

INFRASTRUCTURE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

TUESDAY, 6 APRIL 2021

PRESENT: Councillors Sayonara Luxton (Chairman), Jon Davey (Vice-Chairman), Christine Bateson, Phil Haseler and John Baldwin

Also in attendance: Councillor Neil Knowles, Councillor John Bowden, Councillor Gurpreet Bhangra, Councillor Gurch Singh, Councillor David Hilton, Councillor Andrew Johnson, Councillor Gerry Clark, Councillor David Cannon, Councillor David Coppinger, Councillor Ewan Larcombe and Councillor Donna Stimson

Officers: Fatima Rehman, Simon Dale, Sue Fox and Joseph Hitchman

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

MINUTES

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting held on 19 January 2021 and 18 March 2021 be approved, subject to the following change to the former minutes:

- **ACTION:** Chairman and Vice Chairman to review the Work Programme, with the Panel Members input.

The Vice Chairman asked what led to a suggestion to be an action or noted, and the clerk advised if the officer agreed to review a suggestion, it was noted as an action.

Q3 PERFORMANCE UPDATE REPORT

Simon Dale, interim Head of Highways, introduced the item and said there was a slightly improved situation since the last quarter. Six of the seven service performance indicators were succeeding or achieved, with the number of homeless households in temporary accommodation being a non-targeted measure.

The Vice Chairman asked who the Community Information Champions were and how the process worked. David Scott, Head of Communities, said the Champions were volunteers who offered to cascade regular messages from the COVID-19 response team to the wider community they were in regular contact with, or were approached by the borough due to their community connections. The Vice Chairman asked how funding was best used for emergency orders, which had reduced to less than 60%, and Simon Dale said improvements on planned and responsive work were being made. The Vice Chairman suggested the Crucial Conversations training that was given to staff to be rolled out for Councillors to aid in having open conversations. He asked the estimated number of evictions likely to be made.

ACTION: The Vice Chairman to be informed of the estimated number of evictions likely to be made, and the Crucial Conversations training for Councillors to be explored offline.

Councillor Bateson asked why footfall was not collated for Ascot and Sunningdale, and David Scott said the footfall counting mechanisms were installed in the two main towns to derive footfall estimates on the shopping centres and high streets.

ACTION: Town Managers to provide future reports of activities in outlier shopping centres and high streets, such as Ascot and Eton.

Councillor Baldwin asked if there were updates on restoring the Maidenhead and Winsor Planning Panels, and Councillor Haseler said the working group was exploring the options, with no current decisive decision made. Sian Saadeh, Development Management Service Manager, would provide recommendations in future.

The Panel noted the item.

LEAD LOCAL FLOOD AUTHORITY

Simon Dale introduced the item, which was a summary of the boroughs duties and responsibilities as a lead local flood authority (LLFA). The borough worked with Project Centre, which helped in the strategic approach to responsibilities, and changes in the team would increase proactivity in discharging its responsibilities. Sue Fox, Principal Commissioning Officer, was moving into a full-time role focusing on flooding and drainage, supported by Joseph Hitchman, Senior Risk Engineer at Project Centre and VolkerHighways.

Sue Fox and Joseph Hitchman presented slides, which addressed that the Pitt Review was undertaken after widespread floods in summer 2007, in which over 50,000 households were affected, and damages exceeded £4billion, which resulted in 92 recommendations. They were based on Local Authorities playing a major role in the management of local flood risk. The Environmental Agency (EA) was brought in as a statutory consultee on major planning applications in areas at risk of flooding from rivers and/or the sea.

The presentation highlighted the role and responsibilities of the LLFA, the EA, Thames Water, and the borough as the Risk Management Authority (RMA). As the RMA, the borough discharged its responsibilities to VolkerHighways to maintain highways, including ensuring highway drainage systems were clear. This was done through a routine maintenance programme for maintaining gullies, drains and soakaways predominantly in Maidenhead. Most ditches were the responsibility of landowners. The borough was responsible for maintaining the pumping station, protecting the highway from flooding and adjoining properties from the runoff of the highways. The borough delivered improvement schemes annually that dealt with wet spots on the road, broken gullies, and broken connections.

