

STREETSMART AND HIGHWAYS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY, 24 SEPTEMBER 2014

PRESENT:- Councillors Andrew Bennett, Alan Bishop, Mary Friend, Colin Lovell, Nick Martin, Derique Montaut, Kevin Parry (Chair), Eric Shaw (Deputy Chair), Vera Tomlinson, Joe Tray, Steve Wakefield, Peter Watts, David Wood and Robert Wright

Also in attendance was Councillor Brian Ford.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Neil Heavens, Fay Howard and Timothy Swinyard.

12. Declarations of Interest

The Chair reminded members of the need to declare any known interests in any matter to be considered by the Committee. No interests were declared.

13. Public Question Time

No public questions were received prior to or during the meeting.

14. Minutes

It was queried and confirmed that Councillor Brian Ford, the Cabinet Member for Streetsmart, and Leon Barrett, Head of Streetsmart, have been visiting and investigating the areas where issues of concern had been raised at the last meeting.

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 July 2014 be accepted as a correct record.

15. Swindon Local Flood Risk Management Strategy

The Committee received a report providing information on the Swindon Local Flood Risk Management Strategy approved by Cabinet on 23 July 2014, as identified in the Works Programme of this Committee approved on 16 July 2014. The report supports the Council's strategic priority of working with residents to create well cared for neighbourhoods.

Tim Price, Service Manager, Highway Asset Management and Project Delivery, introduced the report and gave a short presentation to the Committee covering the following points: the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 and how Swindon Borough Council is now the lead local flood authority; the differing types of flooding possibilities and responsibilities for each; the co-ordination between flood risk management authorities; riparian owner responsibilities; flood risk groups already set up in communities and flood prevention plans which have received grant funding from the Environment Agency; the capital spend allocated by the Council for flood prevention work; and moving towards a more risk based approach to asset maintenance.

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

- It was noted that a summary of the consultation responses received and how they were dealt with is contained within Appendix C (Stakeholder Engagement) to the main Strategy available on the Council's website.
- Boundary line changes amongst the Localities, and in particular which Locality the Bruce Street Bridges now come under.
- The issues of flooding in the car park at Cavendish Square, and any pressure that could be brought to bear upon the developer to address this.
- The recurring submergence of the subways at Queens Drive, and contributing factors to this problem.
- The low predicted risk to domestic properties from surface water and fluvial flooding in the North East Locality when this area has historically suffered from a high number of floodings.
- Connections with partner organisations, in particular Thames Water, and available information from them on how they are discharging their obligations and duties. It was noted that Thames Water has been given responsibilities under the Flood and Water Management Act 2010, and that they prioritise their spending based on evidence of floods.
- The current reactive service provided by Council staff to reports of blocked gullies, and how this is communicated to members of the public.
- Checks completed by Council staff when roads are formally adopted from housing developers, particularly if gullies are clear from building rubble, and who is responsible for addressing issues dependent on when the issues arose.
- The possibility of publicity aimed at those homeowners who do remedial work to address their own flooding problems but ultimately cause others to have flooding problems as a result.
- It was queried how the Environment Agency fits in with the Strategy and how their approval is obtained. It was noted that the Agency is closely involved with the separate drainage strategy being developed for the Eastern villages as one example, and their permission has to be sought for river developments.
- It was noted that there are no thorough historical plans available as to the whereabouts of every pipe and drain laid over the area during the last couple of hundred years. The available budget has to be concentrated on addressing high flood risk areas rather than investigative works.
- It was noted that rural and urban areas have different seasonal issues, for example when farmers are cutting and transporting straw and the blockages that can occur as a result of this.
- It was noted that a list will eventually be produced which will show the programme of planned gully cleaning across the area, but that further information will still need to be collated for at least the next two or three years first.
- It was suggested that more emphasis should be placed on preventing flooding rather than managing it.
- It was noted that there should be effective and quick resolutions to riparian disputes contained within the Strategy.
- It was noted that the old drains and drainage systems are failing and should be replaced rather than repaired.
- It was noted that members could encourage residents to complete the

questionnaires produced by Thames Water on flooding issues in the local area. Trading Standards can also sometimes be involved where the blockage is being caused by a business.

Resolved – To note the report and the presentation.

