

Minutes of the meeting of the ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT SELECT COMMITTEE held on TUESDAY 21 OCTOBER 2014 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillor P Geary (Chair)
Councillors Bint, Cannon, E Gifford (Vice-Chair), Green, McPake (Vice-Chair), Petchey and Wilson

Officers: S Heap (Committee Service and Scrutiny Manager)

Public: 2

ET09 MINUTES

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Select Committee held on 30 July 2014 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record

ET10 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

Councillor P Geary disclosed a personal interest in Item 5 (Flood and Water Risk Management) as an owner of land which was currently subject to planned flood alleviation works.

ET11 FLOOD AND WATER RISK MANAGEMENT

Witnesses:

Councillor Legg (Cabinet Member for Public Realm) P Burrows (Environment Agency), J Glerum (Anglian Water), A Gosling (Environment Agency), J Oldfield (Internal Drainage Board) and J Williamson (Senior Planner – Milton Keynes Council)

(Councillor E Gifford [Vice-Chair] in the Chair.)

The Committee received a presentation which introduced the issues associated with flood and risk management from Williamson the Council's Senior Planner with responsibility for flood and water management issues. The presentation outlined responsibilities as defined by legislation, together with the various projects and areas of work currently being undertaken by the Council in conjunction with partners, which included, the preparation of, the Milton Keynes Local Flood Risk Management Strategy; Flood Risk Asset Register, Plan:MK (the new Local Plan); a Surface Water Management Plan for the Borough; local guidance on the Water Framework Directive; and various drainage schemes.

The Committee also heard from the representatives of the Environment Agency, Anglian Water and the Internal Drainage Board.

Mr Burrows and Mr Gosling of the Environment Agency referred to the strong partnership working between the various agencies, most notably over the Anglian Region River Basin Management Plan. Reference was also made to the process the Agency applied in deciding to contribute towards particular projects and the programme of works which had been established with the Internal Drainage Board.

The Environment Agency representatives also referred that the levels of partnership working provided a good model which could be followed in other local authority areas.

Mr Glerum of Anglian Water referred to the schemes being undertaken in conjunction with the Council. He also referred to the Company's Business Plan 2015/20, which had been submitted to OfWat for approval and the funds made available by Anglian Water for partnership working.

Mr Oldfield from the Internal Drainage Board outlined the Board's responsibilities, making particular reference to the Board's Memorandum of Understanding with the Milton Keynes Parks Trust on working arrangements, which included work to Broughton and Loughton brooks, and the use of monies available from the Milton Keynes Tariff to manage sustainable drainage systems.

In answer to questions to the witnesses, the Committee noted that:

- (a) work was ongoing in the Council to ensure that the future growth of Milton Keynes does not impact upon flood risk, taking account of potential climate change issues. With regard to flood prevention measures, policies and infrastructure were being planned to meet the needs of an expanding Milton Keynes, which included new attenuation features and the expansion of linear parks. Also Flood Defence monies were being used to assess current resilience and assess future needs. It was recognised that brooks and balancing lakes were key flood alleviation measures which needed to be maintained and kept silt free;
- (b) the Environment Agency was currently scoping a Flood Risk Management Study which would identify where potential risks existed and provide an opportunity to provide reassurance that future challenges would be addressed. The particular risk of surface water flooding following heavy rainfall in some areas was recognised by the Environment Agency representatives;
- (c) the Environment Agency was also aware of the considerable interest in flooding issues and had a programme in place to ensure that its assets were in good condition, although the Agency recognised that there was a funding gap in the ongoing maintenance of some key assets. However, the Agency aimed to have 97% of its assets in top condition by 31 March 2015;

- (d) the Council had an inspection regime in place for highway and drainage assets, which was supported by a maintenance programme, to try and ensure all would be able to cope with most levels of rainfall;
- (e) while the potential conflict between keeping brooks clear to allow the unimpeded flow of water and brooks being an important wildlife habitat was recognised, the had not been necessarily taken account of in flood alleviation planning;
- (f) the Council's Highways Team were responsible for road gully maintenance, while Anglian water were responsible for the sewers;
- (g) Anglian Water had an annual maintenance programme for its various assets, which it shared with the Council. The programme was currently being digitised so that it could be included with the Company's Asset Register. While certain elements of the programme were available to the public on-line, other elements could only be viewed at the Company's offices due to the form of the documents;
- (h) an element of Anglian Water's maintenance work was reactive due to the need to respond to unanticipated breakdowns in the infrastructure;
- (i) if the public was unsure who to call in the event of a flooding incident, the Council's Environmental Services Helpline would be able to notify the correct authorities to ensure situations were dealt with as quickly as possible.

