

ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Environment Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday 8 March 2023 at the Cabinet Suite - Shire Hall, Gloucester.

PRESENT:

Cllr Roger Whyborn	Cllr Phil Awford
Cllr Susan Williams	Cllr Sajid Patel
Cllr Chris McFarling (Vice-Chair)	Cllr Dr David Willingham
Cllr Gill Moseley	Cllr Vernon Smith (Chair)
Cllr Alan Preest	

Virtual Attendance: Cllrs Phil Awford and Alan Preest

Officers in attendance: David Owen, Kathryn Haworth, Colin Chick, Simon Excell, Jason Humm and Gary Kennison

Cabinet Members: Cllr David Gray – Environment and Planning
Cllr Philip Robinson – Education, Skills and Bus Transport

Apologies: Cllr Dom Morris – Highways and Flooding

2. MINUTES

2.1 The minutes of the meetings held on 22 November 2022 and 11 January 2023 were approved as a correct record.

2.2 A member asked for an update on the action to consider co-opting a member of the Gloucestershire Youth Climate Group onto Environment Scrutiny. It was advised that a recommendation had been drafted for the Committee to consider, this would be emailed out to members shortly and if acceptable, scheduled for the next meeting to make a decision.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Willingham declared that he was Cheltenham Borough Council's nominated representative on the Cleeve Common Trust in relation to Item 5.

4. HIGHWAYS GREEN INITIATIVES AND INNOVATIONS

4.1 Kath Haworth, Assistant Director for Highways & Infrastructure, was invited to present the report. The following points were highlighted.

4.2 The paper outlined a range of green initiatives and innovations which were being developed across the highways industry. The team recognised the importance of the support they had received so far to test these new initiatives, accepting not all would be successful but it was important to try. The report was split into four main sections as outlined below.

- 4.3 Digital and technology was partly about using data and digital techniques to better inform what the department did and how they did it. For example, a heat defect map could be used to identify heavy pockets of activity arising on the network to help direct resources and identify patterns. It was also about what can and could be captured automatically, in real-time and shared with the public for better self-help and transparency. There was rapid development happening in this area, with some areas on the cusp of providing real opportunities.
- 4.4 The materials and waste section outlined opportunities to use lower carbon materials, improve efficiencies, and better recycle what came out of the network as well as using recycled and recyclable products. Materials currently used for surfacing took a huge amount of energy to produce, largely due to the high temperatures needed. There were opportunities to explore different materials for use in different weather conditions which could reduce the need for return journeys to refill potholes.
- 4.5 There was a lot of 'green estate' on the network, and this came with opportunities to promote and improve the natural environment through biodiversity. An example was given that as a result of the current Ash Die Back programme, which was removing diseased trees off the network, some areas had flourished with new species establishing themselves in areas where Ash Die Back had previously been dominant.
- 4.6 The section on plant and operations was around the rollout of electric vehicles and optimisation of equipment. There was a recent trial of an 'all electric' site, officers were working through the outcome details, but all initial soundings seemed positive. The technology continued to improve on battery life and discussions around the future of HGVs.
- 4.7 Members of the Committee welcomed this report and thanked the team for all their hard work in continuing to trial innovations.
- 4.8 A member shared several other opportunities that may want to be explored, particularly in relation to camera and video footage developments to detect things like potholes, and GPS technology to detect deviations in the road surface and monitor bridges etc. Noting the connections with cyber technology in Cheltenham, there could be opportunities for Gloucestershire to become a leading example in some of these areas.
- 4.9 Officers welcomed the comments and were happy to continue discussions offline on particular opportunities. They had begun to trial the use of video systems in highways vehicles but shared that the Artificial Intelligence capture was not quite as good as a human yet in terms of judgement and automation.
- 4.10 It was added that when this technology matured, there would be opportunities to improve the monitoring of unclassified roads, which were

typically only inspected once a year. This technology could be fitted in other fleet vehicles which drove the roads more frequently.

- 4.11 A member shared that they had heard complaints from crews about the lack of equipment available to heat materials on the fleet vehicles. It was advised that the method of repairing potholes was to use hot materials which were taken from depots on the day and kept on insulated beds. GCC were also working with contractors to trial cold products, these were generally more expensive but, in some instances, have a better whole life cost. The member was asked to share the details of this particular issue with officers offline.
- 4.12 Officers felt that the biggest gain they could see at the moment was the technology, to develop a more joined up and automated system, and make better use of the data that was available in doing so. This would then eventually lead to officers having more time to deal with the more complex queries and issues, rather than focusing solely on the day to day. A comment was noted about raising better awareness of the positive trials being undertaken.
- 4.13 A member shared the ongoing public frustration where potholes in close proximity to each other were not all being filled at the same time. It was agreed that technology such as the heat mapping would help, as well as exploring optimisation of route inspections and ensuring crews were located in a tight geographical area, and not needing to travel back and forth across the county.

