

STREETSMART AND HIGHWAYS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY, 25 MARCH 2015

PRESENT:- Councillors Abdul Amin, Andrew Bennett, Alan Bishop, Neil Heavens, Fay Howard, Colin Lovell, Derique Montaut, Kevin Parry (Chair), Timothy Swinyard, Joe Tray, Steve Wakefield and Robert Wright

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Roderick Bluh, Mary Friend and Vera Tomlinson.

32. Declarations of Interest

The Chair reminded members of the need to declare any known interests in any matter to be considered by the Committee.

With reference to Item 5 – End of Year Report 2014-2015, Councillor Steve Wakefield declared a personal interest as the land in front of his residential property is maintained by Swindon Borough Council.

33. Public Question Time

The following questions were asked in accordance with Standing Order 28:

Questioner

Mr Paul Sunners, Chiseldon, Swindon

Questions

Mr Sunners asked if it was now time for a borough-wide initiative to respond to the ever-increasing incidence of graffiti and litter so clearly visible across the town and outlying areas, and if Swindon Borough Council has the resources to launch such an initiative. Mr Sunners also noted the graffiti on utility boxes, and suggested that the Council should be more proactive with resources and send strong messages to perpetrators.

Response

The Chair thanked Mr Sunners for his questions and comments.

Councillor Brian Ford, Cabinet Member for Streetsmart, responded at the meeting and advised that there had been a reduction in the number of complaints regarding graffiti but that there were still problems trying to deal with graffiti on private property. Councillor Ford also confirmed that officers have been tasked with cleaning up the gateways into Swindon, and prosecutions for littering will be sought. Resources are not available to be able to undertake everything that is required, but other initiatives are being encouraged. Councillor Ford also noted the on-going discussions with utility companies regarding graffiti on boxes, and asked those present to always report instances of graffiti they come across.

34.

Minutes

Resolved – That the Minutes of the meeting held on 21 January 2016 be accepted as a correct record.

35.

End of Year Report 2014-2015

The Committee received a report reviewing the work carried out over the 2014-2015 Municipal Year, which will also be included in the Annual Report for Scrutiny.

Sally Smith, Overview and Scrutiny Officers, introduced the report and noted that the Committee had successfully scrutinised issues such as Greenwaste, the Swindon Local Flood Risk Management Strategy, Customer Feedback Management, managing the Highway Asset, and Parking Staff absences and vacancy rates. With reference to the Task Groups set up by the Committee, she highlighted the report of the Un-adopted Land Task Group attached at Appendix 1 to the report, and the report of the Roadworks and Streetworks Task Group attached at Appendix 2 to the report.

With the agreement of the Committee, the report of the Un-adopted Land Task Group was considered first. Sally Smith asked members to note the aims and objectives of this Task Group who had agreed three elements on which to concentrate their review: land owned by the Borough that residents wish to purchase; land not owned by the Borough that is not being maintained; and land not owned by the Borough but is being maintained by the Borough. The Task Group had put forward four recommendations for the Committee to consider, as set out in Appendix 1.

Members then asked questions and made observations on the following issues:

- The importance of setting out in writing to residents that the Council has no obligation to maintain land not owned by it, and their obligations regarding maintenance of the land if it belongs to them.
- Problems caused by the uncertainty over who owns pieces of land, and the opportunities and savings provided by transferring ownership of Borough-owned land to private residences in perpetuity.
- Issues which arise from new housing estates being built and the odd pieces of land which require maintaining on them.
- The importance of highlighting to residents that there are some issues regarding un-adopted land that the Council would be unable to assist them with.
- Issues which can arise from residents being able to apply to build on a piece of land they do not actually own, and if they do this on un-adopted land.

