

**MINUTES OF THE GROWTH, ENVIRONMENT AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE MEETING
HELD AT 7PM ON
WEDNESDAY, 6 NOVEMBER 2019
BOURGES / VIERSEN ROOM, TOWN HALL, PETERBOROUGH**

Committee Members Present: Councillors C. Harper (Chairman), K. Aitken, R. Brown, C. Burbage, G. Casey (Vice-Chairman), A. Ellis, Judy Fox, J. Howard, H. Skibsted, C. Wiggin, I Yasin.

Officers Present: Steve Cox – Executive Director, Place and Economy
Andy Tatt – Head of Peterborough Highway Services
Charlotte Palmer – Group Manager, Transport and Environment
Mark Sandhu – Head of Customer and Transactional Services
David Beauchamp – Democratic Services Officer
Peter Carpenter – Acting Corporate Director, Resources

Also Present: Councillor John Fox – Representing the Group Leader of the Werrington First Group
Councillor David Seaton – Cabinet Member for Finance
Keith McWilliams – Contract Manager, Skanska
Mark Bennett – Local Government Partnerships Director, Serco

22. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Aitken and Parish Councillor Keith Lievesley (Co-opted Member)

23. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING DECLARATIONS

Agenda Item 7 – Serco Annual Report 2018/19

Councillor C. Burbage declared a statutory interest due to his employer having a contractual relationship with Serco and elected to leave the room for discussion of this item.

**24. MINUTES OF THE GROWTH, ENVIRONMENT AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 10 SEPTEMBER 2019**

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 September 2019 were UNANIMOUSLY agreed as a true and accurate record.

25. CALL IN OF ANY CABINET, CABINET MEMBER OR KEY OFFICER DECISIONS

There were no requests for call-in to consider.

26. SKANSKA ANNUAL REPORT 2018/19

The report was introduced by the Head of Peterborough Highway Services, the Group Manager – Transport and Environment and the Contract Manager – Skanska. The report allowed members of the Committee to review and scrutinise the contractual performance and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the Peterborough Highway Services contract with Skanska.

The Growth, Environment and Resources Scrutiny Committee debated the report and in summary, key points raised and responses to questions included:

- Members asked if Peterborough City Council would be held accountable in the future for footway damage in light of the installation of Fibre Optic cables and reconstruction of footways by CityFibre. Officers responded that becoming a 'Gigabit City' was a positive step for the City of Peterborough and its Growth Agenda. All Council buildings were included in the scheme and it would soon be expanded to more residential areas. Regarding pavement reconstruction, the Council worked in close collaboration with Aragon Direct Services and City Fibre in accordance with the New Roads and Streetworks Act. CityFibre were obligated to re-instate footways to the Council's standards and inspections were carried out to ensure this. Future defects would be the responsibility of the Peterborough City Council.
- Members raised concerns that the City Council and City Fibre were referring complaints to each other and requested greater clarity as to who had ultimate responsibility. Officers apologised for this and stated that they were keen to ensure that CityFibre took responsibility for their works and that their Client Team had been responsive to complaints. Officers encouraged members to refer complaints to the Council to ensure that safety is maintained if the response from CityFibre was not adequate. Once the City Council intervened, they became liable again for pavements.
- Members stated that some complainants had been referred to a sub-contractor of CityFibre when attempting to contact them. Officers responded that this was concerning and would raise this issue with CityFibre if this happened again.
- Members enquired if the Council were monitoring the number of complaints and evaluating the response in order to improve performance. Officers responded that they previously had to exercise control over CityFibre when they were working in the Eastern area of the city. This led to an improvement in CityFibre's performance who were keen to protect their image in the City. A new contractor, with a proven track record, had been appointed whose performance was proving better than the existing contractor.
- Members asked if there was a planned programme of upgrades for footways and cycle ways, noting that many paths were in need of maintenance in residential areas. Officers responded that an annual programme of works was produced for the financial year to follow, which was signed off by Central Government. Specific safety issues with paths were fixed in 24hrs, 7 days on 28 days depending on their severity. Highways inspectors inspected every street with inspections taking place annually in residential areas. Streets were scored from 1 to 5. This data was input into a management system with 'condition data surveys' which helped to create the maintenance programme.
- Budget pressures meant that ad hoc maintenance only took place on pathways when required to maintain safety. The focus was instead on undertaking longer-term maintenance on entire sections of path.