ACTION: **Kath Haworth** – confirm what happens to the chipped wood from the [Ash Dieback Programme](#).

ACTION: **Kath Haworth** – confirm how much plastic waste from PPE was recycled or incinerated.

ACTION: **Kath Haworth** – provide further information on Solid Recovered Fuel (paragraph 3.5)

- 4.14 Reference was made to a previous Task Group report which recommended the Council to explore the use of cut and collect operations when cutting road verges in order to help improve biodiversity. Officers confirmed this was trialled a few years back and at the time, the equipment was too big to make it viable to use across most verges in the county. It would be something the team would keep an eye on for advances and hopefully more suitable equipment to become available in the future.
- 4.15 A member referred to the ongoing success of alternative transport trial 'The Robin' and queried the reporting mechanism for this to Government. It was explained that as it was being funded by Government, there was regular feedback already happening. It was currently a 2-year trial, but discussions were already happening on how to bring some of the learning forward, due to its current success and challenges for the county in rural accessibility but

also around Stagecoach cuts. Officers hoped to be able to share a summary update with members soon.

- 4.16 Another example was discussed of where the equipment/technology had not quite advanced enough at this stage. Highways trialed the use of a machine which could heat the existing materials in and around a pothole, redistribute it and then add a smaller amount to make up the quantity. This was a really good way to recycle and reuse material and use a lot less new material overall. It was however a very big piece of equipment and was therefore not suitable for all locations as it would lead to programme efficiency issues.
- 4.17 Noting all the excellent examples of initiatives being explored, a member questioned whether the Council had an idea of the measurable impact the various changes could have on its carbon footprint. It was advised that the department were currently pulling together a Carbon Management Plan in order to understand the impact of any potential future change, and also to ensure that if initiatives needed to be prioritised for financial or resource reasons, the Council was moving forward with the ones that would make the most difference.
- 4.18 It was advised that drones were hired through specialist suppliers and used mostly to do things such as bridge inspections that were otherwise difficult and expensive to access. This was a good example of camera technology making a huge improvement in certain areas and would hopefully start to be used more.
- 4.19 A member raised this issue of misunderstanding among residents, and sometimes councillors, of what met the council's pothole threshold. They requested information around the number of visits that were carried out across the county each year that ended with the criteria not being met. It was felt that there were clearly efficiencies that could be made here, and whether the Council was clear enough with its messaging on this.

ACTION: Kath Haworth

ACTION: Kath Haworth/DSU – Arrange a members visit to see new IT used by highways department.

5. BIODIVERSITY

- 5.1 Gary Kennison, Principal Ecologist, presented this item. The report was taken as read and the following points were highlighted.
- It was advised that considering biodiversity would see a lot of change over the coming years due to legal regulations and associated guidance emerging in relation to the recently passed Environment Act 2021.
 - The Act, amongst other things, strengthened the biodiversity duty on councils, which would involve a review of all policies and operations. It also implemented a requirement to produce a Nature Recovery Strategy

for the county, which GCC had been identified as the likely Responsible Authority for its production, monitoring and review.

- GCC had preliminarily accepted the role as Responsible Authority, it was proposed that the Strategy be produced through the already existing Gloucestershire Local Nature Partnership but were awaiting further guidance before continuing.
- Officers envisaged the shortest timeframe to produce the Strategy would be about 18 months. Gloucestershire was in a positive starting position due to the strong evidence base and Local Nature Partnership relations.
- Government was aware of the significant resourcing concerns for councils in implementing the Act. The finance and resource implications and current position were outlined in Part 3 of the report.
- The report included sections covering next steps, summary points and recommendations for the Committee to note.