The Committee also heard from Councillor Legg, the responsible Cabinet member, who stressed how seriously the Council took drainage issues. The new Highways Contractor would be implementing a programme to clean all gullies within the first year of the contract and would then put in place an ongoing maintenance programme. Also a new mobile 'phone app' would soon be available to make reporting highway defects easier and it was also intended that response time to reports would be improved.

RESOLVED –

1. That the Cabinet Advisory Group for Planning Matters be requested to ensure that the management of flood and water risk, together with biodiversity issues are emphasised in Plan-MK.
2. That officers be requested to invite the Canal and River Trust, as a Responsible Body, to be involved in the preparation of the Assets Strategy and its assets included in the assets register.
3. That Cabinet be requested to ensure that there are no reduction in budgets related to flood and water risk management.

4. That the Service Director (Public Realm Services) and Anglian Water be requested to ensure that there is a regular inspection of highways drainage assets in order to minimise the risk of surface water flooding.
5. That members of the Committee be notified of the arrangements in place for inspection of highways drainage assets by the Council and Anglian Water
6. That the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee be requested to include a review of Partnership working' and the interface with the public in the Select Committee's future work programme.
7. That it be noted that 95% the Environment Agency's Assets were currently serviceable and that it was expected that this would be 97% by 31 March 2015.
8. That the witnesses be thanked for their important contributions and commitment to working with the Council.
9. That the digital mapping initiative to record the drainage assets of all Risk Management Authorities with responsibilities across the Borough be commended and encouraged.
10. That Anglian Water be encouraged to make all information relevant to the public, particularly its maintenance programme, available on-line wherever possible.

(Councillor P Geary disclosed a personal interest in this item and retired to the public gallery taking no part in the discussion, or voting thereon.)

ET12 PERSONAL INJURY COLLISIONS DATA AND TRENDS

Witnesses:

Councillors Legg (Cabinet Member for Public Realm) and O'Neill (Cabinet Member for Housing and Regeneration), N Biggs (Thames Valley Police), R Brinklow (Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire and Rescue Service), A Carden (Road Safety Team Leader – Milton Keynes Council) and K Paradine (Senior Road Safety Engineer – Milton Keynes Council)

(Councillor P Geary [Chair] in the Chair.)

The Committee was informed that following a recent spate of fatal road traffic collisions, combined with an increase in collisions since 2010 and an increase in the severity of collisions on higher speed roads, a comprehensive review of personal injury collision trends in Milton Keynes was being undertaken.

The Committee considered an early draft of the report on the review to be submitted to Cabinet in January 2015 which was supported by a presentation from the Council's Road Safety Team Leader and the

Senior Road Safety Engineer, which provided an assessment of all personal injury collisions that had occurred in the four year period 2010 to 2013, specifically with regard to:

- (a) where the collisions had occurred on the highway network (at a junction / single or dual carriageway);
- (b) why the collisions had happened (speed, poor judgement, driver error, road design);
- (c) when the collisions had happened (time of year); and
- (d) who was involved in the collisions (age, gender and home address).

The Council's Road Safety Team Leader also referred to the availability of resources to undertake the review and the need to make sure that it was adequately resourced.

It was reported to the Committee that the Council had a statutory duty under Section 39 Road Traffic Act 1988 to investigate the causes of road traffic collisions, prepare and carry out a programme of measures designed to prevent them in the future and to promote road safety, which currently included the dissemination of information and advice relating to the use of the roads and providing practical training to road users.

The Committee also heard from N Biggs (Thames Valley Police), R Brinklow (Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire and Rescue Service), Councillors Legg (Cabinet Member for Public Realm) and O'Neill (Cabinet Member for Housing and Regeneration).

N Biggs (Thames Valley Police) highlighted the number of accidents involving vehicles turning right across a dual carriageway and the challenge provided by vehicle speeds. Mr Biggs also expressed the view that in a number of cases some form of engineering intervention, rather than better signage, was required.

Councillor Legg (Cabinet Member for Public Realm) recognised the need to balance road safety with the many benefits provided by the Grid Road Network and that a combination of approaches would be necessary to improve road safety. Councillor Legg identified young drivers and riders of two wheeled vehicles as being at high risk of being involved in a collision and that the majority of collisions appeared to occur at dual carriageway right turn junctions.

Councillor O'Neill (Cabinet Member for Housing and Regeneration) and Chair of the SaferMK Crime and Community Safety Partnership reported the Partnership's concerns about the impact of the increase in road traffic collisions in Milton Keynes which appeared to be against the National trend and the need to keep situation under review and to have a wide debate on potential solutions.

The Committee also heard from a member of the public who supported the review and suggested that speed limits should be lowered as this would reduce the number and the severity of collisions. He also suggested that the impact on bus services and car ownership of any changes to speed limits should form part of the review.