The borough's flood risk activities included a strategic role and liaison with professional partners; Sustainable Drainage Systems consultee; highway maintenance; annual capital programme, with a budget of £500,000 for the municipal year; land drainage consenting and compliance; emergency planning; RBWM Flood Liaison Group, which met quarterly with parish councils, the EA and Thames Water to

discuss matter of local and strategic flood interest; and, Berkshire 5 Strategic Group, an officer group to discuss regional matters and share best practice.

The work programme for 2021-22 included a number of items, including a refresh of the Local Flood Risk Management Plan, which would be taken to Cabinet in July 2021; the joint project with the EA for the Datchet, Horton, Wraysbury, Old Windsor flood alleviation project; the capital programme delivery including soakaway improvements, including 10% replacement of covers and clear silt in Maidenhead; flood prevention in Horton, Wraysbury and Datchet; ditch clearance and run-off over verges; and, Highway Drainage schemes, focussing on the backlog, such as Priest Hill, Old Windsor, and delivering 40 minor drainage schemes.

Councillor Baldwin asked for the source of figures regarding the Pitts Review and how it contrasted to the borough's lack of investment, and the Panel was informed that the data was collated from the review report and the investment was the council's decision based on unaffordability. Therefore, other flood alleviations methods were being reviewed.

Councillor Baldwin asked if the Project Centre was fit to deliver timely information, and the Panel was informed that other than a dip during COVID-19, the Project Centre was meeting its performance target to deliver responses to planning applications within 21 days. Councillor Baldwin said outsourcing a contract should lead to greater resilience than the internal service during pressured times and improvements could be made. He said drawings for the second phase of the Active Transport scheme were six months behind schedule, and Sue Fox said this would be responded by Chris Joyce, Head of Infrastructure, Sustainability and Economic Growth.

ACTION: Chris Joyce to advise Councillor Baldwin of the timeliness of Project Centre offline.

Councillor Larcombe said there was a corporate loss of memory and asked who authorised the variations of the Wraysbury drain and why nothing was done regarding unauthorised works on the drain. Simon Dale said it was acknowledged that the borough was not as responsive in the past and that was being corrected, and due to staff turnover, there was a loss of corporate memory. Officers arranged a meeting with Councillor Lacombe to begin discussions on resolving the matter, and any other Councillors were welcome. The Vice Chairman said Councillor Lacombe's requests were not addressed in the past due to lack of finances and was pleased with the progression.

ACTION: Councillor Baldwin to be included in the Wraysbury Drain meeting.

The Panel noted the item.

CCTV SYSTEM REVIEW

David Scott introduced the item and said a capital project that started in 2017 as part of the Delivering Services Differently programme to transition from the old analogue system to more advanced digital technology in 2019. Specialist consultants identified options for hardware and software solutions, and the proposal went back to market under a competitive tendering exercise. The contract was awarded to CDS Systems Limited following the tender process, and the system was replaced on a phased basis, including cameras, connectivity, and display screen equipment for 2018/19 year. The

first phase was completed in March 2019, and minor improvements were completed in 2019/20. There was a mixture of hardwired and wi-fi wireless connections between cameras to reduce annual operating costs and increase resilience. Camera locations and lighting levels were improved for better images.

During COVID-19, the services continued to operate around the clock, with some amendments made to sustain the operation when team members were affected by the virus. Operators held a Security Industry Authority license for public space surveillance, and the borough was applying for a third-party accreditation scheme to demonstrate compliance. The team size was reduced to a Service Leader and eight full-time operatives that covered 24/7 monitoring and emergency out of hours services. The operators worked closely with Thames Valley Police (TVP) and supported crime prevention. Images recorded were held for 31 days and then deleted and overwritten. The funding came from the borough, future further investment could come from developers through Section 106 agreements, housing and residents' associations, and parish councils, to provide for additional coverage.

