

STREETSMART AND HIGHWAYS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY, 26 NOVEMBER 2014

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

Also in attendance were Councillors Brian Ford and Dale Heenan.

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Roderick Bluh.

19. 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 – Review of Green Waste, Councillor Oliver Donachie declared a personal interest as a non-executive Director of Swindon Commercial Services.

20. Public Question Time

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

Questioner

Mr Richard Symonds, Shaw, Swindon

Questions

Mr Symonds asked a set of questions regarding: the policy for the removal of flytipping; investigations into if particular households are responsible for flytipping; unfinished work on cutting back hedges; the team only cutting back hedges on one side of a road and not the other; how to ascertain when a particular area is going to be visited for shrub beds and hedge cutting; the siting of two lampposts on the Eastern side of the River Ray bridge; the purpose of visits by road sweepers with its brushes retracted; the schedule for the clearance of street gutters; bus stops sited within the confines of pedestrian crossing protective zig zag lines; and the flooding under the Mead Way underpass.

Response

The Chair thanked Mr Symonds for his questions and comments.

Councillor Dale Heenan, Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transport, and Councillor Brian Ford, Cabinet Member for Streetsmart, both responded at the meeting and advised that a written response would be provided where agreed.

Questioner

Mr Roy Worman, Haydon View, Swindon

Question

Mr Worman asked a set of questions regarding: consultation input to the local flood management system and the Council's response; the number of residents who have purchased green waste bins and the savings to the service so far; and the number of fleet vehicles that had been sold since the transfer of waste services back to Swindon Borough Council.

Response

The Chair thanked Mr Worman for his question and comments.

Councillor Dale Heenan, Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transport, and Councillor Brian Ford, Cabinet Member for Streetsmart, both responded at the meeting and advised that a written response would be provided where agreed.

21. Minutes

Resolved – That the Minutes of the meeting held on 24 September 2014 be accepted as a correct record.

22. Review of Green Waste

The Committee received a report providing a review of the new Green Waste service implemented with effect from 31 March 2014, following on from the previous report received by the Committee at its meeting on 16 July 2014. The Committee noted that the introduction of the new Green Waste subscription service was linked to the Streetsmart Change Programme, one of the key change programmes identified by the Council, and the report provides summary information to inform discussion in line with the Committee's remit and Work Programme.

Councillor Brian Ford, Cabinet Member for Streetsmart, introduced the report and noted the projected reduction in operating costs by no longer collecting green waste free of charge. An analysis of subscription levels against disability, age and deprivation have not identified any significant disadvantages, and a meeting with the Equalities Advisory Forum on 25 June 2014 had provided positive feedback. Concerns raised by them, such as the size of the bins provided and the lack of awareness of the Assisted Collection Scheme, are being addressed.

Councillor Ford asked members to note the investigations being undertaken in conjunction with the housing service to explore the possibility of adding green waste charges to weekly rents, and a recent court case regarding fly tipping in which the Council successfully prosecuted the perpetrator. He added that there is no evidence so far of an increase in the amount of green waste being placed into general rubbish bins, but that reviews continue to be undertaken with Swindon Commercial Services Ltd. Members also noted that monthly instalments for paying the green waste service fee will not be introduced as it is cost prohibitive, but direct debit payments are being looked in to as an alternative.

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

- In rural areas a larger green waste bin may be required rather than a smaller

sized bin. It was also suggested that green waste bags should be available to purchase as and when required throughout the year. It was noted that compost bins are also available to purchase from the Council and that bins could be shared by neighbours.

- An assessment should be undertaken of the domestic rubbish being processed through the Solid Recovered Fuel Plant to determine if householders are now placing their green waste in with their general waste. It was noted that Swindon Commercial Services have not yet provided any data they may already have available on this issue to the Council.
- It was noted that it is still the policy of the Council to disperse green waste where the opportunity is provided.
- It was noted that the routing software used by the green waste service determines the distance between subscribers. This is monitored to ensure the current number of collection vehicles can cover all subscribers, or if a trigger point has been passed at which another vehicle may need to be purchased.
- The location of the fifty plus households who have purchased more than one green waste bin.
- Smaller gardens which struggle to accommodate the current size and number of bins.
- It was noted that the audit of fly-tipped waste was conducted over a two-week period in October when it was all collected from across the Borough in one event. Enforcement could be concentrated on those areas identified as part of the audit where fly-tipping is a particular problem, and officers are investigating ways to reduce incidents such as utilising mobile cameras, leaflets and reports in the local paper.
- Concerns were raised over the reliance of the current green waste service on achieving greater take-up and enforcement, and adding the service charge to weekly rents for residents who are already on a low income.
- Education being as important as enforcement when it comes to the issue of fly-tipping.
- The levels of general waste collection since the introduction of the green waste charges and if they had increased.
- The cost of disposing of green waste per tonne, and the levels of green waste being taken to the household waste recycling centre.
- The number of bins purchased by the Council which had not yet been allocated to a household.
- Variances projected on the current proposed operational cost savings of £731k, and alternative spending for that saving.
- The tonnage levels of waste taken by members of the public to the household waste recycling centre.

