

**CORPORATE INFRASTRUCTURE AND REGULATORY SERVICES SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

28 March 2024

Present:-

Councillors A Dewhirst (Chair), P Bullivant (Vice-Chair), M Asvachin, J Brook, R Chesterton, P Crabb, J Hodgson, C Slade, R Radford, M Squires and J Trail BEM

Apologies:-

Councillors Y Atkinson, J Berry and I Roome

Members attending in accordance with Standing Order 25

Councillor Hughes (SO25(1)) and Leaver (SO25(2))

*virtual (non-voting)

* 156 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest from Members of the Committee.

* 157 **Minutes**

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the ordinary and budget meetings held on 25 January 2024 be signed as a correct record.

* 158 **Items Requiring Urgent Attention**

There was no matter raised as a matter of urgency.

* 159 **Public Participation**

There were no oral representations from Members of the Public.

* 160 **Scrutiny Work Programme**

The Head of Scrutiny updated the Committee as to the work programme.

RESOLVED that the following items be added:

- Deaf Awareness (Masterclass).

* **161** **Community Policing**

The Chair welcomed the Acting Chief Constable and Chief Superintendent to the meeting who gave an overview of community and operational policing, both nationally and in Devon.

The Police representatives in summary reported on:-

- the 3C's: Competence, Compassion and Common Sense approach at the heart of community policing;
- a clear and structured delivery plan, with plans to deliver a balanced budget and robust medium term financial strategy;
- Devon and Cornwall's strong resource base but with a number of newly appointed Officers requiring training and support. There was a national shortage of detectives, including locally so a more flexible approach to their work allocation and deployment was proving positive;
- assessment and evaluation of performance, focussing on the three areas for improvement required by HMICFRS following being placed in "engaged" status (special measures) since October 2022. One area of improvement had been discharged due to the progress made. Progress was being made against the two other areas for improvement: recording crime and answering 999 and 101 calls, but with work to do regarding responding to 101 telephone calls;
- backlogs in considering renewal and new firearms licence requests had significantly reduced and the risk was being managed safely;
- cases were proceeding within the criminal justice system in a more timely manner;
- violence against women and girls and domestic abuse was a focus;
- close working with Devon County Council particularly in child safeguarding;
- reopening of frontline police offices review;
- neighbourhood policing teams, with an emphasis on being visible and connected to local communities;
- centralised investment of public complaints with learning from feedback;
- focus on police conduct, culture and criminal activity and early recommendations from the Angiolini Inquiry;

- national risk and political uncertainty;
- national accountability review and use of force and firearms by Officers;
- local priorities included response times; domestic abuse; and effective/competent investigation of crime.

Members' range of questions included:-

- risks to Devon's young people, including safeguarding and exploitation;
- frontline Offices;
- policing levels in North Devon;
- positive effect of community cafes;
- Right Care, Right Person, a national programme working with the NHS and other partners in supporting the mental health of very vulnerable persons; and
- reporting of data.

The Chair thanked the Acting Chief Constable and Chief Superintendent and welcomed working closely with the County Council on all round community issues (as well as children's services matters).

* 162 **Performance of Utilities on the Highway and Changes to Regulations**

The Committee considered the Report of the Director of Climate Change, Environment and Transport (CET/24/21), introduced by the Cabinet Member for Highway Management, giving the current position and developments since this Committee's Masterclass presentation on the Coordination of Utility Companies Works and Reinstatements in March 2022, attended by two utility companies, Southwest Water and Wales & West.

Despite the increased work volumes and changes in legislation as detailed in the Report, the Council continued to fulfil its statutory network management function whilst remaining abreast of wider developments across the profession and ensuring it was ready for future challenges.