Lessons learnt included further staffing reductions being unachievable and restoring fibre connections where needed, as it had greater capacity and resilience. Complete reliance on a wi-fi system was not possible as the technology was ineffective around high-rise buildings and cranes. Camera installation was subject to Operational Requirement and Data Privacy Impact Assessment, which were kept under review. Next steps included continuing to build resilience and ensure the system was used to its maximum effect; to provide public reassurance and prevent and detect crime with TVP; and, to work collaboratively with partners at large events such as happened for the royal wedding in 2018.

Councillor Baldwin asked how CCTV was a deterrent in crime, as the footage helped TVP convict the criminal after the event. David Scott said although footage was used retrospectively as evidence for unknown crimes committed at real time, staff were trained to recognise crime in real time and assisted TVP, Community Wardens and other teams. The system was used to track individuals shoplifting and monitor emerging crimes.

Councillor Cannon, Lead Member Public Protection and Parking, said the existence of CCTV and signage was a deterrent of crime and assisted in preventing crime. CCTV was monitored in real-time to assist in not just crime but public safety, such as in the night-time economy and aiding vulnerable people to safety. Councillor Baldwin said there was a reference to intimate knowledge of what was recorded on CCTV and asked how Councillor Cannon was aware of information of live events of vulnerable people. David Scott said the Lead Member was appraised of incidents in retrospect and not in real-time, and he may have been speaking from his experience as a police officer and knowledge of CCTV systems. Councillor Baldwin queried where the boundary of access of information was for the Lead Member. Councillor Bowden said it was inappropriate to discuss the details of the information shared between the control room and TVP in public. CCTV aided in intelligence gathering for alleged criminals and in reaction to offenses.

Councillor Haseler asked if Automatic Number Plate Recognition was installed, and the Panel was informed they were. Councillor Baldwin asked for reassurance that the resource would be maintained, and David Scott said the current budget was built based on the resource needs.

The Vice Chairman asked which parish council requested extra CCTV coverage, and the Panel was informed this was Wraysbury parish council. The Vice Chairman asked about the reliability of wireless connections, and the Panel was informed that a restricted frequency can be used where necessary to increase reliability. The Vice Chairman asked how much of the budget was used, and the Panel was informed that almost all the budget had been spent for the developments made. The Vice Chairman asked if trees were being cut down to allow wireless connection, and David Scott said they were being trimmed only, to help allow reliable transmission in some specific locations.

The Panel noted the item.

HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE CONTRACT - OPTIONS FOR FUTURE SERVICE DELIVERY

Barry Giggins, member of public, submitted a statement for the Panel to consider:

“The Volker Highways contract is due for renewal next year and, due to the complexity of this contract by combining the consultant and contractor roles, I request the Infrastructure Overview and Scrutiny Panel to recommend seeking an audit by a suitably fully qualified person to establish whether the current contract is value-for-money and conforms fully with the Council’s financial standing orders. The value-for-money element should include the actual cost of implementing works compared to other authorities.”

Simon Dale said he had spoken to Mr Giggins regarding the contract’s value for money aspect, which was subjective, and could be calculated by cost per square metre of tarmac, for example, but this was not necessarily a good measure of VfM. The contract did conform to the council’s financial standing orders. Simon Dale said the service area did not have much comparative information compared to other authorities due to the lack of benchmarking information; however, the borough was comparable to tarmac and the supplies VolkerHighways used when it came to materials costs.

Simon Dale introduced the presentation and said the initial contract term was due for expiry in 2022. An audit had been made on the service and a Task and Finish Group had looked at the service provided by Project Centre. It was incumbent on the council to indicate to VolkerHighways its intention for the contract, and the council was able to extend the contract for up to two years.

Cabinet approved the five-year term contract with VolkerHighways at Cabinet in June 2016 and the contract was awarded in January 2017. The commissioned service contained seven services; street cleansing was sub-contracted to Urbaser and scheme design and delivery was sub-contracted to Project Centre. The use of Project Centre increased resilience, as the council in previous years did not always have specialist engineers to call upon for specific issues, but now there was a repository available. VolkerHighways was monitored mainly through key performance indicators, and the borough had a duty under Best Value to continuously improve the services provided, and the team had been looking at new ways of working on highway maintenance work to increase effectiveness.

