

ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Environment Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday 16 June 2021 virtually.

PRESENT:

Cllr Roger Whyborn	Cllr Gill Moseley
Cllr Susan Williams	Cllr Alan Preest
Cllr Alex Hegenbarth	Cllr Phil Awford
Cllr Chris McFarling	Cllr Sajid Patel
Cllr Dominic Morris (Chair)	

Officers in attendance: Kathryn Haworth, Colin Chick, Simon Excell, Philip Williams and Wayne Lewis

1. APOLOGIES

No apologies were received.

2. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

Members were advised that as the legislation allowing local authorities to hold meetings virtually came to an end in May, any meetings now held remotely would not be formal meetings.

This meeting was an introductory session to the Committee and therefore any formal business could not be carried out. Members were advised to give thought to their nominations for vice-chair ready for the next formal meeting of the Committee.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

4. INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMITTEE

4.1 Colin Chick, Executive Director for Economy, Environment and Infrastructure (EE&I), introduced the department to the Committee and explained that introductory presentations would follow from four of the six Lead Commissioners/Heads of Service within EE&I, and covering the main areas that came within the Committees scope.

4.2 Members noted how closely linked the economic and environment agendas had become, meaning the department often had to find a balance between improving one but not damaging the other at the same time.

4.3 The first presentation was received from Simon Excell, Lead Commissioner for Strategic Infrastructure and members noted the following:

- Gloucestershire was a growing county, but also a very constrained county. Slide 1 showed the Central Seven Vale where 60-65% of the county's future growth would be located.
- The natural constraints within this area were represented on the key, namely the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), the green belt, active flood plains and the Forest of Dean area.
- In addition the second key showed different levels of development for the county from actively ongoing to future potential.
- Whilst it was not GCC's role or responsibility to dictate future planning (this was the responsibility of the district councils), what it could and tried to do was heavily influence the quantum, location and type of future development.
- As an authority it had many duties to provide infrastructure which was often dictated by future developments e.g. highways and education provision.
- To give members a flavour, it was advised that there were currently between 3-4,000 new houses (county-wide) due each year.
- The team also undertook the role of Lead Local Flood Authority. Since the major flooding in 2007, the County Council had ring-fenced monies for delivering flood alleviation works. As a minimum, there was a £2.1m spend per annum.
- The team also commented on all major planning applications to make sure districts and developers were aware of any potential impacts on flood risk and how to mitigate these.
- As a predominantly rural county, GCC had a statutory responsibility and duty to produce AONB management plans for the three areas (Cotswolds, Wye Valley and Malvern Hills).
- The county is rich in heritage, and amongst other things it was home to important Roman settlements. The team therefore also comment on planning applications to help find a balance between enabling development but not to the detriment of Gloucestershire's valuable history.
- There was a statutory responsibility to produce a number of plans including the Minerals Local Plan, Waste Core Strategy, Local Transport Plan etc.
- Gloucestershire was very rich in minerals; GCC was required to determine quantum and location of all future mineral extraction.
- Likewise the Waste Core Strategy outlined the location and management of waste (the waste disposal function is with the Waste Management team).
- It was the team's responsibility to negotiate and secure appropriate developer contributions for housing developments. It was vital for these to

be secured to ensure future growth was supported by the relevant infrastructure. There was a Local Development Guide which enhanced the ability to negotiate and secure these monies.

- Unfortunately this had not been helped by the introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy. For the areas that used this instead of S106, it had put the responsibility in the hands of the district councils to secure the contributions so there was often a battle to ensure GCC secured the required monies.
- Finally the Fastershire programme was a joint roll out with Herefordshire Council to provide fast broadband to all residents. The programme had done exceptionally well with an over 97% rollout rate to date.

