



Place Overview
Committee

04 August 2021

1.00 pm

Item

3

Public

**MINUTES OF THE PLACE OVERVIEW COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 8 APRIL
2021
2.00 - 4.50 PM**

Responsible Officer: Sarah Townsend
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Present

Councillor Joyce Barrow (Chairman)
Councillors Julian Dean, Rob Gittins, Simon Harris, Paul Milner (Vice Chairman),
Pamela Moseley, Paul Wynn, Gerald Dakin (Substitute) (substitute for Dan Morris),
Roger Evans (Substitute) (substitute for Andy Boddington) and Simon Jones (Substitute)
(substitute for William Parr)

104 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Andy Boddington, Dan Morris and William Parr. Councillor Roger Evans was in attendance as a substitute for Councillor Andy Boddington, Councillor Gerald Dakin was in attendance as a substitute for Councillor Dan Morris and Councillor Simon Jones was in attendance as a substitute for Councillor William Parr.

105 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

Members were reminded that they must not participate in the discussion or voting on any matter in which they had a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest and should leave the room prior to the commencement of the debate.

Councillor Simon Harris declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest as Deputy Portfolio Holder of Highways and stated that his specialist subject was within the railway industry.

106 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 2nd March 2021 were confirmed as a correct record.

107 Public Question Time

Four questions were received from members of the public.

From: Charles Green, acting for CPRE Shropshire

Mr Green's questions related to the scrutiny of the Local Plan by the Place Overview Committee and the Local Plan Member Group. A full copy of the questions and responses provided is attached to the web page for the meeting and also attached to the signed minutes.

From: Peta Sams

Ms Sams' questions related to the improvement of biodiversity across Shropshire and the policies that are in place. A full copy of the questions and responses provided is attached to the web page for the meeting and also attached to the signed minutes.

From: Laura Hoskison

Ms Hoskison's questions related to complaints regarding the traffic in her local area, the Battlefield Ward. A full copy of the questions and responses provided is attached to the web page for the meeting and also attached to the signed minutes.

From: Rita Baker

Ms Baker's questions related to the plans that the council has in place to ensure that biodiversity across Shropshire will increase over the next decade along with the biodiversity targets the council was hoping to achieve. A full copy of the questions and responses provided is attached to the web page for the meeting and also attached to the signed minutes.

108 Member Question Time

Questions were received from two Councillors.

From Councillor Roger Evans: Councillor Evans was in attendance to ask his questions in relation to the statement made by the Deputy Leader at the last Place Overview Committee meeting regarding the Cabinet's plans to spend an extra £40 million on road maintenance during the next four years, in order to fix the county's roads and footways. A full copy of the questions and responses provided is attached to the web page for the meeting and also attached to the signed minutes.

Councillor Evans was allowed to ask a supplementary question regarding how the Council could spend additional money on highways maintenance, when in previous years, funds had been taken out of the highways budget. The Executive Director of Place responded that the current administration had pledged to spend an additional £40 million pound over the next four years (£10 million pounds each year) as an additional resource to that which is in place already, should they be re-elected. It was his understanding that this investment would be **additional** funding.

From Councillor David Turner: Councillor Turner was in attendance to ask his questions in relation to winter maintenance. A full copy of the questions and responses provided is attached to the web page for the meeting and also attached to the signed minutes.

109 Fireworks

The committee received the report of the Head of Trading Standards and Licensing which provided an overview of work that has been undertaken to put into place a December 2019 Council resolution containing actions that sought to mitigate the alarm, distress or anxiety caused to people and animals by fireworks. It also provided members with an overview of the legal framework around fireworks, including the powers and responsibilities of the local authority, and explained how the local authority currently carries out its duties within the legal framework.

During the discussion and responding to questions from the committee, the following was explained:

- The main problems that occur are regarding the use of fireworks.
- The Council's powers are limited in terms of what they can do to prevent fireworks from upsetting people and animals.
- Exercises regarding the test purchasing of fireworks to underage people had been undertaken at retail stores in November last year across the county, which had resulted in no sales. In previous years where sales have been successful, they were taken through to prosecution.
- A comment was made regarding whether more could be done to encourage quiet fireworks. Several members expressed surprise that representations had not been made directly to Government via the relevant Portfolio Holder urging it to limit the maximum noise level of fireworks to 90dB for those sold to the public for private displays. In response to why this had not been taken forward, The Head of Trading Standards and Licensing acknowledged that this was outstanding and commented that the last year had been particularly challenging. However, this was being considered at a national level and was on the agenda of the relevant Ministers and Officials at Government level.
- A council motion was passed in July 2018 to ban the use of floating lanterns on council property and the Head of Trading Standards and Licensing commented that she was not aware that anything had changed in terms of the current laws but would need to further look into this.
- Controlling the price of fireworks is not something that can be done by the local authority or nationally.
- As part of the council's social media campaign around bonfire night, information would be included explaining how people can report those who use fireworks inconsiderably.
- The Council were unable to put legislation in place to ensure that all fireworks that are let off do not have any sound when people set off fireworks on their own land and in private gardens and business premises.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the committee notes the report and continues to support officers in their work regarding the regulation of the sale and discharge of fireworks.
- (b) That the committee lobby Government concerning the maximum noise level of fireworks for those sold to the public for private displays.

Prior to the consideration of the following agenda items, Councillor Roger Evans was allowed to make a statement. He stated that when the agenda was published, he

and several other Councillors had asked that the agenda items concerning WSP and Kier not be discussed at this meeting due to the proximity of the forthcoming election and them having been the subject of some political debate. He requested that these items be deferred and reconsidered at the first opportunity following the May 2021 elections. The Chairman of the Committee explained that the Monitoring Officer had advised that these items were part of the normal work programme of the Committee and there was no reason why these items should not be considered. Councillor Evans' proposed deferral was however put to a vote following which, the vote was lost.

110 Highways Winter Service Working Group

The committee received the report of a working group of the Place Overview Committee which detailed its review of Shropshire Council's highways winter service policy and provided the council with recommendations to support its proposed review of the highways winter service policy.

The report detailed several recommendations in relation to the defined network, grit and grit bins, gulleys and groundwater flooding, community wardens, customer service and communications.

During the discussion and responding to questions from the committee, the following was explained:

- Conversations needed to be had with landowners regarding the retention of water on their land as much of the flooding arose from gulleys blocked with silt from water draining from agricultural land or from mud left on the road by agricultural vehicles. Whilst acknowledging the problem, the Head of Highways commented that this was an area of focus for them.
- One of the strategies that the Highways Department wanted to put in place was to empower people locally to get involved e.g. clearing footpaths.
- Whilst the report specifically talked about winter maintenance, seasonal maintenance had not been reflected within it and it was acknowledged that heat waves could also have an impact upon the highways network.
- A question was asked regarding whether any of the Town and Parish Councils had provided feedback on the Environmental Maintenance Grant and if it had been useful in allowing them to help support the council during the Winter Maintenance Programme. It was suggested that the Portfolio Holder could refer this question to SALC to forward onto its members.
- The Head of Highways commented that the strategy around grit bins needed to be reviewed.
- The Chairman commented that she wanted some assurances in writing from the Head of Highways that the various identified issues would be addressed and implemented, along with a timeline detailing when this would happen and who the lead officer would be.
- It was noted that the review of the council's highways' winter service plan was due to be completed by May / June 2021.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the committee agrees to forward the recommendations contained in the report to the relevant officers.
- (b) That the committee agrees to review the revised winter service policy before it is adopted by Shropshire Council, taking into account the recommendations in the report.
- (c) That the revised winter service policy be added to the committee's draft work programme for consideration by the next administration.

111 WSP Professional Services Annual Report

The Commission Manager, WSP, was in attendance for this item.

The Head of Transport and the Environment presented a report summarising the annual performance of the WSP contract for the 2019/2020 financial year. He drew attention to the breadth of the contract that included highways, transport and also to the wider support to economic growth and other council-wide projects.

The value of WSP in improved flexibility and project management by improving the Council's ability to bid for project funding to tight deadlines and undertake associated feasibility studies in a timely manner, for example the North West Relief Road, was noted. The success in attracting funding was testament to the value of the work of WSP working with the Council. However, it was recognised that a new procurement model may be considered for the basis of the future contract (the current contract developed on a commissioning model was due to come to an end on 31 March 2022) and this would be a topic for future debate.

Responding to Members' questions and concerns the following information was provided:

- The current contract was drawn up seven years ago and consideration needed to be given to numerous issues including whether to continue with a commissioning model, whether services should return in-house and dealing effectively with the bidding culture for national funding opportunities.
- Recognition that costs have increased resulting from increased traffic volume and from assistance requested from developers and additional properties needing to be serviced.
- In response to a comment that temporary traffic lights should be removed more quickly, it was explained that repair material needed time to harden off and therefore temporary traffic lights often needed to remain for a while.
- The benefits of highways development being within the Council's planning function and the resultant ability to report to Planning Committees in a timely manner was acknowledged.
- Development control was currently part of the WSP function and choices on this element would be made on preparation / procurement of the new contract.
- The Design Guide would provide an aide memoire to developers and help to reduce the duplication of questions received. Information on the Council's expectations and requirements would be included and WSP were assisting the Council in compiling the guide.

