

HIGHWAYS AND COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE POLICY AND SERVICE COMMITTEE: MINUTES

Date: Tuesday 12th March 2019

Time: 10:00-12:25

Present: Councillors I Gardener, M Goldsack, L Harford, W Hunt (Vice-Chairman), D Jenkins, S King, T Sanderson, J Scutt, and M Shuter (Chairman)

Apologies: None

Also present: Councillors I Bates, P Downes and P Hudson

102. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were noted as recorded above. There were no declarations of interest.

103. MINUTES AND ACTION LOG

The minutes of the meeting held on the 15th January 2019 were confirmed as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

The Action Log was noted.

104. PETITIONS AND PUBLIC QUESTIONS

A public question was received from Mr Antony Carpen. Mr Carpen asked for an update on some of the responses he had received from the Council in the past relating to the Cambridgeshire Collection, the proposed electronic room booking system and online electronic payments system for libraries. Mr Carpen had understood that information would be forthcoming following statements by councillors at previous meetings debating new income streams for library services.

The Chairman thanked Mr Carpen for his question and advised that he would be sending him a full written response within ten working days.

105. FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE REPORT- JANUARY 2019

The Committee considered the January 2019 Finance and Performance report for Place & Economy services.

In the revenue budget, Members were advised that the two significant pressures of Coroners' Services and Waste continued, but these were offset by savings in other services and overachievement of income in other areas, including concessionary fares and parking enforcement. The Service was forecasting an underspend of £78K at year end. On the capital side, the previously forecast Libraries underspend had increased to £2.6M, due to re-profiling of library projects.

The following Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) were currently showing red:

- Number of visitors to libraries/community hubs
- Classified Road Condition – narrowing the gap between Fenland and other areas of the county
- Killed or Seriously Injured (KSI) casualties

The report also provides information for the first time on the number of vacancies which Place & Economy was carrying.

Arising from the report:

- a Member queried the underspend on concessionary fares. Officers advised that this could be attributed to a number of factors, including the increased age for qualification for a concessionary bus pass, and the number of bus services that had been changed, withdrawn or reduced, meaning there was less scope to use concessionary passes. With regard to the financing of concessionary fares, this was quite complex: the responsibility for concessionary fares now sat with the Combined Authority, but for the 2019/20 financial year, the Combined Authority had passported this responsibility back to the Council. The funding was genuinely a pragmatic solution: the underspend could have been taken away as a saving, but the CA would have levied it back on to the Council. In the long term, this type of arrangement was not sustainable, but had been agreed for 2019/20. It was confirmed that notionally, the funding for concessionary fares came through central government, and was built in to the Revenue Support Grant, which was now minimal, so it was just part of the overall base budget;
- the Committee noted the capital underspend related to libraries, specifically (i) the deferred purchase of two mobile libraries; (ii) delay in the Milton Road library refit and (iii) delay in progress with the Sawston Community Hub;
- a Member asked if the parameters for narrowing the gap between highways in Fenland compared to the rest of the county had been altered. Officers advised that they had not, and when the Committee had had its discussions around the new suite of indicators, there had been a discussion about removing or replacing this indicator, but it was agreed to retain it. The Member commented that his concern was that the indicator in its present form was not very informative or helpful;