In response to Members' discussion the Director of Climate Change, Environment and Transport advised that:-

- Members' frustrations with utility works on Devon's highways were recognised;
- the County Council's powers were limited in managing and mitigating utility company works disruption, particularly when utilities were responding to emergency works. In such cases road diversions were not always the most appropriate route;

- the County Council had limited power to specify how and timescales for works, but did challenge and coordinate checks with other works in any location/area;
- the assistance/information that Network Enforcement Officers could give to local Members over local utility works concerns;
- the relatively low level of fines that could be imposed on large organisation utility companies;

Whilst not specifically related to this agenda item, there was concern raised generally of damage to property, heritage properties/settlements and the highway from large vehicles (including agricultural) and lack of powers for redress; and that more proactive action should be taken to encourage landowners to take a responsible approach to drainage, vegetation etc that could adversely affect the highway;

It was **MOVED** by Councillor Dewhirst, **SECONDED** by Councillor Bullivant and

RESOLVED that:

- (a) the Neighbourhood Highways Officers and Network Enforcement Officers be thanked for their hard work, responsiveness, and commitment to maintaining the highways and keeping Councillors informed; and
- (b) that through bi-annual performance meetings, there should be a robust focus on improving the performance of the utilities companies, and that the Committee are informed on the actions taken to improve performance.

* **163** **Highways Performance Dashboard - Winter 2023/24**

The Committee considered the Report of the Director of Climate Change, Environment and Transport (CET/24/22), introduced by the Cabinet Member for Highway Management, regarding Planned and Reactive Maintenance: Potholes and Drainage, updated Performance Dashboard giving an overview of the performance of the Highways and Traffic Management Team over the winter period.

In relation to safety defects (potholes), Officers reported on the rapid deterioration of the highway network, given last winter's and this winter's particular weather conditions affecting what was now a very fragile network with little/no resilience against poor weather.

The expertise and analysis by Devon's materials laboratory assisted Officers in continually reassessing best practice, new technology and specialist plant.

A record number of potholes were being reported with 97% of public reports via Devon's web portal enabling safety inspector to triage reports, check location and any duplicate reporting. Gangs were deployed according to work schedules to optimise their efficiency, balanced against timescales and liability.

Members' discussion included:- examples of common themes of defects brought to their attention; road surfaces and repairs affecting motorcyclists; longevity of varying repair methods; further development of the public reporting systems.

(b) In relation to the remaining dashboard report, Members raised issues around:-

- blocked piping within cleaned gullies;
- tree safety management figures; and
- the reporting of patching.

It was **MOVED** by Councillor Dewhirst, **SECONDED** by Councillor Bullivant and

RESOLVED:-

(a) that the Cabinet Member for Highway Management be asked, in partnership with the Chair of this Committee, to write to the Department for Transport to raise:

(i) the concerns and risks arising from the Councils lack of authority in respect the utilities work on the highways, and the need for greater controls to ensure the safety and standard of the network; and

(ii) the lack of resources available to maintain the network to the appropriate standard;

(b) that as part of the Highways Performance Dashboard, the Committee receive information on safety defects including: the number of safety defects, the number of re-visits and the cause of defects; and

(c) that the Committee establish a Spotlight Review with a focus on Safety Defects on the highway (potholes).

* 164 **Report of the Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Standing Overview Group: Local Transport Plan**

The Committee considered the Report of the Standing Overview Group: Local Transport Plan, 31 January 2024.

Members' discussion included some dilemma on the best locations for residential Electric Vehicle (EV) charging points, whilst recognising that EV development was at a relatively early stage.

It was **MOVED** by Councillor Bullivant, **SECONDED** by Councillor Dewhirst and

RESOLVED that:-

(a) the interdependency of LTP4 with the Electric Vehicle Strategy be made explicit;

(b) clarification of phrases such as 'Active Travel' be included within the strategy; and

(c) a specific focus is made on an integrated programme of travel within the priority "easier travel."

* 165 **Future Meetings**

Please use link below for County Council Calendar of Meetings:

<http://democracy.devon.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?Committeeld=175>

***DENOTES DELEGATED MATTER WITH POWER TO ACT**

The Meeting started at 10.00 am and finished at 1.55 pm