

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Thursday, 23 February 2023.

PRESENT: Mr A Booth (Chairman), Mr P V Barrington-King (Vice-Chairman), Mr N Baker, Mrs R Binks, Mr T Bond, Mr A Brady, Mr N J Collor, Mr G Cooke, Mr A J Hook, Mrs S Hudson, Rich Lehmann, Mr H Rayner and Mr O Richardson

ALSO PRESENT: Mr D L Brazier (Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport), Mr R C Love, OBE (Cabinet Member for Education and Skills), Mr P Cole, Ms M Dawkins and Mr R J Thomas

IN ATTENDANCE: Ms H Chughtai (Director of Highways and Transportation), Ms C McInnes (Director of Education), Mrs N Floodgate (Road Safety and Active Travel Group Manager), Mr M Bunting (Vision Zero Strategy Manager), Mr G Romagnuolo (Research Officer), Mrs A Taylor (Scrutiny Research Officer) and Mr M Dentten (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

78. Declarations of Interests by Members in items on the Agenda for this Meeting *(Item A3)*

No declarations were made.

79. Minutes of the meeting held on 25 January 2023 *(Item A4)*

RESOLVED that, subject to the inclusion of Mr Hook and Rich Lehmann as virtual attendees, the minutes of the meeting held on 25 January 2023 were an accurate record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

80. Short Focused Inquiry - Highway Improvement Plans - Final Report *(Item A5)*

Mr R Thomas (Chairman, Highway Improvement Plans Short Focused Inquiry) and Mr G Romagnuolo (Research Officer) were in attendance for this item.

1. The Committee were presented with the Highway Improvement Plan (HIP) Short Focused Inquiry's report, for approval, and submission to the Leader and relevant Cabinet Members including a request for a formal response to the recommendations within two months. The report included the Inquiry's headline findings; communication and engagement; training; enforcement; funding; and the Inquiry's 5 recommendations.
2. Mr Thomas introduced the Short Focused Inquiry's report. He explained that the Inquiry focused on four key issues: context; funding; governance; and

possible improvements. He gave an overview of the witnesses which gave evidence to the Inquiry, which included: Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC); the Road Safety Foundation; KCC's Road Safety and Active Travel Group; and Kent Police, giving thanks to them for their contributions. The Inquiry's recommendations were detailed, with it noted that better: communication; guidance in unparished areas; training; enforcement; and funding were required to realise sustained improvements.

3. A Member commented that recommendation 5, "that KCC's Road Safety and Active Travel Group should urge the relevant planning officers to consider HIPs when allocating the funding from developer contributions. This should be done at the earliest opportunity in the planning process," would be difficult to implement consistently and required a greater understanding of the issues faced in unparished areas, in order to successfully secure planning obligations through Section 278 agreements.
4. The importance of managing community expectation, including on the deliverability of schemes contained within HIPs, was highlighted by a Member. They added that the further Member training recommended in the report would help to streamline the HIP development process and ensure clear communication with communities.
5. A Member noted that there were inherent difficulties with the funding of highway priorities and infrastructure improvements in both parished and unparished area, which had not been fully addressed in the report. They stressed the importance of HIPs factoring in Local Plan priorities, whilst also maximising the use of Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy contributions.
6. The Chairman agreed to consider a future item on Joint Transportation Boards, following comments by the Committee, which noted that their effectiveness varied across the county.
7. A Member emphasised the importance of promoting joint working between adjacent parish and town councils, in order to ensure that there was a shared awareness of other authorities' HIP priorities.
8. Members commended the report's emphasis on the importance of providing local Members with revised guidance and information on HIPs, alongside in-person and virtual training.
9. A Member asked that the criteria for new speed cameras, impact of pilots and oversight by the Kent and Medway Safety Camera Partnership be explored further, including the possibility of self-financing solutions.
10. Following a request from a Member, the Chairman assured Members that Scrutiny would closely monitor, after to the Executive response, the progress made to consider and implement the SFI's recommendations.

11. A Member asked that a comment on the importance of communications and partnership with district, boroughs and city councils during their developments of Local Plans be included in the Chairman's covering letter to the Executive.
12. Members commented that the number of parish and town councils in Kent, cited as 309 in the report, needed to be corrected to 321, to include non-KALC affiliated councils and that the report needed to explain that Highways Improvement Plans were permitted in non-parished areas.
13. The Chairman assured the Committee that their comments would be incorporated into his letter to the Executive which would accompany the Short Focused Inquiry report.

RESOLVED to approve the Short Focused Inquiry Report into Highway Improvement Plans, and that it be submitted to the Leader and relevant Cabinet Members along with a request for a formal response to the recommendations within two months.

81. Vision Zero - Road Safety Strategy for Kent - Update *(Item C1)*

Mr D Brazier (Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport), Ms H Chughtai (Director of Highways and Transportation), Ms N Floodgate (Road Safety and Active Travel Group Manager) and Mr M Bunting (Vision Zero Strategy Manager) were in attendance for this item.

