

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held in the Council Chamber - Sessions House on Wednesday, 8 May 2019.

PRESENT: Mr A M Ridgers (Vice-Chairman), Mr M A C Balfour, Mr P V Barrington-King, Mrs P M Beresford, Mrs R Binks, Mr R H Bird, Mrs T Dean, MBE, Mr D Farrell, Mr R C Love, OBE and Mr J Wright

ALSO PRESENT: Mr P W A Lake, Mr M D Payne, Mr H Rayner, Mr M Whiting and Mr M E Whybrow

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr J Cook (Scrutiny Research Officer), Mrs A Hews, Mr P Lightowler (Head of Public Transport) and Mr A Loosemore (Head of Highway Operations)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

56. Apologies and Substitutes

(Item A2)

1. Apologies had been received from Mr Booth, Mr Cooke, Dr Sullivan and the Parent Governors and Church Representatives.

57. Minutes of the meeting held on 3 April 2019

(Item A4)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 3 April 2019 were a correct record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

58. Select Committee Update

(Item A5)

1. Joel Cook provided Members with reassurance that following establishment of the Knife Crime Select Committee work was underway with the first formal meeting taking place on 9 May 2019. Mr Barrington-King, who was the Select Committee's Chairman designate, explained that within 48hrs of the approval of the Select Committee he had convened a meeting with officers, it was considered that the position of the Select Committee was unique and pathfinding. It was intended that the Select Committee would conclude by October 2019 and Members would proceed with diligence. At a productive early cross-party meeting Members had identified key witnesses and testimonials to empower the Committee to make contributions and recommendations.

RESOLVED that the Committee note the positive progress of the Select Committee.

59. KCC managed road closures for utilities works

(Item C1)

Mr Whiting (Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport and Waste), Mr Payne (Deputy Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport and Waste), Mr Loosemore (Head of Highways Asset Management) and Mrs Alison Hews (Streetworks Manager - East) were present for this item.

1. At the invitation of Mr Whybrow who, jointly with Mr Bird, had asked for this item to be placed onto the Scrutiny Committee agenda, the Officers introduced their report.
2. Andrew Loosemore briefly explained the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991 (NRSWA) under which Utilities Companies had to install and maintain apparatus in the highway. Under the Traffic Management Act 2004 (TMA) Highway Authorities had a duty to co-ordinate such activity.
3. KCC operated a Permit Scheme across the whole road network alongside a Kent Lane Rental Scheme (KLRS) operating on 5% of the most traffic sensitive streets of the primary network. The Lane Rental Scheme accrued around £1million per year and regulations meant that the scheme funds could be used to offset reasonable costs and the surplus went into an innovation fund which funded projects that fulfilled the key criteria.
4. The duty on Highway Authorities was to coordinate works and to mitigate traffic disruption, not to prevent disruption.
5. Alison Hews explained the temporary road closure process to Members, this was managed by the Street Works Team. The agenda pack contained the paperwork required to close roads.
6. Mr Whybrow thanked the officers for their report and for their verbal explanation, it was considered that there was a lack of public understanding around who was responsible for road closure and he asked whether signage could be improved? Andrew explained that it was mandatory to have a signboard on site which should include a reference number, name and contact details of the responsible company. KCC could issue a default notice if the sign was not present.
7. In response to a question over coordination between utilities companies Alison explained that the council would always push for collaboration if it was aware of multiple works on the street, these were often emergency works which were difficult to coordinate. A discount was offered to utilities companies if they could work collaboratively, it was beneficial to companies to share costs.
8. In response to a question over the extent to which KCC could specify remedial action and whether this was patching or full coverage. Andrew explained that there was a national consultation on the conditions imposed by the Highways Authority, this included a proposal to increase the work guarantee from two years to five years, this was a substantial document which set out the qualities and standards for utilities companies.
9. Andrew Loosemore set out the inspection regime to Members, this did not prevent the team from making unscheduled inspections.

10. Referring to the Lane Rental Scheme, this was run under Transport for London and Kent was the only other authority who ran the scheme. The rules around the Lane Rental Scheme were set out in legislation and the Lane Rental Board decided where surplus funds were spent.

11. In relation to coordination of highways works KCC had a quarterly Highway Authorities and Utilities Committee (HAUC) meeting. Prior to this companies had to submit a return of all planned main schemes. At that meeting representatives looked for opportunities for collaborative working.