- a Member queried whether there had been any update to the KSI figures since the report had been completed. Officers advised that there was a time lag in getting the finalised data from the Police. In response to a further question as to whether the measures taken at the previous meeting would have had any effect, officers advised that this information should become available in the summer;
- with regard to the KPI on “percentage of schemes delivered to the agreed programme dates”, it was confirmed that this related to all schemes, not just LHI schemes. A Member commented that it was disappointing that only 88% of schemes had been delivered to the agreed programme dates, and it was suggested that it would be helpful in future to have more detail on the schemes that were lagging behind, and also the direction of travel.
Action required;
- a Member noted that the number of vacancies being carried by specific teams, including Flood Risk Management, Highways ‘Other’, Major Infrastructure Delivery, Traffic Management and Growth & Development were quite high at around 20%. The Member asked about the reasons for these high numbers of vacancies, and whether there was any crossover with the Combined Authority, e.g. on ‘Growth & Development’. She also expressed concern that officers on those teams could be used as scapegoats for not delivering against their targets, when they were working very hard but were under resourced. Officers advised that vacancy management and recruitment was quite difficult, and it was normal in most teams to have a degree of turnover, and some of the teams cited were quite small. In all of the cases cited, managers were actively seeking to recruit, and no posts were being held vacant deliberately. Growth & Development was Juliet Richardson’s team, and there was no crossover with the Combined Authority. All teams that were carrying vacancies were using a variety of initiatives to attract staff, but it was very difficult to recruit, with many staff having been recruited to the Highways England A14 project over the last couple of years. Major infrastructure Delivery was slightly different: this team had been managing the Ely Southern Bypass project, and was now focused on Kings Dyke and the Abbey Chesterton bridge. Because that team’s overall workload had diminished slightly, the pressure on that team had reduced, so the vacancy rate was less of a concern. The Member thanked officers for their update, and acknowledged the difficulties in recruitment, but added that the Service had fantastic staff, but needed to look at why it was not attracting staff, as the reasons were not always financial. The Chairman commented that Cambridgeshire was an area of very high employment, and all companies had difficulties recruiting, especially in Cambridge;
- with regard to vacancies in Libraries, it was noted that a number of senior vacancies had deliberately been held vacant as the Service faced budgetary challenges. However, it was acknowledged this was not a sustainable position, which was why the later report on Libraries Transformation set out new proposals for raising income;

- a Member was disappointed that a number of LHI schemes continued to be carried over. Whilst some were attributed to delays with Cambridge City Council, this was not an acceptable reason to repeatedly delay these important schemes. Officers acknowledged this point, and advised that there were a number of issues involved in the delays. It was agreed that these issues would be investigated and an update circulated to Committee Member as soon as possible. **Action required;**
- a Member suggested that the Committee should revisit the Recruitment Policy to see if the Council was being as innovative as it could be in attracting staff. Officers advised that the Recruitment Policy was set corporately, and it was not possible for one Committee to unilaterally revise this document. Members were reassured that within the parameters of the Recruitment Policy there was a great deal of flexibility for teams to be innovative;
- a Member commented that Cambridgeshire paid lower salaries to highways engineers and social workers, compared to some adjacent authorities, and noted that the Council did not pay the Real Living Wage, which the City Council did. She also stressed the value of Librarianship as a profession, and the importance of filling specialist positions in Libraries;
- a Member commented that some of the updates on LHI schemes were already 5-6 months out of date. Officers advised that the report showed the position as at the end of January 2019, but acknowledged that some of the specific updates on LHI schemes were out of date. The narrative focused on the red KPIs, but information could be added about completion dates for those that were on track. **Action required.** With regard to a scheme in Fordham, the Chairman advised that this was a very complex scheme, and there had been detailed discussions with the officers and Local Member.

It was resolved to:

1. review, note and comment on the report.

106. LIBRARY SERVICE TRANSFORMATION

The Committee considered an update on the ongoing programme of work to transform the library service. The report included a proposal to withdraw the charge for computer access in libraries.

Members were reminded that at their meeting in September 2018, the Committee had considered an update on the package of improvements previously agreed by the Committee. Members asked officers to bring back a progress report, in particular on charging for computer access, and how this had impacted on the number of library visitors and computer usage.

Officers had been working very hard to increase income generation opportunities. A number of initiatives had been funded through Capital funding, which the Library Service was very grateful for. This included investment in new Mobile libraries, and the introduction of card payment on self service machines, plus a 'donate' button on self service machines. The latter was a first for library services nationally.

Charging for library computer use was introduced on 1st May 2018, both to raise income, but also to manage demand. By 31st March 2019, an income of around £9K was expected, significantly short of the predicted income of £108K. Although the actual reduction in use was very close to that predicted, the low income reflected the high number of people using computers who were exempt from the charge, meaning that the service was being used by those who most need it. Online and paper questionnaires had been made available, and the key points arising from this survey were detailed in the report. As a result of the negative feedback, low level of income generated and reduced usage, it was recommending that the charge was withdrawn and other means of income generation used. Whilst generating new business opportunities took time, officers were confident that they could reduce the gap in future years. One measure proposed was to conduct a one off debt recovery campaign to recover stock items that were overdue, and charges outstanding.