- It was not always advisable to repair the 'worst first'. Not conducting preventative maintenance on moderately deteriorated pavements could result in increased costs in the future. Officers encouraged members to contact them regarding concerns about specific pavements.
- Members enquired if winter footpath treatment could be deployed in suburban shopping centres as well as the City Centre. Officers responded that Peterborough City Council were not responsible for privately owned shopping centres, only public highways although footbridges and subways were also gritted. Suburban Central Business Districts were gritted by Aragon Direct Services. The Winter Service Plan could not include extensive gritting off pathways but grit bins had been provided from 2010/2011 onwards.
- Members requested further information on Electric Vehicle charging points in Peterborough and where they were located. Officers responded that details of E.V. charging points could be found in the report. There were currently 42 public charging points in the city, 9 of which had rapid charging capability. Some charging points were not owned by the council but were still publically accessible. The increased use of zero-emissions vehicles in the city necessitated an increase in the number of charging points. Work was underway to provide chargers for taxi and private hire drivers in the most convenient locations for them.
- Charging points could be installed for a standardised price. Connecting these chargers to the national grid was more expensive however. For example, a new sub-station has been installed in the Riverside Car Park to support rapid chargers.
- Officers were investigating the installation of chargers in residential areas with no off-street parking.
- It was important to identify the issues that discouraged people from switching to electric vehicles and address these issues accordingly.
- Support was provided to local businesses via grants to install charging equipment at places of work.
- Members asked for a comparison of the performance of the 'Dragon Patcher' vs. more conventional methods of pothole repair. Officers responded that the Dragon Patcher was a good tool but not necessarily suitable for all situations. The Dragon Patcher prevented new potholes from forming as well as fixing the potholes. The use of Dragon Patchers reduces the need for manual handling and the use of jackhammers.
- A patch should not come out of a pothole but when this does occur it could be for several reasons such as it being located on a junction that experiences heavy traffic flow. It may be that conventional patching would still be required in these areas.
- The 'Dragon Patcher' was still relatively new and still being trialled. Skanska were trying to use it as extensively as possible. It was not used on 'A' Roads but was recently used in an industrial area for the first time. Weather conditions could affect the workmanship and longevity of roads patched with the 'Dragon'.
- A challenge for Councils using the Patcher was the high level of initial capital expenditure required. The Patcher was currently provided via a memorandum of understanding whereas some local authorities had decided to buy them themselves.
- Members asked if they could receive a schedule of inspections for pathways. It was agreed that these would be provided on a case-by-case basis to members upon request.
- Members asked if there was a way in which that councillors could contribute to negotiations with CityFibre, as residents were expecting them to take action to address their concerns regarding the quality of reconstructed pavements. Officers responded that they appreciated the problems and would engage with ward councillors. Officers encouraged members to send photographs of any issues with pavements to Highway Services

ACTIONS AGREED

The Growth, Environment and Resources Scrutiny Committee reviewed and commented on the report and asked that schedules of inspections for pathways be provided for individual Members upon request.

27. PORTFOLIO PROGRESS REPORT FROM THE CABINET MEMBER FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING AND COMMERCIAL STRATEGY AND INVESTMENTS

The report was introduced by the Head of Peterborough Highway Services, the Group Manager – Transport and Environment, the Head of Planning and the Executive Director – Place and Economy. The report updated the Committee on the progress of items under the responsibility of the Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Commercial Strategy and Investments.

The Growth, Environment and Resources Scrutiny Committee debated the report and in summary, key points raised and responses to questions included:

- It was noted the bullet point regarding the ‘fire damaged Toys R Us’ on page 60 of the reports pack should have been located under the ‘Employment’ heading, not ‘Leisure’.
- Members raised issues regarding disabled access from the station to Queensgate and on to the town centre. Officers responded that signage was in place to direct people from the station to the City Centre. New at-grade crossings had been installed on Bourges Boulevard with help from the Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) which took into account the requirements of the future North Westgate development. Work with RNIB to set up ‘beacons’ from the railway stations to the RNIB offices to seek help with navigating the city centre had been delayed due to difficulties getting permission from building owners. These were now in place and would help to provide guidance for blind people and would ideally include Queensgate.
- Members requested that Officers liaise with Brian Tyler of Disability Forum regarding improvements to disabled access between the station, Queensgate and the Town Centre.
- Officers stated that the Station Quarter’s role as a gateway to the city was important and could be improved upon. The North Westgate’s development’s job opportunities, parking, residential development and the improved connection between the Station and the Town Centre, would be closely aligned with the requirement for disabled accessibility.
- If the City Council was successful in winning the £25m grant under the ‘New Town’s Fund’, it would be for the Council to propose how this money was spent in consultation with residents. The focus of the fund was on regeneration, culture, enterprise, skills, bringing people together and engaging communities. Details of the consultation would be released shortly.
- Members referred to page 64 of the reports pack, praised the success of the Bikeability Scheme thus far and asked for information on how the Bikeability Scheme would be funded in the future and how many students would benefit in light of the Council’s Declaration of a Climate Emergency. Officers responded that funding for the scheme had been confirmed by Central Government although for the exact amount could not be recalled. There was a limit to how much of this

money the Council could apply for. It would be for the City Council to suggest how many pupils could be successfully put through the scheme and efforts would be made to encourage pupils to sign up. Insufficient data was available to draw conclusions on the demographics of pupils signing up but officers acknowledged the importance of addressing any gaps. Bikeability enabled children develop confidence and independent as well as develop a life - skill. The Council were also investigating whether the scheme could be offered to home-schooled pupils. The Bikeability Scheme was closely aligned with the Council's aspirations for increased active travel and there were with colleagues working on road safety matters.

- Members referred to the award-winning repair scheme to Nene Bridge on page 64 in the reports pack and asked for the status of repairs on the remaining 2 piers. Officers responded that repairs to the remaining piers were planned for the next financial year as they were on the other side of the River Nene and part of a separate operation.
- Officers had calculated the replacement cost of the bridge if the renewal work had not taken place. The work gave the structure an extra 50 years of life. The Frank Perkins Parkway was part of the Key Route Network and an 'asset management approach' was used to monitor 100 key structures. A principle inspection was carried out every 5-6 years with a more minor one taking place every 1-2 years to identify any issues early.
- It was noted that the Peterborough City Council were finalists in the British Construction Industry Awards and that the Council had also applied for a Green Apple Award for Sustainability for the work on the Nene Bridge.

ACTIONS AGREED:

The Growth, Environment and Resources Scrutiny Committee **RESOLVED** to

1. Note the report
2. Request that Officers liaise with Brian Tyler of Disability Forum regarding improvements to disabled access between the station, Queensgate and the Town Centre.

28. SERCO ANNUAL REPORT 2018/19

Councillor C. Burbage left the room at 7:52pm for discussion of this item, following his declaration of a statutory interest.

The report was introduced by the Acting Corporate Director - Resources, the Local Government Partnerships Director – Serco, the Head of Customer and Transactional Services accompanied by the Cabinet Member for Finance. The report allowed the Committee to scrutinise the performance of Serco during 2018/19 and to question both officers of the Council and the Serco Partnerships Director, Mark Bennett on this subject.

The Growth, Environment and Resources Scrutiny Committee debated the report and in summary, key points raised and responses to questions included:

- Members referred to page 73 of the reports pack and asked what measures were place to address the overspend in the Peterborough – Serco Strategic Partnership. Officers responded that the 2018/19 Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) contained a targeted £1m budget reduction to be achieved by the move to Sand Martin House and the use Chromebooks rendering other I.T. equipment redundant.

Although the expenditure was reduced, it was done from 'variable expenditure' instead of 'service director lines' so the budget could not be reduced. This has now been remedied in the Budget Reallocation set out in the September 2019 Budget Monitoring Report. In the 2020/21 financial year, the budgets had been successfully amended.

