



## **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**4.30 p.m. - 6.40 p.m.**

**24 June 2010**

Present: Councillors Stephenson (Chair), Wiltshire (Vice-Chair), Blower, Bradford, Driver, Fairbairn, Jago, Jeraj, Little (A), and Ramsay

Apologies:

### **1. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED** to approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 20 May, 2010, subject to the addition of Councillor Little (A) to the list of apologies for absence.

#### **Quarterly Performance Data**

**RESOLVED** to ask the Scrutiny Officer to remind the Deputy Chief Executive of the Committee's requests for background information on the performance data used to measure the performance of the Customer Contact Team.

### **2. WORK PROGRAMME**

Members' considered the current work programme which had been circulated.

During discussion, Councillor Ramsay suggested that the Committee should consider the effort of changes to the Council's procurement strategy and how these had been implemented. The Scrutiny Officer said that the procurement strategy had only recently been adopted by the Council and suggested that the Committee should review the implementation after a period of six months.

Councillor Little proposed that the Committee should examine the implementation of the new "blue collar" contracts to Connaught and suggested that managers from the company should be invited to explain how the problems encountered within the first quarter, which had involved a considerable amount of case work for many Members of the Council, were to be resolved. Councillor Driver said that a number of the problems experienced within the first quarter had been due to outstanding issues with the previous contractor and suggested that these should be considered in addition to the problems experienced since the letting of the new contracts.

A member suggested that a further meeting of the Committee should be held towards the end of July to consider the implementation of the Connaught contracts, subject to questions to the contractors being scoped in advance.

The Chair referred to the ongoing need for questioning training to be provided to Members. It had not been possible to provide a joint training session with Broadland District Council but suggested that the Council could organise its own session and share costs with other authorities who would be invited to participate.

During further discussion Members proposed that the item on Greater Norwich Development Partnership should be considered at the October meeting along with a report on the implications of the coalition government spending review.

The Chair then referred to the motion on student tuition fees which had been passed in full Council and asked whether the Committee would wish to examine the effect of tuition fees on student debt in the city. Members were sceptical that the Committee could provide added value to this issue and suggested that it did not qualify within the PICK analysis as an issue which would warrant consideration.

**RESOLVED** to -

- (1) approve the Scrutiny Committee work programme as set out in the report subject to:
  - (a) an additional meeting to be held in July to consider the implementation of the new "blue collar" contracts award to Connaught;
  - (b) the items on Greater Norwich Development Partnership and an additional item on the implications of the government spending review to be considered at the October meeting;
- (2) ask the Scrutiny Officer to write the Student Union to inform them of the Committee's decision not to consider student tuition fees within its work programme;

- (3) agree that the work programme be considered as the first main item following approval of the minutes at each meeting.

### **3. CONDITION OF ROADS IN NORWICH**

[Andy Watt, Head of Transportation, Andy Ellis, Highways Team Leader (Norwich City Council), Andrew Nicholson (May Gurney) and Kevin Townly (Norfolk County Council) attended the meeting for this item]

The Head of Transportation introduced the report and answered members' questions.

Discussion ensued during which Members expressed concern that no records were kept of the history of pothole issues reported to the Council and about the overall distribution of repair funds within the city. The Highways Team Leader said that records were kept of pothole repairs which had failed. He referred to the different methods of road repairs including the use of asphalt which was cost effective, helped maintain the roads to a satisfactory condition and ensured that limited financial resources were distributed throughout the network. The Head of Transportation referred to the Highways Asset Management Plan which sought to balance the requirements to maintain main and minor roads across the county. Councillor Driver asked whether pressure was put on contractors to ensure that only cheaper materials were used for repairs. Andrew Nicholson said that it was always the intention to obtain agreement about the quality of repairs and contractors would work with the authorities to investigate the use of new repair materials.

Members then asked a number of questions concerning the inspection regime for the road network. The Head of Transportation said that inspections were made of entire roads which took into account all issues affecting individual roads. He referred to the requirement that officer time should only account for 5½% of the cost of repairs. It was always the aim to ensure that permanent repairs were carried out, depending on the availability of contractors' plant and machinery and that savings could be achieved in the long term if repairs were long lasting.