Arising from the report:

- a Member commented that she had voted against the computer access charges, which she saw not only as inconvenient but also harmful, and she had doubted that the initiative would generate money for the service. The results vindicated this decision, and she queried the cost of the software to collect the charges, which she believed to be around £19K. The public had made it clear by signing a petition that they opposed this move. Officers responded that the cost of the computer software had been procured through a Transformation bid;
- a Member requested more information on the debt recovery programme for recovering library fines and lost books, and asked how this differed to current practices. Officers advised that overdue notices were already sent to library customers, but in some cases, considerable fines had accrued. The Library Service wanted to look at different ways of communicating with library users, using both existing and new technology e.g. card payments and donate buttons on machines. Fewer people carried cash, and in rural communities, access to cash machines was very limited. It was confirmed that measures such as taking people to court for unpaid fines were not being considered. Another Member commented that many people became very anxious about debt recovery and it was vital that library users were not alarmed, and appropriate advice on managing money/debts should be signposted by the Library Service, where appropriate. Officers reassured her that a 'light touch' approach would

be taken to debt recovery, and signposting would be provided where appropriate;

- a Member was pleased to see that the library computers were being upgraded, noting that it took a long time to log on to the existing computers. She also observed, from the Finance & Performance report, that the number of library visitors and book borrowing had not met the performance target, which she believed was directly related to the charging for computers. She added that there had previously been a discussion about people using library computers for entertainment purposes e.g. watching films, playing games, but she felt that this was a legitimate use, as part of libraries' remit was to provide opportunities for leisure and entertainment;
- a Member asked about the one off funding of £98K from the Transformation Fund for a short-term post to develop new income streams. It was confirmed that the £98K was not just for the salary;
- in response to a Member question, it was confirmed that the 'Library Extra Membership' scheme had had limited take up, but this was increasing, and represented additional support for libraries;
- a number of Members commented very positively on the Library Service and its work, noting the recent Member Seminar, where the partnership with 'Civic' had been explored, the wide level of support by the public, and the entrepreneurial approach to income generation. On the latter point however, a Member expressed caution, citing the efforts to accommodate wraparound care at Soham Library, and how effectively subsidising this provision did not conflict with existing wraparound care operators locally;
- a Member applauded the work being done by the Library Service, and commented that the Council should not be apologetic for investing in libraries, as libraries do more than simply lend books, but they provide other vital services such as opportunities for social engagement, support for small businesses, and support early years development. It was suggested that the section of the report on "Alignment with Corporate Priorities" (Section 5) of the report should be expanded in future reports to reflect the true value of libraries;
- a Member asked if the computer upgrade was on a one for one basis. She also commented that the self service machines did not make it easy to pay fines. It was confirmed that computers were not being replaced on a one for one basis, but the usage and specification of computers was being reviewed e.g. to ensure that the BFI films could be screened satisfactorily on all computers. It was confirmed that the replacement rate would not be based on most recent usage i.e. following the introduction of the computer charge. It was agreed that Members would be provided with more information on this point by email. **Action required;**

- a Member was pleased to see Mobile Libraries being replaced, and raised the issue of paying by card, especially in rural areas, where there was often limited access to cashpoints. Officers acknowledged this point and advised there were ongoing discussions with IT colleagues, but the intermittent nature of Wifi in rural areas could be problematic. Officers also outlined early stage discussions taking place with partner organisations to use Mobile Libraries for other services of benefit to communities; It was agreed that further information would be sent to Committee Members, to help promote this new initiative **Action required**.
- a Member commented that he had not supported the charging for computer usage as he was sceptical that it would work, but he acknowledged that officers had to try different solutions to meet the funding challenges, and it was time to move forward. It was confirmed that the computer upgrade would take place in the 2019/20 financial year, although the computers would not necessarily all be operational within the financial year, given the scale of the project;
- the Committee noted the events being offered as part of the Library Extra Scheme, and the plans to work with partner organisations. The Chairman concluded by saying that Members were very passionate about libraries. The charging for computer usage was potentially a source of significant income, so had been worth trying, but it was now accepted that it had not worked, so it was time to reverse that decision. There were a number of very positive initiatives taking place to promote libraries and generate income, including the proposals from Civic.