- Members requested an update on staff mobile phones. The Cabinet Member responded that the cost savings of Agile Working outweighed the costs of issuing mobile phones to all staff. A mobile phone review had now begun to identify phones that were not being used and take them back if appropriate. It was acknowledged that the article on the review published on Insite could have been clearer.
- Officers added that the mobile review had begun with Serco and Council colleagues working closely together on it. A key finding was that many members of staff had a mobile phone used to receive calls only, e.g. the out of hours service. These phones were therefore needed but would not have been recorded as having made any outgoing calls.
- Officers stated that staff mobile phone contract had been recently renewed. Phone use by staff would therefore be reviewed due to the need to upgrade phones over time as part of the contract
- Officers understood that Council mobile phones operate on a contract model based on the corporate volume of calls rather than 'pay as you go' but would verify this.
- Members requested that the Acting Corporate Director, Resources, investigates if a 'pay as you go' model could be used to reduce the operating costs of mobile phones issued to staff.
- The Cabinet Member for Finance added that he had initially been concerned about the prospect of closing the cash office, but this had been a success. The Cabinet Member and Officers praised the relationship between the Council and Serco. Officers also praised the rates of business rate collection, the deepening relationship with the Citizens Advice Bureau, 'pre-work' undertaken with customers before needing to go to Court and developing a more customer friendly environment.
- Members raised concerns regarding officers being uncontactable due to not redirecting their landlines to mobiles when out of the office. It was agreed that the Head of Customer and Transactional Services liaise with the Service Desk to investigate if there are any problems being caused by members of staff not redirecting their desk phones to their landlines when out of the office
- It was also agreed that the Cabinet Member for Finance to work with the Acting Corporate Director of Resources and the Head of Customer and Transactional Services to post a reminder to staff on Insite of the importance of redirecting desk phones to mobiles when out of the office.
- Members felt that it was important for the committee to praise well-delivered services as well as identify problems.
- Officers stated that Serco recognised the challenges the council faces and were looking at different ways of delivering services and delivering a good customer experience

ACTIONS AGREED:

The Growth, Environment and Resources Scrutiny Committee **RESOLVED** to

1. Review and Comment on this report
2. Request that the Acting Corporate Director, Resources, investigates if a 'pay as you go' model could be used to reduce the operating costs of mobile phones issued to staff. .

3. Request that the Head of Customer and Transactional Services liaise with the Service Desk to investigate if there are any problems being caused by members of staff not redirecting their desk phones to their landlines when out of the office
4. Request that the Cabinet Member for Finance to work with the Acting Corporate Director of Resources and the Head of Customer and Transactional Services to post a reminder to staff on Insite of the importance of redirecting desk phones to mobiles when out of the office.

29. PORTFOLIO PROGRESS REPORT FROM THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE

Councillor C. Burbage re-entered the meeting room at 8.08pm

The report was introduced by the Cabinet Member for Finance, accompanied by the Acting Corporate Director, Resources which updated the Scrutiny Committee on the progress of items under the responsibility of the Cabinet Member for Finance.

The Growth, Environment and Resources Scrutiny Committee debated the report and in summary, key points raised and responses to questions included:

- Members enquired about the process for the 2020/21 Budget. The Cabinet Member responded that the delay caused by the general election would allow Members to have more time to scrutinise the Budget. For the first time, the public consultation would finish before Joint Scrutiny of the Budget.
- There will still be two phases to the Budget, with Phase 1 being approved in January and Phase 2 being approved in March.
- Officers stated that it was possible that the Government's financial settlement might be known by the end of the consultation. This could be announced between December and January, although the impact of not having this information was less for unitary authorities compared with two-tier areas due to issues they face with regards to Council tax. Depending on the timing of the Government settlement, Council Tax bills could be sent out towards the end of April to allow one month's notice. Some budget items might be subject to a two-week delay although many could be worked on in the meantime. Proposals relating to staff might take longer e.g. proposals affecting staffing and Serco which might require a full three months consultation.
- Members commented that the revenue support grant had been cut by 80% since 2010 and felt that Local Government funding was inadequate.
- Members raised concerns over the £33m debt levels and the possibilities of redundancies.
- Although there was a proposed cut to Youth Services provision, Peterborough City Council would retain a budget for this service when many other local authorities had withdrawn it entirely.
- Members asked for more information on funding for consultancy work undertaken by Grant Thornton. The Cabinet Member responded that contracts were complex and lengthy (e.g. 13 volumes for Serco) and reviewing them required specialist staff that the council no longer employed. Around £14-15m of savings had been identified with minimal service cuts.
- Officers added that Grant Thornton provided a useful external perspective and provided benchmarked data from other local authorities to assess the Council's performance to ensure value for money was being delivered. Like most other Councils, over 60% Councils turnover was from contracts, e.g. Skanska and Peterborough Limited and ensuring value for money from them was important. Grant Thornton provided a more commercial viewpoint to drive down the cost

of contracted services. The Council had previously not been able to challenge costs as they should have been.