Resolved – To note the report and the supporting evidence base, with comments having been provided by members at the meeting on the next steps being considered for the future delivery of the Green Waste service.

23. Managing the Highway Asset

The Committee received a report providing information on highway maintenance and major maintenance schemes planned for the Borough. The report supports the Council's strategic priority of working with residents to create well cared for neighbourhoods.

Councillor Dale Heenan, Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transport, introduced the report and asked members to note that he would be attending Scrutiny Committee on 15 December 2014 for his Cabinet Member Question and Answer session.

Tim Price, Service Manager, Highway Asset Management and Project Delivery, then gave a short presentation to the Committee covering the following points: the different infrastructure which constitutes the highway asset; how big the Swindon Borough Council highway asset is; routine maintenance of the highway asset; planned maintenance of the highway asset; the case for asset management; the prioritisation of major maintenance works; and typical materials used during the maintenance of the carriageway asset.

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

- The typical life expectancy of differing road surfaces.
- Roads being resurfaced in some areas that do not require it, when nearby roads which do require it are not resurfaced.
- The consistency of the quality of resurfacing materials and any quality control measures put into effect such as warranty periods.
- The policy on the replacement of road safety fixtures, such as speed bumps, once an external organisation such as a utility company has finished their works under a road.
- Kerbs being placed on rural roads and the subsequent effects if they are or are not present.
- The geography of the East and North villages as set out in a recent communication regarding pothole repair and road patches.
- Concerns raised by elderly and disabled residents on the state of footpaths, and how councillors can access the footpath maintenance schedule.
- How the economic value of a road is determined through such things as the cost to build it at today's prices and an independent valuation being undertaken.
- 20mph speed limits being enforced in town centres.
- The use of CCTV cameras or mobile cameras on bus lanes which are being used by car drivers as a shortcut.
- The importance of a good transport network as a contributor to economic development.

Councillor Heenan then referred to the current roadwork and traffic problems being experienced through the town centre. He asked members to note that he, the Chief Executive, and the Leader of the Council have been involved in discussions trying to address the issues with the external organisations currently undertaking works and closing roads. Bus gates have been opened to all road users in an effort to alleviate some congestion, and 19 road resurfacing projects that were due to commence have been postponed. Councillor Heenan then proposed the setting up of a Task Group to look further into the management of the highways asset with a view to reporting back to this Committee at its January meeting.

Councillor Eric Shaw proposed, seconded by Councillor Vera Tomlinson, the addition of two recommendations which were agreed by the Committee.

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

(2) To acknowledge:

- (a) The need to continue in investing in the road network to support the Council's economic strategy and policies to promote business.
- (b) The concerns expressed by residents and businesses with the issues caused by the present road key works, some of which were outside the Council's control.
- (c) The prompt action already taken by the Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transport.

(3) To request that the Cabinet Member and Cross Party Working Group brings back to the next Committee meeting a report summarising the actions that were taken and any changes that will be implemented to alleviate or mitigate the effects of future road works.

24. 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 by the Council and within the Committee's work programme.

Karen McMahon, Head of Business Services and Support, introduced the report and noted that the presentation of the performance dashboard had been kept in the same format as at the last meeting following positive feedback received from members. She highlighted that the customer service function had been transferred back to the Council from Capita from 1 October 2014. A dip in performance levels during this transfer had been expected, and management actions have been taken to recover and build a more sustainable service.

Members also noted that the table set out in paragraph 3.17 of the report regarding the top five areas of complaints received in September and October was an annual picture. The call abandonment rate is now 9 – 10% which is good, and there has been an increase in the number of calls to the Members Hotline as discussed at the last meeting. An officer has now been appointed to lead on member queries received through the Hotline, and all members are asked to feed their concerns, comments and queries through her.

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

- The percentage of agency workers currently being used to staff customer services as compared to full time employees.
- The improved training available to new members of staff, and for keeping all customer services staff up-to-date with service developments across the Council.
- The staff absences and vacancy rates within Parking Services, and underlying issues contributing to this such as physical threats and violence towards parking enforcement officers. It was agreed that an investigation into this issue would be added to the Committee's work programme, and reported back on at the January 2015 meeting.

Resolved – To note the report and its appendices.

25.

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.

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

(2) To agree the addition of extra items on the programme for January 2015 regarding the report from the Cross Party Working Group on managing the highways asset, and the recruitment and safety of Parking Officers.