There was a proposal that the remit for Libraries move from the Highways & Community Infrastructure Committee to the Communities & Partnership Committee, pending approval at Constitution & Ethics Committee and full Council. Whilst the Committee was sad to lose Libraries, the Chairman and other Members acknowledged the logic behind this proposal, and wished the Service every success in the future.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- 1) Note the ongoing programme of work to transform the Library Service
- 2) Agree to withdraw the charge for computer access in libraries
- 3) Agree to a debt recovery programme to recover unpaid library charges in order to bridge the income gap in the short term.

107. HIGHWAY INFRASTRUCTURE ASSET MANAGEMENT

Members considered a report on the Council's Highway Asset Management Policy, Strategy and Highway Operational Standards documents.

The Committee was reminded that the Council took a preventative, long-term approach to highways maintenance, enabling it to optimise the available funds via appropriate maintenance treatment at the correct points in the lifecycles of highways assets. Central government used an incentive funding mechanism, which was dependent on the extent to which the Council implemented its highway asset management strategies and policies. Failing to adequately and demonstrably implement a robust asset management approach could cost the Council over £2M of government funding in the coming financial year.

A key element of the Authority's implementation of the asset management approach was a three year forward programme of capital maintenance schemes, and approval of that programme was included in the recommendations. All policy documents were appended to the report presented to Members, with changes highlighted. One of the key changes was clarification of the timescales within which defects reported to the Council would be investigated, to align with corporate standards. Another key change was the addition of a policy regarding attachments to street lighting columns, allowing the Council to recharge commercial applicants who wish to place attachments on lighting columns.

Arising from the report, Members:

- discussed "other options available to residents and communities", which stated *"if particular haulage companies can be identified who continue to use the road as a through route when another main route is available, then we can contact them, making them aware that complaints from residents have been received, and advising them to use another route"*. A Member commented that a village in her division had already been doing this, and she expressed concern that this may be very resource intensive for officers. Officers advised that they were probably best placed to support communities on these issues, and coordinate communications to haulage companies;
- a Member noted that the Street lighting attachments policy had been considered by Spokes some time ago, and sought clarification on which organisations were included under "commercial" applicants, as many public and community bodies attached notices to lampposts, and these bodies had little or no funding. It was confirmed that this related to organisations that were overtly commercial, and these would be decided on a case by case basis: if there were any issues, guidance could be sought from the Local Member or Committee Members. It was clarified that this did not extend to paper notices, but actual attachments which could pose a safety issue;
- a Member thanked officers for counting trees, and the new Tree policy, drawing attention to the very good summary;

- asked about signs on roundabouts. It was noted that this was included in the Signs Policy, although many roundabouts in the county were sponsored;
- asked if the Council was doing all it could to lobby the haulage industry to send freight by rail rather than road, as HCVs caused considerable cost in terms of damage to roads and enforcement, not to mention the impact of HCVs driving through residential areas. Officers advised that they work very closely with Network Rail on a variety of issues, and partners were working together to encourage modal shift of freight to rail. It was also noted that there was more investment in rail;
- discussed the communications strategy and the performance of partners including Skanska and Balfour Beatty;
- asked if there was scope to consult the Local Member if amendments were required to the three year Capital Maintenance Programme. Officers explained that any minor variation would need to be agreed by the Executive Director, in consultation with the Committee Chairman, as set out in the recommendation;
- noted that where no specific projects were identified, i.e. funding was allocated to countywide schemes, this was done via the Local Highways Officer, who would keep the Local Member(s) informed. The programme was reviewed annually, and sometimes more frequently, to recognise changing priorities;
- suggested that it would be useful to have a schematic setting out how the various policies and plans fit together, including weblinks of where the latest version could be found. **Action required.**

It was resolved by a majority to:

- a) Approve the latest version of the Highway Asset Management Policy, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report;
- b) Approve the latest version of the Highway Asset Management Strategy, as set out in Appendix 2 to the report;
- c) Approve the Highway Operational Standards (HOS), as set out in Appendix 3 to the report;
- d) Agree that the Executive Director, Place & Economy, in consultation with the Chairman/Vice Chairman of the Highways & Community Infrastructure Committee, can make minor amendments to Appendix M of the Highways Operational Standards, in accordance with the approved asset management principles.
- e) Agree that the Executive Director, Place & Economy, in consultation with the Chairman/Vice Chairman of the Highways & Community Infrastructure

Committee, can make minor amendments to the budgetary apportionments derived from Appendix Q of the Highways Operational Standards.