4.4 The second presentation was received from Phillip Williams, Lead Commissioner for Community Infrastructure and members noted the following:

- The key areas within Community Infrastructure required a high level of cooperation with other authorities. The quality of relationships was very important, as was scrutiny as a channel for officers to understand what the county's priorities were, whilst also making the most of councillor's valuable local knowledge and connections within their divisions.
- The provision of quality housing and transport access were key to the quality of life residents expected and linked directly back to the Council's key priorities. The challenge for the department was to make sure the budget provided reasonable and responsible policies.
- Highways Development Management required a lot of liaison with local planning authorities, advice on the appropriateness of the highways aspect of new developments (new junctions, public transport services, cycle ways etc.).
- Integrated Transport Unit covered a social responsibility and duty to provide transport in terms of subsidised travel. Public transport access was critical for resident's wellbeing, access to jobs and education. Out of the 21m journeys each year about 10% of those were subsidised by GCC.
- It also covered the expanding active travel network, the e-scooter pilot and fleet management for the authority. There were fantastic active travel proposals across the county but it took time to build the capacity and expertise to deliver these schemes.
- Highways Network Management covered on-street parking, road safety, road signals and highways records.
- Sustainability was a growing departmental challenge. It covered all work in relation to the climate change and air quality agendas.
- The team also managed the gypsy and traveller sites in the county. There were currently four sites with just under 400 residents. Work was ongoing

to invest in the quality of accommodation provided and looking at ways to improve their access to affordable energy, health care etc.

- The overarching priority for the department through all of the above responsibilities was to support and promote healthier, safer and more sustainable choices for residents.

4.5 The third presentation was received from Kathryn Haworth, Lead Commissioner for Highways and members noted the following:

- The Highways department focused on the delivery of service – the maintenance of what we had and the construction of what we needed.
- Across the department there are 120 FTE members of staff, plus a number of external providers that the team worked very closely with.
- The network the team looked after was vast. There was 3500 miles of carriageway (which included the footways, verges etc.), another 3500 miles of public rights of way (PROW), over a 1000 bridges, thousands of street lights etc. This often meant there was a need to balance the needs of the network as a whole with local issues.
- The operations team was managed by Jenny Goodson, and they looked after day to day operations, PROW, policy and statutory work, as well as the support for customers, councillors, parishes etc.
- The capital delivery side of the business was managed by Mark Darlow-Joy and this covered all strategic and local road network projects, major resurfacing, street lighting maintenance etc.
- In addition there was also a customer contact team.
- Pages 16-20 of the reports pack gave an overview of the key areas and contracts managed by the team.
- The council had a Highways Skills Academy which offered apprenticeships and construction skills development. This was a really important long-term focus for the department due to the huge shortage of and high demand on skilled construction workers.
- The Local Highways Managers were set out on pages 21-22. They were a key contact for members to develop a productive working relationship with to allocate their Highways Local Fund (HLF) amongst other things.
- The Ash Die Back programme was one of the current major programmes. It was estimated for Gloucestershire there were 30,000 highways trees that needed to be addressed. There was a programme to deal with those identified as diseased which most often required felling due to the huge safety concern of them failing on the highway, but the council had committed to replacing two for each one felled.

4.6 The fourth presentation was received from Wayne Lewis, Head of Waste, and members noted the following:

- The waste disposal team was made up of eight full time employees and oversaw a £35m revenue budget per annum.
- All responsibilities for waste were set out in law via the Environmental Protection Act (page 29).
- GCC was responsible for the treatment and disposal of all household waste in the county and providing access to Household Recycling Centres for items that were not suitable for the kerbside collections.
- The district authorities were the waste collection authority and therefore were responsible for all kerbside collections, street cleaning and fly tipping clean up.
- The Gloucestershire Resources and Waste Partnership was established in 2019 to develop long term strategic management of waste across the different authorities, and also to enable working together on communication and community involvement functions.
- Page 31 gave a picture representation of the true costs of waste disposal. Whilst there was an annual budget off £35m, every product discarded took with it a plethora of hidden costs which left the true cost being ten times that amount.
- The waste hierarchy was enshrined in law for all councils and businesses to consider when making decisions on their waste policies. The goal was to do more of the top and less of the bottom. In practise Gloucestershire was operating more of a diamond shape – there was a lot of recycling and recovery, a lot less disposal but not enough on prevention.
- In 2019 the team undertook an in-depth analysis on residual waste and page 33 showed the findings.
- There were a number of local actions being supported by GCC which were summarised on page 35.
- The communications plan was annually reviewed by all members of the Partnership before being enacted and covered all sections outlined on page 36.
- Whilst recycling was managed by district councils, GCC supported this by paying recycling credits and a locally agreed incentive cost. These payments were in recognition of the saving in disposal costs for the county.
- The five provided HRCs were currently managed by Ubico which was a local authority owned company and the team were responsible for selling the waste streams collect there.
- The local recycling rate was currently 51% which was above the national average but recognising both averages had become stagnated in recent years. There was a need for continued investment.
- When all of the above efforts were exhausted, waste was disposed via the Energy from Waste plant. It was currently processing 130,000 tonnes

of residual household waste each year which had massively reduced the county's reliance on landfill.

