Agenda Item No: 7

Utility Company Interface and provision of accurate and timely information relating to Highway Schemes

To:	Highways and Transport Committee
Meeting Date:	19th January 2021
From:	Steve Cox – Executive Director, Place and Economy
Electoral division(s):	All
Forward Plan ref:	N/A
Key decision:	No
Outcome:	To report on the extent to which there are significant time and/or cost delays as a result of Utility company information and to determine whether a meeting should be held with the relevant Government minister and utilities companies to discuss ways in which issues can be improved and resolved following Cllr Manning's motion to full council in October 2020
Recommendation:	To note the content of the report and endorse the continued engagement with the Department for Transport (DfT) through the already established channels to influence and shape the work currently underway nationally and to agree that at this time, a specific meeting with a Minister in DfT is not needed. To share the report with utility providers in the County for information and keep the situation under close review and consider a report back to Committee if necessary.

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1. Background

1.1 In 2018 Cllr Bailey put forward a motion regarding the performance of UK Power Networks (UKPN), which resulted in the response from UKPN dated 22 March 2018 from their Chief Executive, Basil Scarsella to the council's Chief Executive, Gillian Beasley (appendix A). Since then the relationship between the council and UKPN has, on the whole, been positive. However recent experience on some major schemes has highlighted a broader issue where engagement with utilities is involved.

1.2 Following the Fendon Road roundabout scheme, Cllr Manning put forward a motion to Full Council in October 2020 requesting that officers report on the extent to which there are significant time and/or cost delays as a result of Utility company information and to recommend whether a meeting should be held with the relevant Government minister and utilities companies to discuss ways in which the issues can be improved and resolved.

1.3 Any new highway scheme, large or small, may require utility apparatus to be relocated or altered in some way. For example, an electrical cable may run underneath land which needs to be excavated to create a new cycle path and therefore has to be moved. Whilst planning a scheme, the designer needs to understand what is in the way. Timely identification of equipment is essential in order to understand the cost and timescales involved in moving utility assets and can help to avoid equipment strikes, which are both costly and potentially dangerous to the on-site work force.

1.4 Whilst utility records can provide a starting point, the accuracy may not be exact, and sometimes the information provided is inaccurate or has plant missing. Utility companies provide a disclaimer to the accuracy of information being provided, and so it is essential that a survey is undertaken to confirm the depth and line of existing utility equipment. It is also important to carry out a visual inspection to determine above ground equipment, such as cabinets, pillars and substations. However, despite this utility services can sometimes not be picked up until site work and excavation is underway, which can lead to unforeseen project delays and cost increases.

1.5 With so many utility assets now in place, the process and coordination of these works is complex and costly. There are two types of diversion estimates from the utility companies, a C3 Budget Cost and a C4 Detailed Cost Estimate. As utility companies are obliged to charge the actual cost of diversion works, these costs are sometimes much higher than estimates provided before works commence.

1.6 Timescales for the diversion works are dependent on the type of equipment and its construction. Some utilities will be more complex to divert than others, e.g. fibre optic cables, where diversions can be over £1M. A further difficulty with diversionary works is that guaranteed standards and response times do not exist within the industry and the utility companies generally set their own standards which means receiving quotes or plans can sometimes take a long time (delays of over 6 weeks are common). This can delay schemes and increase costs significantly and the local authority has little control over this.

2. Main Issues

2.1 The Department for Transport (DfT) until recently had a code of practice for diversionary works known as 'Measures where apparatus is affected by major works: a code of practice' but this was withdrawn from print by the DfT in 2018 and copies of the code are no longer available either electronically or printed. It contained timescales for the responses to enquiries made to Statutory Undertakers by the Highways Authority. Whilst most companies still try to work to the code of practice there is no real impetus for them to do so.

2.2 Time and cost delays are an issue nationally and this has been recognised by the national body Highways Authorities and Utilities Committee (HAUC) UK who are engaging with DfT on this matter with particular urgency due to the forthcoming works on HS2 which will require significant utility diversions. It is anticipated this may result in a revision and re-issuing of the Code of Practice for diversionary works. The DfT are also developing a National Underground Asset Register stating that 'there is huge potential for location data to improve the way that national infrastructure is planned, built and managed'.

2.3 In Cambridgeshire officers have worked hard to develop close and positive working relationships with utility companies through regular engagement via the Cambridgeshire quarterly HAUC meetings and through early engagement, discussion, compromise and negotiation on large projects. Involvement with utility companies on smaller scale, lower value work, such as maintenance schemes or local infrastructure improvements is generally positive.

2.4 Where challenges arise, they tend to be on the larger more complex schemes. Three recent examples of schemes where utilities have resulted in delays are:

- A10/A142 BP roundabout
- Kings Dyke
- Fendon Road roundabout

2.5 A10/A142 BP roundabout near Ely - a medium pressure gas main was highlighted in the early investigations and the surveys found it to be lying over a gulley which complicated the works. Cadent required an agreement on the method of working to be in place before any works could commence close to the gas main and stipulated that these works be supervised by a third party. However they took eight weeks to agree how the works could be carried out which significantly delayed the early stages of the project.