- 5.2 It was confirmed that district councils had already given agreement for GCC to be the responsible authority, they and parish councils would be involved in contributing ideas and content for the strategy via the Local Nature Partnership. The Partnership was keen to be a key player and that this would help ensure a Gloucestershire wide and inclusive approach. Guidance on implementing the new legislation was awaited before proceeding to understand what should happen in situations where there might be potential disagreement and how to deal with this before final adoption of the Strategy.
- 5.3 In response to a question, it was confirmed that the strategy will refer to land but regulations or guidance may suggest the exclusion of marine areas. The County Council and Local Nature Partnership however would make sure that rivers, water courses and the upper Severn Estuary were included for consideration in the Strategy as they were such important parts of Gloucestershire's natural environment.
- 5.4 There was a flavour in the initial guidance of urban biodiversity being important. The Local Nature Partnership had already done some work on green infrastructure and had considered how urbanisations can provide corridors for species to move through and this would certainly form part of future discussions.
- 5.5 In reference to Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), a member stressed it was important to make sure the rare species that had been identified within these areas were clearly highlighted in the strategy, and to ensure any future work continued to try and protect these. There should also be consideration of how we could better enforce against organisations who were not protecting these areas. It was advised that monitoring and enforcement for SSSIs was a responsibility for Natural England and the police. The Council could play its part in terms of collating information and reporting incidents. There would be a designated officer from Natural England working with the Partnership on developing the Nature Recovery Strategy and so SSSIs would be covered.

- 5.6 A member shared their despair that there was another, at least, 18 months to wait before a new strategy was in place. They had seen many strategies and plans over the years, none of which had stopped the overwhelming decline and extinction of species. Many SSSIs remained at risk from pollution and/or development and they felt deeply concerned that this direction from Government felt like business as usual. They also raised concern around funding and resource needed for local authorities to implement the Environment Act requirements in this area.
- 5.7 It was confirmed that the planning requirement for developers to produce a net gain in biodiversity was currently not mandatory. It was prompted by councils through their existing plans e.g., Minerals and Waste Plan for GCC, which meant each council had a slightly different approach at the moment. From November, all planning applications caught by the new legislation would have to demonstrate a minimum of 10% net gain. It may be possible to explore enforcing higher percentages, via the Strategy, probably in specially important or strategic areas if a case to justify this could be made.
- 5.8 Officers advised that 'New Burdens (or Grant) Funding' was money that was being given by the Government to implement new legislation and responsibilities. The Council has received some, and would be receiving further funding, to produce the Nature Recovery Strategy with partners and to implement the biodiversity net gain requirement in planning.

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

- 6.1 The pre-submitted questions and response are attached as an appendix.
- 6.2 Another member shared further concerns from residents around changes to the F bus service, particularly in relation to elderly and physically disabled residents who were unable to walk to use another service.
- 6.3 In response, officers advised that they had received no further update from the Traffic Commissioner to date. Gloucestershire would not achieve service access per 400m (as detailed in some best practice guides) due to its rurality, and even London struggled to achieve this in some areas. Whilst accepting services had changed, the Council had done the best it could with the public money available to patch up the services cut by Stagecoach, and support as many residents as possible. Those who were greatly disadvantaged also had access to other types of services such as dial a ride, hospital transport etc. A member requested to carry the dialogue on in relation to changes of the F bus service.
- 6.4 A member requested further information on the grant schemes available under the Fastershire Programme. They referenced concern, in relation to the community grant, as to how communities were engaged with, particularly if they were not known to each other or geographically close enough.

- 6.5 It was explained that the detail of the ongoing programme was subject to a Lead Cabinet Member decision in December and the report can be accessed [here](#). The officer was happy to continue discussions should the paper not provide the relevant detail.
- 6.6 In relation to the Quarter 3 performance data, a member was concerned to see some targets seemed to be set against progress and what the end goal was to achieve. For example, the residual waste per household in December 2021 was 440kg and yet the target for 2022 was 479kg. Similarly, for highways, December 2021 to September 2022 reported 99-100% performance for defect repairs but the target was 96%. In addition, such high performance for highways was not coming through in the overall resident satisfaction rates.
- 6.7 Officers advised that waste figures were set based on previous year's performance and population growth, the target had to be realistic in line with this, but they had been pleasantly surprised in how rapid the reduction for residual waste had been, regardless of growth in population.
- 6.8 For highways, the 95/96% target rates were built into the contractual requirements for the provider in 2019, to achieve at least those rates throughout the contract life. The dilemma on customer satisfaction was one of the things being investigated as part of the new Highways Transformation Board.

7. WORK PLAN

Members confirmed they were happy with the current work plan.

CHAIR

Meeting concluded at 13:00.

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Cllr Roger Whyborn

J10 report - do we have a timeline for spades in the ground, and how firm is that?

Following the Treasury call in of the HIF programme, the DCO submission date for M5J10 has been revised to reflect a potential 6-month delay (this has been the length of delay suggested by Homes England but Members should note that this is still to be confirmed by Treasury and Homes England). The Project Team are working on the assumption that the DCO is now submitted to PINS in July/August this year. That being the case, the SoS decision would be expected Feb 2025, with a start on site in April 2025 and a practical completion in Dec 2027.

