

Performance Management Scrutiny Committee

8th July 2020

Member Questions

1. Question from Councillor Roger Evans

I am disappointed with the "Highways Improvement Plan Update". The report being considered today fails to give many details on what the actual improvements actually are.

In the opening paragraphs it is stated that "The Service is being completely restructured to meet its vision.

This vision I assume is "To deliver a high-quality highway service with our residents and communities at the heart of everything we do"

In the last few days roads have been closed with no notice being given to residents. Bus services cancelled because of this closure. Persons manning the barriers not knowing what the alternative diversion route was so no advice could be given to those who suddenly arrived and found their route blocked. The times of the road closure were also altered with no prior notice being given as work progressed. Many residents and Communities do not agree that a high quality service is being delivered.

1. How and why was this work not be communicated to the local member and the many residents who would be affected by it. Why was it so urgent that no prior notice was given. Is this what is meant by putting "residents and communities at the heart of everything we do".
2. Many members queried the structure that was introduced just 18 months ago. Requests for details and contact numbers were refused. Will details of this this new structure be circulated to members.

Response:

Under the Highways Act 1980 we have a statutory duty to maintain the highway network. In exercising these responsibilities, we will almost inevitably come into conflict with the travelling public and other stakeholders as we deliver meaningful betterment on the highway network often at very short notice.

At the same time, we have taken a robust approach with our contractor (Kier) in terms of holding them to account for their contractual responsibilities. Under the contract Kier own the responsibility for consulting with stakeholders on work they deliver on our behalf. This function has, until very recently, remained with Shropshire Council. The firmer line drawn by ourselves, holding the contractor to account has contributed to some of the issues around notification as our contractor adjusted to

their responsibilities. We recognise these shortcomings and apologise for any inconvenience caused.

Details of the new Highways Structure will be circulated to Members once finalised.

2. Question from Councillor David Vasmer

- 1) Given that so many of the problems with the performance of Highways centres around their management of the contract with Kier and previously Ringway it is very disappointing that so much of this report makes no mention of Kier. One of the problems all councillors and members of the public have faced is Highways' failure to monitor repairs which should be done on their computer programme called Confirm. In the past we all had examples of repairs that had been done badly, but there appeared to be no consequence for Kier. With regard to action point 50, can we be assured that all work undertaken by Kier is now effectively monitored and, if not done properly, Kier are not paid?
- 2) Under Action Point 51 the report states that Highways have been reviewing ways in which they can obtain the best from Kier. As a result the decision required is to review any resource changes – what was reviewed and were any changes made? Under update we are told that there have been more meetings with Kier and an improvement team set up with a new Governance Framework. But surely the obvious thing to do is review the operation of the very detailed contract with Kier and not pay for defective work?
- 3) Do we have the specialist staff to monitor the contracts with Kier and WSP?

Response:

1. The Highways Improvement Plan identifies 57 separate actions to deliver crucial improvements within the Highways Service for the residents of Shropshire.

- We have changed the way defects are identified, ordered and repaired we have improved the timeliness and quality of repairs and reduced costs.
- We have repaired approximately 12,000 potholes since the beginning of March increasing permanent repairs of potholes from 5% to 95% and repairing adjacent defects.
- We have introduced new alternative innovative pothole repair methods and implemented our own Find and Fix lengthsman gang directly reducing the costs by up to 90%.
- We have delivered low cost drainage interventions which have resolved long standing issues and will extend the life of our roads and prevent flooding issues.

- We have instigated a mixed local economy and reinstated ditching and grip clearance using local contractors reducing future damage upon road surfaces.
- The front face of the service has been transferred to the Council's Customer Service Centre and residents enquires have reduced from over 1,400 a week by approximately 90%.
- The Members portal has been launched and enquiries have reduced by approximately 80%.
- A new Highways Customer Engagement and Liaison Strategy has been launched and a Highways Customer Panel is being established with SALC.
- We are developing a new suite of KPI's into our Contract with Kier to incentivise high performance and hold them to account.
- In respect to item 50 on the improvement plan, all recommendations from the Council's 2019 Audit review of the contract management of the term maintenance contract have been actioned and closed. Improved processes are now in place to address the recommendations from the report. It is proposed to take this report to the Audit committee at its forthcoming September meeting.

2. A new Governance Framework has been introduced to the Highways Service to improve management of the Highways and Environment Term Maintenance Contract with Kier. The Framework consists of a new Strategic Board, which is Chaired by the Council's new Assistant Director for Infrastructure, Steve Smith, an Operations Board, which is chaired by the Council's new Head of Highways, Alun Morgan and a number of individual Service and Task & Finish groups which will drive forward improvements within the Contract. The improvement team is the first Task & Finish Group to be initiated and has focused on driving improvements in reactive maintenance repairs. Further Service and Task & Finish Groups are currently being set up and others will be established as needed.

3. A restructure of the Highways Service is being implemented to enable the Highway vision to be delivered and performance further improved. This has been developed with input from both the Staff and Team Leaders Forums and will be centred around three groups; Commissioning, Operations and Business Management. New critical posts have been identified and job descriptions for all the management posts have been created, evaluated and graded by HR colleagues. Following the Council's policies and procedures, appointments to these new roles will shortly be undertaken. New team structures are being developed and new roles created. These will also need to be evaluated and graded following which appointments to the new staff roles can be made.