1. The Committee were provided with a report which updated Members on the progress made implementing 'Vision Zero, The Road Safety Strategy for Kent 2021-2026,' since its adoption in July 2021.
2. Mr Brazier provided a verbal overview of the report and reminded the Committee that, whilst Vision Zero was a multinational road traffic safety initiative focused on casualty reduction, the KCC strategy was tailored to Kent's unique highway challenges and interwove with KCC's commitment to achieve Net Zero in the county by 2050.
3. Ms Floodgate explained the different approach adopted by Vision Zero, comparing it to previous location focused casualty reduction strategies. She reminded Members of the Strategy's five pillars: safe roads and streets; safe speed; safe behaviour; safe vehicles; and post collision response. She added that understanding where, when and how accidents were happening, coupled with improved data sets and a dashboard for damage only incidents allowed better decisions to be taken to prevent future road casualties.
4. Mr Bunting further updated the Committee, which included confirmation that the Kent and Medway Casualty Reduction Partnership, which alongside KCC, included Kent Police, Kent Fire and Rescue Service, Medway Council and National Highways, had been bolstered to enhance shared responsibility and collaboration. Members were encouraged to become Vision Zero champions.

5. In relation to section 3 of the report, a Member noted that the 2016-22 road casualty data indicated an upward trend in casualties, which had incorrectly been referred to as a downward trend.
6. A Member commented that further engagement with partners was required to create a broader acceptance of 20mph zones and precipitate further decreases in road speed.
7. Concerning the Vision Zero Strategy's delivery of the Infrastructure for Communities priority, within Framing Kent's Future, KCC's Council Strategy for 2022-2026, a Member commented that decisions taken on other issues relating to Highways and Transport should take account of their impact on road safety. They asked that Members be provided with an update on how recent projects had impacted incident and casualty rates.
8. Broad education on the benefits of high visibility clothing for active travel route users was encouraged by Members.
9. Ms Floodgate confirmed, following a question from a Member, that accident hotspots were reviewed annually, with remedial engineering and education delivered in response. She noted that small schemes were used on accident clusters, though non-engineered solutions were an important part of Vision Zero. She agreed to provide Members with a list of cluster sites across the county after the meeting.
10. Members emphasised the importance of the Strategy's safe speed pillar and asked that roads near schools and popular active travel routes be prioritised for speed reduction schemes. The Chairman commented that congested roads around schools presented significant risks and danger to children. He asked that active travel be encouraged further to reduce congestion and improve health and wellbeing. A Member added that walking buses should be promoted to achieve the aspiration whilst also ensuring child safety.
11. Members welcomed further information on how road safety measures, including 20mph zones, with strong local support could be promoted, funded and implemented.
12. A Member asked whether average speed cameras could be used for enforcement and whether additional safety courses for car and motorbike users, beyond speed awareness courses, could be promoted to encourage safer driving.
13. Mr Brazier left the meeting. The Chairman shared his disappointment that the Cabinet Member had not made the Committee aware of his need to leave during consideration of the item and stated that it had inhibited the scrutiny process.
14. The importance of speed limit enforcement was highlighted by a Member, who stressed that limits needed to be realistic and would only be fully effective if

adequately enforced. The importance of quantifying the impact of school expansions on surrounding road network congestion was raised.

15. A Member asked whether increases in the number of moped-borne food delivery drivers had impacted road safety.

16. The Chairman asked that written responses to the questions shared after the departure of the Cabinet Member be provided to the Committee following the meeting.

RESOLVED to note the contents of the report.

POST MEETING NOTE: The Committee were provided with the requested written answers to their questions.

82. Home to School Transport - Verbal Update *(Item C2)*

Mr R Love OBE (Cabinet Member for Education and Skills) and Ms C McInnes (Director of Education) were in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Love provided a verbal update which broke down mainstream home to school transport costs, contracts and occupancy, as at the time of the meeting, following a request by a Member. He confirmed that there were 275 hired mainstream contracts, which included both private and public hire, comprising 222 (65%) of service volume and 80% of contract costs for private hire, as well as 53 (35%) of volume and 20% of contract costs for public hire respectively. He added that 82 contracts were for sole occupancy transport at a total cost of £1.4m, which compared to £3.3m for the 193 multiple occupancy contracts. Ms McInnes provided further statistics, confirming that the average cost per head per day across all contracts was £21.48, which was further separated into £18.10 for multiple occupancy and £93.37 for single occupancy. She noted that the average costs per head per day, varied significantly based on the route and distance.
2. Mr Love agreed to provide Members with a written briefing following the meeting, to support the statistics shared with the Committee.
3. District taxi and private hire vehicle licensing was raised by a Member, as an area for further investigation, in order to understand whether policies overly restricted market supply.
4. A Member commented that alternative employment models for drivers should be investigated.
5. A Member noted that home to school transport had been a long-term issue, for more than a decade, with costs significantly increasing over the period. They added that schools should be engaged in order to explore other options and carry out pilots, including school-run licensed taxi services.

6. Members asked that the issue be scrutinised further and that the written briefing promised include an overview of the legislation which required KCC to provision home to school transport and a comparison with similar authorities.
7. Concerning decision making, Ms McInnes noted that there was significant interplay between the statutory obligations to offer school places and transport which heavily influenced expenditure on home to school transport.
8. Mr Love thanked the Committee for its questions and comments. He reassured Members that KCC had some of lowest home to school transport costs per child, when compared to many neighbouring authorities. He welcomed Members' suggestions of pilots and opportunities for optimising sole-occupancy transport routes, and committed to investigate the impact of taxi licensing policy on market supply. He concluded by reminding Members that there was no single solution to resolve the issues identified and that a multi-pronged approach was required.
9. The Chairman thanked Mr Love for his engagement with the Committee, the answers provided and commitment to provide further information to Members.

RESOLVED to note the verbal update from the Cabinet Member.

POST MEETING NOTE: The Cabinet Member provided the Committee with a written briefing on Home to School Transport, which included: decision making and the statutory framework; benchmarking and cost drivers; managing costs and value for money; the numbers of contracts and pupils being transported; and further efficiencies.