Buses and Stagecoach 'aftermath': When the report says that only the one half of the F service has been replaced by the L, and the other (St Marks half) need not be, due to proximity of other routes, what is the evidence that the other routes are near enough the erstwhile F route to be meaningful within normal accepted standards for urban areas.

The reason the vehicle for the F has been used to serve Leckhampton is one based on isolation and available alternative services. For someone living along the route of the F, on Devon Avenue for example, they have a relatively short walk to the railway station and Gloucester Road for service D that provides up to 4 buses an hour. Also a slightly further walk in the opposite direction to Princess Elizabeth Way, Orchard Way or Arle Road for service A that provides up to 5 buses an hour. Finally, south to the A40 for the 94/94X with upwards of 6 buses an hour. The area of west Cheltenham served by the F is essentially surrounded by very high frequency bus services and the number of households with a long walk to a bus stop is comparatively small.

Residents of Leckhampton and the surrounding area do not have the same level of alternative service. There is a service Q that clips the north-eastern part of the area but only provides 4 trips a day. The frequent services of B (Sandy Lane) and the 66/10 (Shurdington Road) are approximately a mile from the central point of the service F catchment area in Leckhampton. The equivalent measurement to alternative services from a similar central point of the F catchment at the western end of the route would be less than half a mile.

Our analysis shows that users at the western end have a shorter walk to more frequent services than those of the southern portion. There is no legal or policy-based maximum walking distance to a local bus stop. Some best practice guides suggest a 400m distance but this is not GCC policy.

Cllr Gill Mosley

Have all the first phase applications been processed and how many were approved?

In Phase one of the Community Speedwatch (CSW) scheme:

- 119 bids were received from Parishes.
- 290 total requests were received – noting that a parish can submit multiple bids for Community Speedwatch Cameras, Vehicle Activated Signs, Wheelie Bin Stickers, visits and attendance at Parish or Town to provide Road Safety advice and guidance and finally speed surveys - multiple bids were submitted of which not all were approved.
- 169 requests are approved by GCC, and we are awaiting approval from stakeholders with regard to Speedwatch Camera applications or Vehicle activated signs that were approved in principle. If these are approved by the Police, then all of Phase 1 is complete with a potential increase in the final requests approved.

When will the results be known for the second phase?

Applications for the second phase are being processed and will be completed by GCC in March. Then a complete list of what has been issued to which Parish will be placed on the Councils web site. Additionally, a GIS map of locations will also be produced and made publicly available, to ensure the delivery of the scheme and what it has achieved in relation to Road Safety and the wider council's policy is understood.

There is no mention of School Streets. Although this project has been halted, where there is a good case for further installations, when might these be considered? (I have a case in Cinderford about which I have contacted Graham Morgan following a new housing development approval).

It was agreed that the 2 previously installed school streets projects would run for an initial period of 12 months, after which the impact and benefit of the projects would be assessed and a view taken regarding the benefit of rolling out this approach at other schools. The review work is due to be undertaken this summer. In the meantime any concerns relating to traffic around schools should be raised in the usual way through the local member and parish, through to the Local Highway Manager, who will discuss whether any measures would be appropriate.

Grant scheme - how are communities identified for inclusion in this programme?

The focus of the Fastershire Broadband Strategy is to “increase superfast broadband coverage through a mixture of contracts and grants prioritising those premises without access to 30Mbps. Eligible households for the Digital Household Grant scheme will be those that have less than 30Mbps (download) broadband, and not covered by any public intervention or commercial investment plans.

The proposed Digital Household Grant scheme will be phased, with priority initially focused to offer a solution to those households affected by their removal from the Gigaclear contracts in December 2021. This would equate to 1,187 premises in the Forest of Dean. From late Autumn, any eligible households across the county can apply.

Similarly, how will individual homes be identified for inclusion in the new household digital grant scheme?

To help raise the profile of the new Digital Household Grant scheme, every property identified in Phase 1 will be contacted directly by GCC to outline the updated grant offer available to them. Further information will be added to the GCC website to fully explain the grant and how it might be used for eligible premises.

How will any increase of fly-tipped tyres be monitored?

The number of tyres delivered by district councils for treatment under the council's residual waste treatment contract is recorded. Weighbridge data allows fly-tipped tyres to be identified.

Will this include the cost of disposal?

Yes

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