

MEETING:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
DATE:	Tuesday, 9 October 2018
TIME:	2.00 pm
VENUE:	Council Chamber, Barnsley Town Hall

MINUTES

Present

Councillors Ennis OBE (Chair), Bowler, G. Carr, Clarke, Franklin, Frost, Gollick, Daniel Griffin, Hampson, Hayward, W. Johnson, Makinson, Phillips, Pickering, Pourali, Sheard, Tattersall, Williams and Wright together with co-opted members Pauline Gould and Kate Morrill

24 Apologies for Absence - Parent Governor Representatives

No apologies for absence were received in accordance with Regulation 7(6) of the Parent Governor Representatives (England) Regulations 2001.

25 Declarations of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interest

There were no declarations of pecuniary or non-pecuniary interest.

26 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 11th September 2018 were approved as a true and accurate record.

27 Highways & Engineering Services Future Council Improvement Review

The following witnesses were welcomed to the meeting:

- Councillor Robert Frost, Cabinet Support Member for the Place Directorate
- Matt Gladstone, Executive Director – Place
- Matt Bell, Head of Highways, Engineering & Transportation, Place Directorate
- Rachel Tyas, Head of Transformation, Environment & Transport, Place Directorate
- Ian Wilson, Group Manager, Highway Delivery, Highways and Engineering

Cllr Frost introduced this item and explained that a comprehensive Future Council Improvement Review (FCIR) has been instigated to ensure the Highways and Engineering Service remains efficient and effective in its operation and in doing so seeks to modernise and improve the delivery of every element of the service. It was highlighted that the majority of front line posts will be unaffected as the focus will be on delayering and reorganising management although some existing vacancies will be offered up as savings.

In the ensuing discussion, and in response to detailed questioning, the following matters were highlighted:

It was felt that the report does not do justice to the depth and breadth of the review as it represents a twelve month programme of work. Employees and Trade Unions were fully involved in the review, with regular meetings and numerous opportunities to put forward their views around what needed to change, working patterns etc. The public have been involved through the National Highways & Transport Network (NHT) public satisfaction survey, which indicated that maintenance of the asset is the primary concern. It was acknowledged that the public need to be more involved and a Twitter feed has been launched as a conduit to get better information out to the public and to receive information back in. The possibility of customer forums and increased use of social media for pothole reporting and winter service issues is being explored.

A Member asked if it would be possible to put measures in place to minimise the disruption caused by utility and broadband companies repeatedly digging up roads. It was highlighted that works with statutory undertakers are coordinated wherever possible, and new software is being used to co-ordinate this more effectively but the fact remains that contractors have a legal right to do this work and it can be difficult to manage. There are also associated budget implications. Regular meetings take place with bodies such as Yorkshire Water and Northern Powergrid and sub-contractors to identify areas of conflict which are then discussed further to resolve and rationalise. The working relationship is generally very good. It would be possible to serve notice when problems are being experienced but this has not yet been necessary. There is a fine balance between pushing hard whilst wanting to also encourage economic growth.

The improvements will deliver value for money. Although there is pressure to generate revenue savings, this will be done whilst improving service delivery using reduced resources. The service wants to deliver services to be proud of with positive feedback from the public and improved efficiency through use of technology.

The review will deliver improvements through: galvanising the service, linking officers together in close proximity with a clear steer; effective use of social media and internal communications to positively raise the profile of the service and building a relationship with Elected Members. It was highlighted that there is a need to use Member influence with the public and to build a more transparent relationship. It was pointed out that the value of the asset is in the region of £2.1 billion, with £14 million needed annually for maintenance.

In terms of risks, staff buy-in and commitment is needed together with a need to align with the Council's vision and values. Ambitious development schemes such as Junction 36 are a massive opportunity but there is a risk that if they are not delivered, City Regions will not continue to fund them, which has happened in Doncaster with a project which was behind schedule. Barnsley does have a good track record in terms of delivery but there is always an element of risk.

In terms of impact on staff, it was reported that staff retention is not an issue, although more than 60% of staff are aged over 50 and will be retiring in the near future. Succession planning is essential and an apprenticeship scheme is also being introduced to plan for this. Better links need to be established with colleges and universities but this will take time to establish. The HS2 project will snap up the majority of engineering graduate over the next few years and there is a shortage of

civil engineers. At the moment the service is carrying vacancies at 15-20% vacancies. It is envisaged that in the new structure this will be no more than 5%.

It was felt that communication between Members and the service has improved somewhat over the last three years. A mobile technology solution introduced around 5 years ago was effective initially but very rapidly became outdated, with issues arising with the supplier and SAP integration (workflow). Currently alternatives are being explored but there will be a significant cost and there are also capacity issues. This will be picked up again at some point but for the time being the current system does provide management data and performance feedback.

The Council uses four main subcontractors to provide services no longer provided in-house with agreed specifications, milestones and payments. If quality is poor, the job will not be signed off. 95% of annual maintenance work is carried out by the Council with subcontractors used for specialist work. Concern was expressed that the Council is often blamed for poor workmanship when the work has been done by subcontractors. Members were advised to direct such concerns to the insurance section.

Work permits are required for main roads, outside schools and where there are known engineering problems. If a permit is in place contractors are able to do the work under a statutory undertaking. The work is checked throughout the process and action is taken if any problems arise if the service is made aware of them but it is not possible to monitor every scheme of work. Members were advised to send any highways related queries to the bespoke Members inbox. If the enquiry relates to potholes, damaged kerbs etc., the e-form should be used. If an issue is sensitive, a direct email should be sent. Members were asked to identify specific areas within their areas requiring maintenance in next year's programme.

A Member pointed out that Liverpool had received a damning report following the annual road condition survey. Every Local Authority has a statutory responsibility to measure integrity of highway network and report back. Members were reassured that Barnsley is not in the same position as Liverpool. Every year the results of the survey are discussed in detail. There is always room for improvement but results of the survey indicate that less than 2% of roads in Barnsley require immediate attention, whereas in other areas of the country between 8% and 10% require immediate attention.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) Witnesses be thanked for their attendance and contribution
- (ii) An All-Member visit be arranged to see first-hand how the new system works.

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