12. Andrew Loosemore offered to discuss with Members, outside of the meeting, any issues or ideas relating to signage or street works.

13. Andrew Loosemore explained that KCC decided which roads were designated as traffic sensitive and this was affected by bus routes, sorting routes and a raft of criteria. Andrew confirmed that utilities companies were only responsible for reinstating the area that they disturbed.

14. A Member requested that officers give thought to how early Members got notified about controversial closure notices affecting their wards and divisions.

15. A Member asked that road works around Christmas be avoided due to the effect this had on businesses. Members also asked that there be a dedicated direct contact number for KCC to report defects.

16. In response to a question Andrew Loosemore explained that there was no option to use the Lane Rental Scheme surplus for wider reinstatement, however Members could put forward suggestions on innovation ideas to Highways District Managers.

17. In response to a question about utilities companies and contractors adhering to the law KCC did its best to ensure compliance with the rules and served notices where utilities companies did not meet all the requirements.

18. Members recognised that there was little spare capacity on Kent's road network, roadworks had a big impact and it was recommended that KCC look at good practice around the UK and abroad.

19. A Member commented that road closures or lane closures could be a good opportunity for litter or verge cleaning.

20. Members offered thanks to the team for their hard work and useful discussion at the Scrutiny Committee meeting.

21. The Cabinet Member together with the Committee Chairman thanked the Committee for requesting the item and for the good discussion, he offered his thanks to the team who worked hard to minimise the disruption and issues.

RESOLVED that Mr Whiting, Mr Payne, Mr Loosemore and Mrs Hews be thanked for attending the meeting and for answering questions. The Scrutiny Committee note the contents of the report and the additional information in Appendices 1 and 2.

60. KCC Supported Bus Services in Sevenoaks

(Item C2)

Mr Lake, Member for Sevenoaks Rural South, Mr Rayner, Member for Malling West, Mr Whiting, Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport and Waste and Phil Lightowler, KCC Head of Public Transportation were present for this item.

1. Mr Lake introduced this item and set out the background to his request to place this item on the Scrutiny Committee agenda. This included the 5 most highlighted themes from the consultation being:
 - a. Impact on elderly
 - b. No Alternatives
 - c. New Developments/Social Housing
 - d. Social Isolation
 - e. Access to Work
2. Phil Lightowler set out the background to the Cabinet Member decision to implement changes to selected bus services in Sevenoaks from April 2019. This decision was based on the proposed reduction to Socially Necessary Bus Services (SNBS) of £455k. there was no statutory requirement for Local Authorities to provide funding for SNBS.
3. KCC had asked Go-coach to monitor capacity on the 404 service, there were standing passengers but this was not over capacity and it was usual for the Local Authority to maximise the full capacity of the vehicle. If more entitled children used the service this would be reviewed to ensure capacity. It was accepted that this was a sensitive issue which had impacted some people, KCC's approach had been to make a saving for KCC that had the least impact and was mitigated by other services being present.
4. Members asked whether the survey would be reviewed in the summer as this was undertaken in the winter, Phil Lightowler stated that KCC had not received complaints from schools or parents about capacity issues. However Inspectors were sent out often to review services.
5. A Member considered that there was a need to look closely at the whole bus network.
6. In response to a query about how children were impacted Phil Lightowler explained that the data for September starters was available, this would be combined with current loadings which would indicate if there was sufficient capacity.
7. A Member commented on the changes made to the bus service in Thanet, there had been no complaints about the commercial route that had been put in place. There were concerns that there might be a need for a rethink of transport for children.
8. The Cabinet Member concurred that there was a need to review and to be more efficient around spending the available money. There was a cross-party member group looking at bus transport.
9. There was uncertainty about how the feedback from the pilot schemes was being used, was there an intention to develop a taxi service?

10. Referring to community transport options only one Tonbridge and Malling Parish Council had put forward an application.

11. The Chairman asked Mr Lake whether he was satisfied with Phil Lightowler's suggestion that he reviewed routes over the next couple of weeks and reported back. Mr Lake confirmed that he welcomed the continuing conversation and would very much like to explore further the taxi service.

RESOLVED that Mr Whiting and Mr Lightowler be thanked for attending the meeting to provide information and answer questions and that no formal comments be issued by the Committee.