2.6 Kings Dyke - a complex scheme to build a bridge over the railway to remove the need for a level crossing on the A605. Early notification was given to the utilities at a HAUC meeting. There were multiple utility diversions required and being on an 'A' road there was an incentive to try to minimise any road closures to reduce the impact on the travelling public. The aim was to coordinate the works carefully and tie in with a nearby housing development, getting all of the work requiring road closures done at the same time under the same traffic management to reduce costs, disruption to the public and reduce the overall length of the works programme. UKPN engaged very well but some of the other utilities were a challenge and showed no appetite for collaboration. In the end the job of coordinating the utilities was handed to the main site contractor who did some of the excavation works for the utilities so they could simply move their assets. This did not affect costs appreciably and promoted

collaboration on road closures and the Kings Dyke scheme did not suffer a direct cost penalty from Statutory Undertakers.

2.7 Fendon Road - Dutch roundabout scheme had complex utility issues to overcome. The initial plans sent through from the utility companies and the early survey work failed to reveal a BT chamber hidden in some undergrowth. Once this came to light it was found to contain sensitive fibre optic cables for Addenbrookes hospital. BT Openreach then proposed that to divert this would take a year and would cost a very significant amount of money. However what followed was some detailed work with Skanska and Openreach drawing on already established good working relationships and a solution was found minimising the delays and additional costs.

2.8 Issues with utility companies are not unique to Cambridgeshire, this a national problem. It is a challenge for any project requiring coordination between several large companies and institutions with time and cost restraints. Whilst there is work taking place nationally to improve the situation (paragraph 2.2) there are also some localised learning points:

- Early engagement with utilities is critical leaving ample time as the quoted response times may not be adhered to.
- If the diversions required are really complex then look if the scheme can be altered to avoid or reduce the diversions.
- Do not rely on the utility companies plans as there will always be a degree of inaccuracy.
- Carry out detailed topographical and radar surveys and dig trial holes to find out what is really going on.
- Work with the communications team to explain any delays to the public.
- Manage the relationships with the utilities. Clarify what is required. For large schemes consider pricing in coordination of the utility diversion works.
- Escalate with the utility company if the issues are becoming problematic.

2.9 Despite the recent experiences outlined above, there are also examples of where the above learning has been taken on board and proved beneficial, e.g. the Robin Hood Signals scheme. Working closely with Skanska and BT Openreach, the team designed out the need for further diversionary works before work began on site. This gave not only a reduction in the length of the work programme overall but a significant cost saving as well. The initial cost estimate with BT Openreach for these diversions was over £100k but with careful joint work with Skanska and BT Openreach, this was designed out leading to nil cost as the works were no longer required.

2.10 Any opportunity to further develop and strengthen relationships with utility companies is welcomed. Given the above, however, and the emerging work that is currently taking place nationally into which the County Council is already feeding via our role within HAUC, officers views are that at this stage, a meeting with a minister would not add further value. Instead, it is suggested that officers share this report with utility providers in the County through the HAUC meeting; continue to monitor and input to the process; consider when the national guidance has been revised whether further action is needed and report back to committee at a later date if necessary.

3. Alignment with corporate priorities

3.1 A good quality of life for everyone
There are no significant implications for this priority.

3.2 Thriving places for people to live
There are no significant implications for this priority.

3.3 The best start for Cambridgeshire's children
There are no significant implications for this priority.

3.4 Net zero carbon emissions for Cambridgeshire by 2050
There are no significant implications for this priority.

4. Significant Implications

4.1 Resource Implications
The following bullet points set out details of significant implications identified by officers:
Improved information from statutory undertakers could significantly reduce major project costs and timescales

4.2 Procurement/Contractual/Council Contract Procedure Rules Implications
There are no significant implications within this category

4.3 Statutory, Legal and Risk Implications
There are no significant implications within this category

4.4 Equality and Diversity Implications
There are no significant implications within this category

4.5 Engagement and Communications Implications
There are no significant implications within this category

4.6 Localism and Local Member Involvement
There are no significant implications within this category

4.7 Public Health Implications
There are no significant implications within this category

Have the resource implications been cleared by Finance? Yes
Name of Financial Officer: Sarah Heywood

Have the procurement/contractual/ Council Contract Procedure Rules implications been cleared by the LGSS Head of Procurement? Yes
Name of Officer: Gus De Silva

Has the impact on statutory, legal and risk implications been cleared by the Council's Monitoring Officer or LGSS Law? Yes
Name of Legal Officer: Fiona McMillan

Have the equality and diversity implications been cleared by your Service Contact?
Yes
Name of Officer: Elsa Evans

Have any engagement and communication implications been cleared by Communications? Yes
Name of Officer: Sarah Silk

Have any localism and Local Member involvement issues been cleared by your Service Contact? Yes
Name of Officer: Richard Lumley

Have any Public Health implications been cleared by Public Health? Yes
Name of Officer: Kate Parker

5. Source documents guidance

5.1 Source documents

5.2 Location
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/diversionary-works

https://www.gov.uk/government/news/national-underground-asset-register-project-update