- The waste materials were then used to generate energy for 25,000 homes each year. Page 39 showed a run through of the process and it was noted members would be invited to visit the plant as soon as Covid restrictions allowed.

Questions

- 4.7 There was a question about library contribution requests. It was advised there was a [Local Development Guide](#) which set out what the council asked for in terms of contributions and why they asked for it. There was also an annual [Infrastructure Funding Statement](#) published of all contributions asked for and received. To note this was published a year in hand so the most recent available figures were published in December 2020.
- 4.8 It was noticed that the contact centre number for highways had been changed to emergency calls only, it was therefore queried whether GCC had seen a reduction in the number of calls coming through and therefore an increase in contact made in other ways (email/social media).
- 4.9 Members heard that the contact centre had moved to emergency only due to Covid and the need for shift working etc. The department were now looking to restart some contacts through the telephone (in line with the Government roadmap) which was often a lot easier for the more complicated issues. It was highlighted however for simple issues such as reporting potholes, the online tools were much better as the jobs were automatically assigned through the automated system.
- 4.10 Social media was helpful in terms of sharing messages and the council had a very popular media feed called 'Glos Roads' which was well followed but in terms of reporting issues, the general approach on social media was to divert people to the correct streams.
- 4.11 Members were advised that following Sally Godwin's promotion, there was an ongoing recruitment process for the new Local Highways Manger for Gloucester but in the meantime members should liaise with Martyn Midgley.
- 4.12 On footpath inspections, it was questioned whether there was a formalised system beyond reports being made by members of the public/councillors. It was advised there was a regular [inspection programme](#) for all highways assets. Depending on the classification of the carriageway, this would either be a quarterly or annual inspection and the accompanying footways would be inspected at the same time. In addition, high use footpaths e.g. in town centres were also categorised and received a walked inspection.
- 4.13 There was frustration from members on the tight turnaround for them to allocate their 2020/21 highways local funding. Officers sympathised that this was especially difficult for the number of new members who were still settling

in to their new roles. It was advised the constraints that Covid and an election had brought this past year had been exceptional. Normally LHM would be working through the year with their members anticipating highways local funding in the next financial year.

- 4.14 As it was revenue funding, it needed to be spent within the financial year and that meant contractors needed to know as soon as possible to allocate the works appropriately. Members were advised to do as best they could to meet the deadline, close working with their LHM would provide support on this.
- 4.15 In addition it was always good to check with the LHM if any other funding pots were available in certain areas where monies could be blended from different sources.
- 4.16 Noting the many different avenues customers may contact highways, a member asked whether there were any discussion on automating the reporting service e.g. into an app. Members would be aware of the front end system [Report It](#) which allowed customers to report issues on the network online/via a mobile. There had been other technology innovations as well such as video based inspections. In terms of implementing a fully automated system from front to back office, this was currently a very difficult task but something that would always be considered.
- 4.17 It was confirmed that Highways Local Fund (HLF) was separate to any funding allocated as part of the administrations manifesto and any further information on this would be shared when available.
- 4.18 On waste monitoring, it was informed in addition to monitoring recycling rates, the team also measured residual waste per household which were both published on a set basis: <https://www.wastedataflow.org/>
- 4.19 A member highlighted that if waste levels continued to reduce, might this compromise the need for the Energy from Waste plant and therefore lead to the need to import waste. Although the Council was committed to reducing waste, there was still a long term requirement for the facility as not everything could be recycled and due to population increases year on year. In the lifetime of the facility, Gloucestershire's population was predicted to grow by the equivalent of a new district.
- 4.20 It was queried whether there was any way of removing recyclable and combustible products that had ended up in residual waste from the EfW facility before it was burned. I was advised that this had been ruled out as the facility did not have the capability, nor did any others around the country. At the point of waste arriving at the facility, it would be incredibly difficult to separate and recover any materials without contamination concerns. Instead authorities were working together on improved education for dealing with waste correctly.

- 4.21 Finally a member asked whether there was any future chance of a scheme to link the A38 and the A40 highlighted in the JCS being delivered. It was confirmed at present the scheme was unfunded and would remain on the 'to do' list until monies became available.

5. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT: ECONOMY, ENVIRONMENT & INFRASTRUCTURE

- 5.1 Colin Chick, Executive Director of Economy, Environment and Infrastructure, updated the Committee on current issues. In particular, members noted that:
- The term maintenance contract was in its third year and was going well. GCC had won awards for collaborative working.
 - The Highways Skills Academy was also doing very well and was bringing through young people, generally from the county, into careers in the highways transport sector. It had just brought online its first advanced apprenticeship.
 - Highways delivery was still feeling the affects of an incredibly bad winter (due to front line staff being on emergency standby from the flooding in December until early March from a 'perfect storm' of weather events impacting the road surfaces).
 - This had resulted in 16,000 potholes being repaired from the beginning of January until end of April 2021, estimated at 1000 repairs per week, on top of all the other work of gritting etc.
 - The highways winter maintenance budget overspent by £250,000 last financial year and £500,000 on responsive maintenance. Two months into this financial year, the team were still repairing damage from winter 2020/21.
 - The impact on staff saw almost double the amount of gangs being needed on the network in comparison to last winter.
 - M5 J10 was moving forward very well with the Preferred Route being announced yesterday.
 - GCC were working with Tewkesbury Borough, acting as advisors on the design and implementation of the bridge at Ashchurch which would open up the first part of the Garden Town Development.
 - The CPO orders for the South West Bypass development had been approved. There was now a Judicial Review period until the end of August with construction due to start in January 2022.
 - This project had always been dependent upon funding being secured from Government. The initial bid had been made to the 'Pinch Point' funding scheme, however had now been incorporated into the 'Levelling Up' funding pot and therefore required a new application. A combined bid (to include the B4063 / A40 Highways England Cycling Scheme project) was therefore now being submitted.
 - Funding had been secured from Government (£1.3m) for two demand responsive public transport trials in the FOD and Cotswolds.

Minutes subject to their acceptance as a correct record at the next meeting

- There were ongoing issues with the county receiving any monies from developments through the new Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). The potential financial loss to the council of this continuing could be millions.

5.2 Noting the major concern around CIL monies, it was added that the county had been trying for several months to secure agreement to commission an external study on the issue. Unfortunately this had only just made procurement and therefore once in place would be many months after it was initially needed.

5.3 The main issue with using the CIL arrangement over S106 was the amounts that could be taken off an already very limited pot of money. The districts were able to charge an admin fee against the monies and if there were any neighbourhood plans where the development was, up to 25% of the remaining fund could be taken. Several members requested for an urgent item to be added to the Committee's work plan.

ACTION: DSU

5.4 A member raised that there was adverse weather reports approaching for the county and questioned whether the network was ready if we did have another risk of flooding. It was advised that it was as ready as ever but could never commit 100%. There was always a possibility of flash flooding and dangerous driving conditions when there was very heavy short falls of rain, what was different in December however was the ground already being so saturated before the bad weather hit.

5.5 Noting that the FOD had two Innovation Labs due to its rural nature, it was questioned whether there had been considered of the Cotswolds also having a second Lab. It was advised this would be completely dependent on funding which wasn't available at the moment.

5.6 Finally on the rural transport trials, it was questioned whether there would be a review of the trial within the two year period to ascertain if it could be expanded to other rural communities in Gloucestershire.

5.7 It was confirmed that the reason for the trial was to understand whether it was more efficient and cost effective to provide this type of demand responsive travel, as opposed to the current subsidy arrangement for rural transport. The project was in its infancy and more time would be needed to see if it worked as hoped. The council had used the money from Govt. to buy four fully accessible minibuses which would remain with the council regardless.

6. WORK PLAN

Members noted the future items in the attached work plan and suggested the following to be added:

Minutes subject to their acceptance as a correct record at the next meeting

- Issues surrounding the Community Infrastructure Levy and S106
- Highway repairs – methods and processes
- Local Transport Plan
- Flooding – lessons learnt from the December 2020 flood events and future action
- School street trials
- Climate Change Action Plan – to understand whether Gloucestershire is on track to meet its commitments and explore whether the plan is ambitious enough to address the crisis at hand
- E-scooters trial

It was confirmed the Chair would share a draft work plan proposal with members to consider following the meeting.

CHAIR

Meeting concluded at 13:00.