The Committee then considered the report of the Roadworks and Streetworks Task Group attached at Appendix 2 to the report. Questions were asked and observations made on the following issues:

- The lack of information being passed through to the Communications Team during the recent difficulties. As they were not kept up-to-date they were unable to advise residents accordingly.
- The problems caused by utility companies liberally using emergency

- applications meaning they only give two hours' notice of any works.
- The importance of good communication when problems are caused by private contractors that behave in certain ways that are out of the Council's control.
- The usefulness of undertaking an impact assessment on behavioural changes caused by prolonged roadworks, and any unintended consequences.
- It was suggested that an advance plan of works could be held rather than short term information which may assist with preventing patterns and behaviours from developing.

Resolved – (1) To note the contents of the report.

(2) To endorse the final report and recommendations of the Un-adopted Land Task Group to the Cabinet Member for Streetsmart for further consideration and implementation.

(3) To endorse the final report and recommendations of the Roadworks and Streetworks Task Group to the Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transport who will present a report to Cabinet on this issue.

36. Transformation update - Leisure, Libraries and Culture Change Programme

The Committee received a report providing an update on the next stage of the Leisure, Libraries and Culture Change Programme, following on from its request for an update on the libraries consultation undertaken in 2014 and the future direction for the service.

Bernie Brannan, Board Director for Service Delivery, introduced the report and highlighted that a new Asset Transformation Delivery Lead had started in post on 5 January 2015. He noted that the programme had been broadened from initially reviewing libraries to looking at culture assets and buildings, libraries, community centres and other operational assets – commercial or school assets have not been included within the scope of the programme. Members also noted that the programme will come under the remit of the Cabinet Member for Streetsmart.

After the presentation of the report, members asked questions and made observations on the following issues:

- The value provided by comparisons with other unitary authorities on net revenue budgets, and budgeted spend on culture, heritage and libraries.
- Community assets being utilised in line with locality strategies, and providing facilities dependent on local needs.
- The requirement to have some form of benchmarking to test and demonstrate that the programme is achieving best value and use of assets.
- Concerns over the long term viability of libraries, and ideas being explored to achieve a sustainable library service.
- The unquantifiable aspects of what community centres provide to residents, and how involving local councillors may help with that assessment.
- The importance of libraries in providing access to other things such as computers, but without losing the heritage that book collections provide.
- The value of focussing on assets where there will be a potential dispute regarding the best use of it.

- The different types of buildings that will be included within this programme, and how value will be placed upon what they are being used for.

Resolved – To note the contents of the report.

37. Performance Dashboard

The Committee received a report presenting a monthly performance dashboard relating to services provided within the Committees remit. The report presented an overview of operational performance and is expected to be an enabler to inform future work by the Council and within the Committee's work programme.

Karen McMahon, Head of Business Services and Support, introduced the report and noted that more service-specific content had been included within this report at the request of the Committee. She highlighted that there had been an improvement in call response times compared to the same period in 2014, and that staff training had continued which has had a positive impact on performance. Members noted that call volumes in Streetsmart are continuing to show a downward trend, whereas there had been an increase in the number of contacts to the Members Hotline. Work is being undertaken to analyse the types of requests to the Hotline and assess how they are being responded to. She also highlighted that the number of complaints received for the whole Council in January and February was 420 compared to 422 in the same period in 2014.

After the presentation of the report and the performance dashboard, members asked questions and made observations on the following issues:

- The complaints being received regarding refuse collectors dropping waste on the floor during their collections, and the resolution of these complaints.
- The possibility of reviewing the kerbside separation policy and its necessity further down the process.
- The spam emails that had been sent out during July indicating that they were from the car parking team, with confirmation being received that the Council's systems had not been comprised.
- The use of smartphone applications to report issues, with members noting the free application called 'fix my street'.
- The agreement to hold a review of recommendations made by the Committee during this municipal year, and their subsequent effect on services.

Resolved – To note the report and its appendices.

The Chair then thanked the members of the Committee, the members of the Task Groups, the Cabinet Members whose remit falls within those of this Committee, and officers for their contribution and support during this municipal year.