- The Cabinet Member stated that although there have been some cuts to services, majority of Councils have been able to cope with reduced expenditure and delivered services with less money. Peterborough had the eighth lowest Council Tax levels in the country, meaning that a typical household were one band lower than they would be elsewhere on average. It could therefore be argued that Peterborough residents are better off.
- Members challenged the assertion that Peterborough residents were better off, citing the proposed budget cuts and the Council's debt levels which had not been adequately addressed. Members that felt that the City Council could still have managed these challenges differently, despite the cuts in central Government funding. The Labour group would put forward ideas for the Council's budget. Concern was expressed about the level of expenditure on consultants and that there was more to setting the Budget than contract management, despite the assertion that the Council did not have sufficient in-house expertise. The Cabinet Member responded that there was a cross-party Budget working group, with opportunities provided to ask questions but the Labour Group did not take part in it.
- Members stated that the Labour group did not take part in the working group because they felt that they were not able to get the answers they sought from it and were not able to consult with other group members and it was therefore not fit for purpose.
- Members emphasised the importance of appointing the right members to the budget working group.

ACTIONS AGREED:

The Growth, Environment and Resources Scrutiny Committee **RESOLVED** to note the contents of the report.

30. GROWTH, ENVIRONMENT AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING START TIME 2020/2021

The report was introduced by the Chairman which allowed the Committee to discuss and agree the start times for its meetings from the beginning of the Municipal Year 2020-21.

Councillor Harper, seconded by Councillor Ellis proposed the Growth, Environment and Resources Scrutiny Committee continue to meet at 7pm. This was agreed **UNANIMOUSLY**.

Members commented that next year's committee might have preferred a different time. It was noted that the meetings schedule had to set in advance.

ACTIONS AGREED

The Growth, Environment and Resources Scrutiny Committee **RESOLVED** to commence meetings at 7pm in the 2020/21 Municipal Year.

30. MONITORING SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Democratic Services Officer introduced the report which enabled the committee to monitor and track the progress of recommendations made to the Executive or Officers at previous meetings.

There were no comments by Members.

ACTIONS AGREED

The Adults and Communities Scrutiny Committee considered the report and **RESOLVED** to note the responses from Cabinet Members and Officers to recommendations made at previous meetings as attached in Appendix 1 to the report.

31. FORWARD PLAN OF EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The Democratic Services Officer introduced the report which invited members to consider the most recent version of the Forward Plan of Executive Decisions and identify any relevant items for inclusion within the Committee's work programme or to request further information.

In response to a member's query, the Democratic Services Officer clarified that the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group to review fly-tipping had been adopted by Cabinet in full and that this Committee would receive 6 and 12-monthly reports on the implementation of the Group's recommendations and these were on the work programme.

ACTIONS AGREED:

The Growth, Environment and Resources Scrutiny Committee **RESOLVED** to consider the current Forward Plan of Executive decisions.

32. WORK PROGRAMME 2019/20

The Democratic Services Officer introduced the item which gave members the opportunity to consider the Committee's Work Programme for 2019/20 and discuss possible items for inclusion.

In relation to the fly-tipping working group proposals, it was noted that commercial vehicles would be allowed 10-12 visits to the Household Recycling Centre. If they used the site excessively, they would be classified as a commercial user. This an area the Committee could review in the future

Members expressed concern that they had not been aware of changes being made as a result of the Task and Finish Group's recommendations, e.g. updated signage at the HRC.

The future work programme would be discussed in more detail at the next Group Representatives Meeting.

Council Ellis requested additional information on the Climate Emergency working group and whether it would report to this committee. It was agreed that the Democratic

Services Officer would provide additional information to the members concerned after the meeting.

The Chairman added that he was keen to have less items on the work programme in order to scrutinise the remaining items more effectively, with three reports per meeting being an ideal level. There were also concerns that reports were too long and he would therefore aim for Group Representatives meeting to be used to provide a steer to officers on what members would like to see in the report.

ACTIONS AGREED

The committee noted the work programme for 2019/20 and it was agreed that the Democratic Services Officer would provide additional information regarding the Climate Emergency Working group to the Member requesting it.

33. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

18 December 2019 – Joint Scrutiny of the Budget

8 January 2020 – Growth, Environment and Resources Scrutiny Committee

Chairman
7.00pm– 8.39pm