at the Department's Portfolio Plan and budget setting process for the 2016/17 financial year and beyond.

MEETING TO BE HELD ON 18 NOVEMBER 2015

- Strategic Infrastructure

It was agreed to provide a report on Strategic Infrastructure that will include strategic road, rail and IT infrastructure improvements. This will include an update on the Superfast Broadband project, examining take up and the next stages of the project. The Committee can then decide which areas that it would like to examine in more detail.

- Buy With Confidence Scheme

The Committee requested a report be brought to the November meeting on the replacement of the Buy with Confidence scheme with an alternative approved contractor scheme. The report is to provide:

- An update on the progress to replace the scheme;
- An overview of the checks and balances that have been put in place to ensure the quality and reliability of the services provided by the chosen provider; and
- An evaluation of the extent to which the new scheme is working effectively and the degree of public confidence in the new scheme.

- Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources (RPPR).

The Committee will review information from the September Scrutiny Committee meeting and establish an RPPR Board to look at the Department's Portfolio Plan and budget for the 2016/17 in December.

8 FORWARD PLAN

8.1 The Committee considered the Forward Plan for the period 1 June 2015 to 30 September 2015. Requests for information should be raised with the listed contact officer, and any scrutiny issues with the Member Services Manager.

9 ANY OTHER ITEMS PREVIOUSLY NOTIFIED UNDER AGENDA ITEM 4

9.1 No urgent items were raised for discussion.

10 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Committee will be held on Wednesday 30 September 2015.

(The meeting ended at 12.05 pm)

COUNCILLOR RICHARD STOGDON
CHAIR