- The introduction of zebra crossings in some areas was based on a national formula that balanced the needs of both pedestrians and vehicles in any given scenario.
- The use of low carbon materials was supported and would be incorporated in future funding bids.
- Different methods of dealing with potholes were being trialled and some trials, although proving to be popular, may not represent the best value for money.

Queries regarding the timelines for completion of the A529 externally funded project could not be addressed at the meeting and Officers agreed to provide information to the Committee as soon as possible.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Annual Performance Report for WSP for the 2019/2020 financial year be considered by this Committee.
- (b) That the Committee's comments upon the detail contained within the report be noted as appropriate.
- (c) That the Committee continues to receive an annual performance report on the WSP contract.
- (d) That the Committee review proposed arrangements regarding the future procurement strategy for professional services in due course and add consideration of the draft contract to its Work Programme.
- (e) That any HDC Design Guide be developed in line with the recent Council commitment to approaches such as those developed by Transport for New Homes and the response be added to the Committee's future Work Programme.

112 Kier Highways Maintenance Annual Report

The General Manager, Kier – Shropshire Highways, was in attendance for this item.

The Head of Highways presented a report on the challenges and improvements on the Kier contract with particular emphasis on the last six months.

He highlighted the following points:

- Reactive maintenance and pothole repairs define the service area and have been the priority over the last six months.
- 16,000 potholes had been dealt with over the last year, compared to 11,000 the previous year.
- General public perception was that road conditions were poor - surveys show that approximately 21% of local authority roads were considered to be in poor condition and in need of major repair. In Shropshire, 16% of the network was in poor condition.
- There was a need to balance planned and reactive maintenance of the network.
- A specialist drainage team working for the Council undertook more complex drainage tasks including catch pits, many of which were being discovered and were added to the inventory.

- In the last twelve months, 75% of repairs undertaken had been a permanent, rather than a temporary fix.
- Different technologies had been trialled over the last six months on carriageway repairs, such as the JCB Pothole Pro and the Mutivo Multihog.
- Over 150 separate surface dressing jobs had been mobilised within a month funded by the Department of Transport, the Safe Start surface dressing project.
- From May 2021 three teams (north, south and central) would be operating in the county.
- The need for improved communications with local Town and Parish Councils was recognised.

Referring to potholes, the Head of Highways explained that public perception was that vehicles generated potholes but in the majority of cases, water was the cause. He explained that effective water management through managing gulley assets more effectively, restoration of ditching and increased highway dressing would have a positive impact and result in a reduction in highway defects.

Responding to Members' questions and concerns, the following additional information was provided:

- The recent development of a Minor Works Programme would allow local technicians to process issues more quickly, e.g. road signage. There was a need to recognise that priorities had to be made given a finite revenue budget.
- Incorrect signage in Whitchurch highlighted by a local member would be investigated and reported back to the member.
- Communication improvements were being developed and it was agreed that improvements to communications, notably with Parish and Town Councils, would be added to the Committee's future Work Programme.
- Night pothole filling was used in certain locations as necessary.
- The target for defect repairs was 95%.
- There would always be a need for some temporary road repairs (rather than permanent) e.g. prior to planned resurfacing and to address urgent safety issues and traffic management complications.
- Road closures were dictated by the nature of the work involved, with health and safety being of paramount concern.
- Staffing issues were improving. Evidence showed that work quality and gang productivity was improving, daily and weekly staff briefings were being held, supervisors were going out on site and staff failure to perform had been addressed.

In drawing the debate to a close the Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport commented that, whilst recognising that there had been issues in this area, he was confident that a corner had been turned and progress was now being made.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee note the contents of the report.
- (b) That improvements to communications, notably with Parish and Town Councils, be added to the Committee's future Work Programme.

113 Date/Time of Next Meeting of the Committee

It was noted that the next meeting of the Place Overview Committee was scheduled to be held on Thursday, 10 June 2021 commencing at 2.00 p.m.

Finally, the Chair put on record her thanks to all Officers, Members and the Portfolio Holder involved in the work of the Committee and paid particular tribute to the outstanding support from the Overview and Scrutiny Officer.

Signed (Chairman)

Date: