

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 9 November 2021 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Brown (Chairman)

Cllr. London (Vice Chairman)

Cllrs. Ball, Barnes, Layland, Morris, Osborne-Jackson, Pender and Purves

Cllrs. Dyball and Thornton were present via a virtual media platform which does not constitute attendance as recognised by the Local Government Act 1972.

10. Minutes

Resolved: That the item be deferred to allow the Minutes of the meeting held on 13 July 2021 to be reviewed.

11. Declarations of Interest

No additional declarations of interest were made.

12. Responses of the Cabinet to reports of the Scrutiny Committee

There were none.

13. Actions from the Previous Meeting

There were none.

14. Kent County Council Cabinet Member for Highways & Transport

The Chairman welcomed Cllr David Brazier, the Kent County Council (KCC) Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport who gave a verbal update on the work carried out by Kent Highways.

KCC had been ensuring the maintenance of 400 miles of highways and 4000 miles of road. Within Kent there were 330 signal junctions and 170 CCTV cameras. There were KCC Officers who were responsible for considering the highways aspect of planning applications within the District.

Members were advised that 97% of bus journeys were run by a private operator with KCC running a few of its own bus services. In West Kent, operators Go Coach and Arriva primarily ran the bus services. KCC had maintained a relationship with the operators to ensure services continue. Travel services were provided to roughly

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4000 special educational needs (SEN) customers a year. The Kent Travel Saver was a pass available to allow children to travel to school. Under the government's National Bus Strategy, KCC had bid for £211 million to provide more bus services and better bus stops with real time information. Previously, bus services had been introduced following lobbying from residents but then had been discontinued due to lack of use. A grant of £9.6 million had been received from government for the Zero Emissions Buses Regional Authorities (ZEBRA) scheme to deliver electric buses.

There were various improvement schemes underway. "Vision zero" was a universal strategy affecting local authorities and cyclists in Kent with the aim to have no accidents by 2050.

A substantial programme of works had been funded to improve drainage. There had recently been an increase in the frequency of rainfall incidents requiring improvements to the current drainage system.

KCC had requested powers from the Department for Transport (DfT) to eliminate disruptive parking by lorry drivers in country lanes and residential areas. There had since been a new policy adopted whereby more facilities for lorry drivers to park would be provided to prevent the disruptive parking from taking place. KCC had been working with the private sector to help provide the facilities.

KCC had sought powers to enable monitoring of those who contravene listed offences in the Traffic Management Act 2004 such as stopping in yellow box junctions and taking prohibited right turns. It was highlighted that these powers were requested to ensure traffic on roads would run smoother.

Regarding winter schemes, Members were advised that KCC ensured 23 to 24 tonnes of salt was available to remove ice from roads. There had been fewer complaints of potholes than previously. Performance indicators at KCC had allowed 28 days to carry out repairs of potholes. Rather than filling in a pothole, repair would involve patching the whole damaged highway. In the 2018-19 year, approximately 15,000 potholes were repaired followed by 38,000 in 2019-20 and 40,000 in 2020-21. It was reported that £20 million was spent on pothole repairs in the previous year.

Members asked questions of clarification and expressed concerns over planning applications for large residential units where they felt there was insufficient parking provision with few public transport facilities. Members were advised that KCC Officers would rely on the current guidance at the time when being consulted on planning applications.

Members queried what road safety measures were place on the A25 Seal Hollow Road with the speed limit being 40mph. Members were advised that it had been claimed that bringing the speed limit down would create congestion.

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Regarding the enforcement of those stopping in yellow box junctions or taking prohibited right turns, it was clarified that money from fines would be received by KCC to cover the cost of the scheme with a road sensor determining when to issue fines.

Following queries on school crossing officers, Members were advised that KCC planned to continue hiring crossing officers outside schools. There had been difficulties recruiting people to the post due to the role's wages, inconvenient hours and exposure to the weather.

With agreement from the committee, the Chairman brought the item to a close due to technical difficulties.

DEFERMENT OF AGENDA ITEMS

With the agreement of the Committee, the Chairman deferred Agenda items 7 'Questions to the Portfolio Holder of People & Places' and 8 'Questions to the Portfolio Holder of Development & Conservation' to a future meeting due to technical difficulties.

CHANGE IN ORDER OF AGENDA ITEMS

With the agreement of the Committee, the Chairman brought forward consideration of item 10 'Work Plan'.

15. Work Plan

The work plan was noted with the following additions made:

20 January 2022

- Portfolio Holder for Finance & Investment OR Portfolio Holder for Improvement & Innovation
- Portfolio Holder for People & Places

22 March 2022

- Sencio Community Leisure
- Portfolio Holder for Finance & Investment OR Portfolio Holder for Improvement & Innovation
- Portfolio Holder for Development & Conservation

16. Performance Monitoring

Members considered the report which summarised performance across the Council as at September 2021. Members were asked to consider 13 performance indicators

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which were performing at 10% or more below their target with a commentary from Officers explaining the reasons and detailing any plans to improve performance. The report also provided key performance indicators relating to the Portfolio Holders for People & Places and Development & Conservation.

Following questions relating to an increase in the number of residents in B&B accommodation, Members were advised this was a last resort when all other accommodation avenues had been exhausted. There had been a large increase in homeless presentations to the Council following the end of eviction protections and family and friends no longer able to accommodate.

Members queried the decrease in phone calls answered within 20 seconds by the Contact Centre and increase in phone calls abandoned by the caller. Members were advised that there had been an increase in calls with 61,000 calls received between April and September of 2021 compared to 35,000 calls between April and September the previous year. The team had been impacted further by long term sickness.

Action 1: That Members be provided with further data relating to Performance Indicators LPI_CS001 and LPI_CS002.

Action 2: That Members be provided with further information on plans going forward for the Performance Indicators LPI_DS Waste002 and LPI_DS Waste004.

Action 3: That Members be provided an outline of the ongoing impact of Covid-19 on staffing levels at the Council.

Following queries, Members were advised that the impact of Covid-19 on staff availability had depended on individuals with some testing positive and able to continue work from home and others unable to work due to sickness.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

17. Establishment of an In-Depth Scrutiny Working Group

The Committee considered various areas for a new In-Depth Scrutiny Working Group to carry out a detailed evaluation. Members discussed the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

It was proposed that an update on their progress be brought to the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee in January 2022 with a final report brought to the meeting in March 2022.

Resolved: That

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- a) an In-depth Scrutiny Working Group be set up consisting of Cllrs Osborne-Jackson (Chairman), Layland, London and Pender;
- b) the working group consider the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic and assess the effectiveness of the Emergency Plan and District Emergency Centre (DEC) and areas of improvement; and
- a) a report on the work of the In-Depth Scrutiny Working Group and any recommendations be brought to a future meeting of the committee for consideration.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 9.12 PM

CHAIRMAN