(Councillor Baldwin left the meeting.)

An asset management approach was used for maintaining the highway, and as a highway authority, the borough had to report on its performance, including reporting on the way the annual allocation for potholes was invested. VolkerHighways was performing well against its key performance indicators, with all but one of the key performance indicators in green. If the contract was agreed to be extended, the team hoped to set more challenging targets to be met.

Over the four-year period that VH have been maintaining the highways, there was an improvement in road condition due to the level of investment with many roads moved from the red, to amber to green RAG rating. Good road networks were important to develop tourism, regeneration, and inward investment. Road investment increased since 2015-2016 due to the Incentive Fund and the Department for Transport (DfT) grant regime. Investment tailed off in 2021-2022 as the grant has been cut by government and the council was unable to invest its own money within the Capital Programme in this municipal year and there was a reliance on the DfT grant. There was a correlation between investment and improved road conditions.

Resident satisfaction was based on National Highways and Transport survey where a random sample of residents were asked questions. The borough was, overall, above the national average, with a couple of areas the borough was just below the national average.

The future options available for the contract were reviewed and partnering opportunities with neighbouring boroughs highway service provisions illustrated, including many outsourced provisions and a few in house teams. Service improvement proposals that could take place included optimisation of gully routes, mapping of drainage assets, first time permanent pothole repairs, use electric vehicles, use of lower temperature asphalt, permitting and rationalise inspections and customer services team.

The Vice Chairman said he was supportive of the option to extend the contract with service improvements and was agreeable of first-time permanent pothole repairs. He asked if the DfT grant could only be spent on potholes, or if it could be spent elsewhere. Simon Dale said the capital grant from DfT could be used for other capital schemes, if the council deemed this appropriate, but this would undo all the work on the highways quality and undermine regeneration and inward investment. The pothole fund had to spent on pothole repair or broader patching but should be targeted at general repairs because of any service if the council wished

Councillor Hilton said similar information to this should be made available annually and helped answer queries about the cost and effectiveness of Project Centre and VolkerHighways.

The Panel noted the item, and the Chairman said the Panel should support the two-year contract extension and Councillor Bateson expressed her agreement.

ANNUAL SCRUTINY REPORT (FINAL VERSION FOR APPROVAL AND SUBMISSION TO FULL COUNCIL)

The Chairman introduced the item and said the final version was awaiting approval. The Vice Chairman said the report was not a fair representation of the year's events. As Vice Chairman, he hoped to have a 5G Task and Finish Group and said the 5G discussion was diluted. He felt a discussion on 5G was required, following the pre-

application to increase the height of an existing mast in Oakley Green by five metres. Matters to raise could be the potential health concerns. Despite the International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection stating there was little health impacts from 5G, Public Health England solicitors suggested local councils to undertake their own research. He was pleased to see the 5G item on the agenda.

The District Environment Crime Officer's item came to the Panel on 17 September 2020 and then sent to Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel on 10 November 2020, which should be addressed in the report. The Active Travel Measures item was brought to the Panel on 19 February 2021 after pressure from the public and should be added in Section 5 of the report.

Regarding improving working methods, the Vice Chairman posed the following questions; how the relevance of suggested agenda items was decided for scrutiny, whether they were aligned to the Corporate Plan, and if the Chairman and Vice Chairman planned the Work Programme. It was favourable to have a scrutiny officer, however resource was not available.

The Chairman said an offline meeting was organised to discuss the report beforehand which the Vice Chairman did not attend, and the Vice Chairman said the meeting was created at short notice. The Chairman said the concerns could have been discussed prior to the meeting, and the Vice Chairman said the Panel was the appropriate place to raise concerns.

RESOLVED: That the Annual Scrutiny Report be approved.

WORK PROGRAMME

The Chairman invited Panel Members to suggest any items for the upcoming meetings. The Panel agreed to have the Street Lighting Review and Bus Routes item scheduled for the next meeting.

The meeting, which began at 6.15 pm, finished at 8.45 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....