16. Working Party Report - Customer Feedback Management

The Committee received a report providing an update from the Complaints Working Party on how customer feedback is received and managed, and how it is used within departments to drive service improvements. This work was requested by this Committee as part of its Annual Work Programme. A similar report had been produced for the Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 15 September 2014 and it was noted that much of this report is a duplication of that reports contents, with additional sections relating to the service area processes of handling and reviewing complaints.

Karen McMahon, Head of Business Services and Support, introduced the report and highlighted the main findings from the review, namely that there is a robust process in place but that there is room for improvement, particularly with issues around logging complaints properly. Overall it was noted that the volume of contacts versus Council activity is low.

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

- The complaints received in other forms that do not necessarily come in through official channels and get logged, such as those received at Locality meetings.
- Concerns were raised over the use of the Members Hotline and the potential for it to be overloaded if all members are using it to log complaints. It was noted that an advertisement was being placed for a dedicated complaints officer.
- It was queried if complaints and issues raised through the Hotline were being processed and completed within the 10 working days deadline. It was noted that the Council's internal complaints system, LAGAN, was used to log these and that a spreadsheet is also completed when a member calls in. These are used to follow through on queries but improvements need to be made to ensure that queries are dealt with within the deadlines.
- It was noted that members are being asked to log any Streetsmart issues through the Members Hotline rather than going direct to officers as this allows them to be tracked properly.

Resolved – (1) To note the report and information and data presented.

(2) To note the level of complaints received in comparison to the overall level of activity the Council performs.

17. Performance Dashboard

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

future work packages within the Committee's work programme.

Karen McMahon, Head of Business Services and Support, introduced the report and noted that the performance dashboard had been enhanced following feedback received from members at the last meeting.

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

- Missing information in the dashboard including issues with the Green Waste service, potholes being dealt with, and enforcement of any people abusing the Blue Badge parking permits.
- The large increase in the number of complaints regarding waste collections in July 2014 and the possibilities of employing short term temporary staff to cover periods of absence during this time.
- The policy of not picking up fly tipped waste immediately and how this may lead to problems of residents not bothering to report issues if they do not feel that it is being addressed.
- The technological developments being planned to assist with waste collection and call centre queries and when these can expect to be embedded.
- The problems with enforcing prosecutions for fly tipping and any publicity surrounding cases that are successfully prosecuted which would hopefully deter others.
- The issue of clarity being required on when the 48 hours that residents have to complain about a missed collection begins.
- Problems caused by the orange boxes being emptied in a hurry by the waste collection teams, causing some of the contents to spill onto the street leading to complaints.
- The replacement programme for highways machinery that has been transferred back from Swindon Commercial Services.
- The planned communications regarding the collection of Christmas Trees under the new Green Waste services.
- Work done through the Localities to engage with schools to educate children about issues such as littering, and further opportunities being explored.
- The criteria and decision making process behind the schedule of works for resurfacing or patching roads, and which roads are done when.

Resolved – To note the report and its appendices, reading it in conjunction with the Working Party Report – Customer Feedback Management also on the agenda.

18. Work Programme 2014-2015

The Committee received a report of the Director of Law and Democratic Services regarding the development of its work programme for 2014/15.

The Committee noted that all three Task Groups had met since the last meeting:

Leisure Assets Task Group

Upon investigative work by officers, it became apparent that the Leisure Assets Task Group were duplicating work already being undertaken by a Cross Party Member Advisory Group who are reviewing facilities as agreed at Cabinet in March 2013. Members of the Task Group agreed that it would be sensible not to proceed

with this Task Group at this stage, subject to the Committee's agreement.

Green Waste Task Group

The Green Waste Task Group noted that officers were currently carrying out a review on the Green Waste Service and felt that they preferred to wait until the outcome of these reviews were available before proceeding further with the Task Group, subject to the Committee's agreement.

Un-adopted Land Task Group

The Task Group have agreed the areas that they would like to investigate further. Terms of Reference are being drafted and are subject to agreement from the Task Group. A further meeting has been arranged for 5 November 2014.

Resolved – (1) That the Committee's updated work programme, detailed in the report, be noted.

(2) To support the decision of the Leisure Assets Task Group in not proceeding with the review, and agreed that an update report of the Cross Party Member Advisory Group be brought to this Committee at a future meeting.

(3) To support the decision of the Green Waste Task Group in not proceeding with the review unless required at a later date.