108. LOCAL HIGHWAYS IMPROVEMENT SCHEMES 2019-20

Members considered the outcome of the prioritisation of the 2018/19 Local Highway Improvement (LHI) applications by the Member Panels in each District area. More time had been factored into the process to allow consultations to be carried out.

Members comments included:

- one Member suggested that there were a number of issues with the process which needed to be resolved, e.g. subjectivity in judging competing schemes. It was noted that there had been a fundamental review of the process last year, but a further light touch review of the processes could be carried out, and it was agreed that this would be considered at the May meeting. **Action required.** It was noted that there was scope to vary how the process worked in different Districts;
- a Member suggested that officers should be more challenging to the Police about the advice they gave, citing a local example where he felt the Police advice was fundamentally flawed. He suggested that the Police should be asked to justify the detail of their advice. It was confirmed that officers do challenge Police advice on occasion, but that they would not go against Police advice, as this could leave individual highway officers liable if there were problems. It was suggested that both officers and Local Members could highlight issues with the Police in order to support their communities;
- a Member commented that the new approach to LHIs had largely been very positive, but factoring in officer resource to scheme costs could be problematic. She added that that whilst officer support was generally of a very high standard, there had been isolated incidents where communications had not been so good;
- noting total scheme commitment often fell short of the total funding allocated, a Member asked if some of the lower cost schemes could be brought forward to utilise that funding. Officers explained that schemes were allocated dependent on the Panel's prioritisation. If there was funding left, this would be allocated to the next scheme. It would be unfair to allocate funding to a scheme which was a lower priority, just because it had a lower cost.

It was resolved to:

Approve the prioritised list of schemes for each District area, included in appendix A of the report.

109. PARISH ENERGY RECHARGING (STREET LIGHTING)

The Committee considered a report about the proposed withdrawal of a service to enable District and Parish Councils to procure their street lighting energy from the Council's energy contract.

The County Council has used inventory information provided by Balfour Beatty to bill District and Parish Councils for street lights using energy provided by the County Council's energy provider, through the Council's energy contract. It was proposed to withdraw from offering this discretionary service due to increasing costs. Parish Councils and District Councils could still access energy from other energy suppliers, the change is that the Council will not be managing the procurement of energy for them. It was noted that over the past few years, a significant proportion of Parish Councils, especially in Fenland and South Cambridgeshire, have looked elsewhere for more cost effective energy solutions.

It was resolved unanimously to:

Approve the withdrawal of services for managing Street Lighting Energy for District and Parish Council street lights from October 2019.

110. ROAD SAFETY ACTION PLAN

The Committee considered an update on the action plan for future delivery of road safety in Cambridgeshire, along with the capital programme for schemes to be delivered in the 2019/20 financial year.

Members noted the following items which had a 'red' status in the Road Safety Transformation project plan:

- recruitment of temporary analyst to facilitate implementation of new methodology;
- route Risk analysis (due to the delay in the recruitment of the temporary analyst);
- integration of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Highways and restructure to put staffing into Hub model (resulting hold on restructuring Road Safety team).

In response to a Member question, it was confirmed that the Action Plan should result in a reduction of the numbers Killed and Seriously Injured, and the full figures would be presented to a Committee meeting in summer.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- 1) Note progress against the action plan outlined in section 2.1 and Appendix 1;
- 2) Approve the capital programme of safety schemes for 2019/20 outlined in Appendix 2.

111. HIGHWAYS AND COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE AGENDA PLAN

Members noted the Committee's Agenda Plan.

It was agreed that the provisional meeting scheduled for April would be cancelled, and the item on Local Highways Improvement (LHI) Initiative Process review would be considered at the May meeting.

A Member asked if it would be possible to have a report on the impact of the Ely Southern Bypass, i.e. on traffic in communities such as Stretham and Wicken. Officers advised that it was usual to wait at least twelve months before being able to fully assess the impact of new schemes such as the Ely Southern Bypass. It was noted that as the DfT were a part-funder of the scheme, the Council would be required to produce such an assessment anyway.

Members recorded their personal thanks to Graham Hughes for his support and advice over the years, although it was noted that this was unlikely to be his last Committee meeting.

It was resolved to:

- i) note the agenda plan.

Chairman