Councillor Little expressed concern that a complete record of pothole repairs was not kept which would help to assess the overall condition of roads. The Highways Team Leader said that the old repairs ordering system did not allow for the data to be kept in this way but the highways inspection regime enabled the overall condition of roads to be considered. Members expressed concern that it was not possible to respond to members of the public on individual potholes reported. The Highways Team Leader said that officers dealt with reports reactively as well as proactively and specific reports of problems were inspected immediately. Members considered, however, that the overall collation of information on reports of problems with the road network and feedback mechanism needed to be improved.

Further discussion ensued during which Members asked a number of questions concerning the re-negotiation of the Highways Agency Agreement, the cost of claims arising from damage to roads, the methods of surface dressing which were unpopular in many areas and the overall condition of Unthank Road compared to radial roads in that area. The Head of Transportation said that the Highways Agency Agreement was currently under review and issues concerning the reporting and the programme of repairs were being considered as part of that review. This would

include the proportion of costs allocated to officer time. The costs of claims arising from damage caused by problems with specific roads were dealt with by the County Council's Insurance Officers. The Head of Transportation recognised that there were problems reported as a result of the surface dressing used but it was a cost effective method of ensuring that a wide range of the network was maintained on a regular basis. With regard to the condition of Unthank Road, it was the case that roads used by a large number of vehicles, including buses, received the largest amount of damage compared to surrounding roads in their areas.

The Chair then referred to the effect of damaged roads on cyclists and asked whether any assessment of use by cyclists on specific roads was made. The Head of Transportation said that the Highways Asset Management Plan did take account of cyclists and the road inspection regime would assess the types of traffic using specific roads. Councillor Bradford suggested that use of roads by certain types of vehicles should be considered where the condition of the surface was not adequate. The Head of Transportation said that weight limits were used but there was always a need to ensure access to premises and any additional restriction on certain types of vehicles would be difficult to enforce.

Councillor Fairbairn expressed concern about the movement of financial resources between various budget heads and asked whether priorities were being neglected as a result. The Head of Transportation said that the County Council allocated limited financial resources to the Highways budget and this needed to be prioritised within each financial year according to need. However, there was some use of reserves in supporting funding, particularly during severe weather conditions such as those encountered in the previous winter period.

Councillor Wiltshire then asked about the co-ordination of utility repairs within the road repair programme. The Highways Team Leader said that reinstatements to roads were inspected following each of the repairs and that Utilities would be liable for any further repairs required within two years.

Councillor Little asked whether comparative statistics from other authorities with regard to road repairs were available. The Head of Transportation said that comparative road condition statistics could be provided as a benchmarking exercise. Kevin Townly explained the differing levels of asset funding within the road network depending on the classification of roads.

[Councillor Blower left the meeting at this point].

**RESOLVED** to -

- (1) ask the Executive Member for Sustainable City Development to review the recording mechanisms for reporting damage to roads including providing feedback to the public;
- (2) ask the Head of Transportation to -
  - (a) consider the use of roads by cyclists as part of the inspection regime for the road network;

- (b) provide comparative information on road conditions in liaison with other local authorities;
- (c) report back on the results of the trials of new surfacing materials and other issues raised at this meeting, in March or April 2011.

#### **4. FUTURE BURIAL PROVISION IN NORWICH**

(Michael Stephenson, Public Protection Manager, attended the meeting for this item).

The Public Protection Manager presented the report of the Task and Finish Group. He said that he had received information that a portion of land to the north of Norwich was being developed as additional burial space and this could have implications on the recommendations outlined in the report.

Discussion ensued during which Councillor Wiltshire proposed that the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group should be deferred until further information on the proposed development was available. Councillor Bradford congratulated the Group on the detailed report and suggested that a recommendation within Option 1 in the report concerning the maximisation of existing burial space could be recommended to the Executive and the other options reviewed at a future meeting. Councillor Ramsay considered it was important to be provided with details of costs of services to be charged for the provision of the proposed new burial space. Councillor Little also expressed concern about the proposals concerning management of closure outlined in Option 1 in the recommendations.

#### **RESOLVED -**

- (1) recommend the maximisation of existing grave space in each cemetery as detailed in Option 1 within the report;
- (2) defer consideration of other aspects of the report to the next meeting.

CHAIR