Members of the Committee made a number of comments which included that:

- (a) the data needed to be in a form which allowed easy direct comparison;
- (b) education was a key element in addressing road safety, which could be potentially targeted at areas based on post codes collected as part of the accident statistics and part of which could be encouraging slower driving;
- (c) consideration at the Sustainable Transport and Road Safety Forum would be useful and would mean that parish and town councils and key user groups would have an opportunity to input;
- (d) population growth should be factored in to the review;
- (e) the impact of vegetation at junctions and how it was managed should be considered as part of the review;
- (f) the practicality of closing right turns across grid roads should be looked at; and
- (g) the analysis needed to be more detailed and include national comparisons.

In answer to questions to the witnesses, the Committee noted that:

- (a) the data available did not give details of contributory factors to collisions, for example mobile 'phone usage at the time of the collision;
- (b) road safety issues would be considered as part of the PlanMK process and if it was possible to reduce car usage the likelihood of collisions would be reduced;
- (c) the Road Safety Team made recommendations on all highway designs and in so doing considered all road users, including pedestrians;
- (d) in respect of pedestrian fatalities the majority were as a result of crossing grid road carriageways rather than using bridges or underpasses which would often require pedestrians to take longer routes;
- (e) where a lower speed limit had been introduced on grid roads the majority of motorists observed the lower speed limit and while the fatalities had reduced the number of collisions had remained reasonably constant;

- (f) it would be necessary to undertake further studies to ascertain whether traffic flow would be improved by reduced speed. However, as congestion in Milton Keynes increased the average speed would reduce and therefore it was likely that the nature of collisions would change with there being more low speed collisions;
- (g) the Fire and Rescue Service, the Police and the Council all worked closely together and were all represented on the Safer MK Partnership. The Partners shared good practice which had led to some innovative approaches to addressing road safety issues. However, it was suggested that initiatives being undertaken by individual Fire and Rescue Service Watches could benefit from closer working with the Council; and
- (h) a full speed limit review would require a considerable amount of data to be collected if an accurate assessment of the impact on the nature / type of collisions and journey times was to be possible.

RESOLVED –

1. That the review of Personal Injury Collisions Data and Trends be supported.
2. That the need to progress the review and implement any findings be recognised.
3. That data should be presented in a uniform way which allows easy comparisons and also includes comparisons with other areas.
4. That the Cabinet be requested to ensure that adequate resources, including staff resources, are available to support both the review and the findings of the review.
5. That officers be encouraged to support any recommendations for change with detailed reasons and data, in-order to lead a public debate which enables the public to understand the reasons for that change.
6. That officers be encouraged to review examples of good practice to inform any recommended solutions.
7. That the Cabinet Advisory Group for Planning Matters, in respect of Plan-MK and the Development Control Committee, as appropriate, be requested to ensure:
 - (a) that adequate provision is made in any new development for safe cycling, walking and public transport use, including the safe crossing of Grid Roads pedestrians and cyclists; and
 - (b) Design of road junctions which helps minimise road traffic collisions.

8. That the responsible Cabinet member and the Chief Executive be encouraged to look to improve working with the other statutory authorities to ensure that limited resources are used in the most efficient manner.
9. That current road safety initiatives be supported and officers be requested to implement, as soon as possible, new initiatives such as the 'Get in Gear' Driver Programme and the 'Better Biker' Programme.

ET13 ESTABLISHING AN ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT SUB-GROUP – HIGHWAYS CONTRACT

At its last meeting on 30 July 2015 (Minute ET06 refers), the Select Committee agreed to establish an Environment and Transport Sub-Group to consider issues relating to the Highways contract, in particular, monitoring and implementation of the contract.

I was reported that Councillors Bint, Cannon and L Gifford were appointed to the Sub-Group and the Group's initial meeting was in the process of being scheduled.

ET14 RESPONSE FROM CABINET - LANDSCAPING / GRASS CUTTING CONTRACT

The Committee noted that at its last meeting on 30 July 2014, it had agreed to recommend to Cabinet that:

- “1. That the responsible Cabinet Member be requested to consider explicit Member discussions on any possible moves towards less manicuring of public spaces and any move towards having smaller areas of higher quality public spaces.
2. That the Cabinet and officers be requested to develop a protocol to enable better public communication and prior information for Ward Councillors on any forthcoming work that might distress the public.
3. That the Cabinet be requested to develop and adopt a Tree Strategy for management of trees in Milton Keynes, including Central Milton Keynes”.

It was reported that Councillor Legg, the responsible Cabinet Member, in response to the referral, had indicated that a review would be carried out by the new Service Director (Public Realm Services) into better methods of delivering well maintained public open space for the areas that the Council was responsible for. Councillor Legg had also indicated that a tree survey would be carried out as a first step of a proposed Tree Strategy.

THE CHAIR CLOSED THE MEETING AT 10.15 PM