



Place Overview Committee
25 October 2021
2.00 pm

Item
3
Public

MINUTES OF THE PLACE OVERVIEW COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 4 AUGUST 2021

Responsible Officer: Sarah Townsend
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Present

Councillor Joyce Barrow (Chairman)
Councillors Steve Davenport, Geoff Elner, Paul Gill, Dan Morris, Pamela Moseley, David Vasmer, Julia Evans (substitute for Julian Dean), Roger Evans (Substitute) (substitute for Andy Boddington) and Peggy Mullock (Substitute) (substitute for Paul Wynn)

4 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Paul Wynn (Substitute: Councillor Peggy Mullock), Councillor Julian Dean (Substitute: Councillor Julia Evans) and Councillor Andy Boddington (Substitute: Councillor Roger Evans).

5 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

None were declared.

6 Minutes of Previous Meetings

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the Place Overview Committee meetings held on 8th April 2021 and 20th May 2021 be approved as correct records.

7 Public Question Time

No questions were received from members of the public.

8 Member Question Time

Member questions were received as follows:

Councillor Julia Buckley – regarding the proposed closure of depots at Bridgnorth and Hodnet and the availability of the associated Equalities Impact Assessment reports.

Councillor Rob Wilson – regarding the reasons given by the Department of Transport not to award funding to Shropshire Council for active travel measures under Capability Funds.

Councillor Rob Wilson – regarding plans being made by Shropshire Council to progress its active travel plans in line with other more progressive authorities.

A full copy of the questions and responses provided is attached to the web page for the meeting and also attached to the signed minutes.

9 Roadworks Diversions

The Committee received a full update report on the background to the issues that had led to the current position relating to road closures and diversions and the service's current proposals to improve its approach to this area. In addition to the detail within the report, Members noted the following points:

- The ability to plan and consult had been severely reduced as the maintenance activities of a two-year cycle had been condensed into 3 to 6 months.
- Level of maintenance was being improved, 75% of repairs now permanent; these often resulted in unpopular road closures and diversions.
- Government funding was received annually and had to be spent in year therefore programmes had to be adapted year on year. The timescales reduced the time available for consultation and working with communities.
- The number of potholes had doubled during the Winter of 2020/21 and 29,000 were dealt with last year.
- It was recognised that diversions were often lengthy in a rural area.
- An improved working relationship had been developed with contractors and the supply chain.

The following additional points were made by Members and in response to Members' comments and concerns during the debate on these issues:

- A timeline for improvements was vital and needed as a matter of urgency.
- A Working Group should be set up to investigate the issues and report back to the Committee.
- It was essential to develop a process whereby Councillors could input local knowledge regarding diversion routes and the impact on local users that needed to be taken into consideration.
- The need to ensure that road traffic management staff on the ground had local knowledge and could advise road users when diversions / closures were in force.
- The value of local knowledge was recognised.
- Night time working was undertaken where the additional costs could be justified but disruption had to be borne in mind particularly, in residential areas and the quality of work could be affected.

- There was a significant backlog regarding pothole repairs and a range of interventions was utilised.
- Operational teams held regular conversations with Kier and held a list of criteria regarding suitable diversion routes.
- Should there be closure of any depots (and a decision had not yet been made), the work undertaken in each area would not change.
- An email to local Councillors as well as to staff advising of any urgent, short notice closures would be helpful and help avert issues on the ground.
- Local Member input should be seen as a help not a hindrance.
- Kier had appointed a Communications Officer and over time, this should result in significant progress in that regard.
- Some diversion routes were unnecessary and were in force for too long.
- Investment was needed in both people and appropriate machinery.

The Portfolio Holder for Physical Infrastructure, Highways and Built Housing added that the proposed Working Group represented a good starting point and may well identify ideas that the service itself was already aiming towards. He recognised that early notification of road closures and diversions was imperative. He also understood that there was a huge backlog in repairs; this was being addressed and more proactive engagement would be the future goal and commitment.

The Executive Director of Place recognised that this service area was stretched and engineers within the service were currently swamped with information and needed support staff in order to free up their time. Time for engagement with local Members and engagement with communities was fundamentally a capacity issue and he urged the Working Group to include consideration of this issue during its deliberations.

It was agreed that a Working Group be set up as soon as possible to put forward recommendations to the Committee; this could be by way of a one day Working Group meeting during September, depending on Members' availability. Input from local Parish and Town Councils would be considered by the Group as part of its investigations. The Scrutiny Officer commented that monthly meetings of the parent Committee provided greater flexibility and the establishment of a Working Group was an excellent way of facilitating a quick response.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the contents of the report be noted;
- b) That areas of concern identified during the Committee debate, and not already detailed within the report, be considered as part of the ongoing improvements; and
- c) That a Working Group be quickly established to consider the issues and make its recommendations to the October 2021 meeting of the Place Overview Committee.

10 Update on Signs, Banners and Barriers Task and Finish Group

The Network Co-ordination and Compliance Manager presented a report detailing the findings of a Task and Finish Group that had been established to consider the processes and policies relating to banners, bunting, Christmas lighting, temporary signage and the proliferation of signage creating clutter and to consider new ways of working to address the issues.

During his presentation of the report, he made the following additional points:

- Development of the new policies, 1. Over highway and 2. Alongside highway, would need to comfortably align with the highways assets advertising policy recently agreed by Cabinet at its meeting on 21 July 2021.
- Further engagement with Parish and Town Councils and retail centres would be essential in order to develop a localised approach rather than a 'one size fits all'.
- Consultation would be undertaken with other authorities in order to identify best practice.
- Location, ownership of over highway signage and banners would be reviewed, to include load bearing testing.
- A potential fee charge would be introduced for banner applications to include administration and enforcement.
- Temporary signage largely related to new housing developments, currently a 12-month permit was granted with a renewal required thereafter.

In answering Members' comments and questions, the following additional information was provided:

- The pandemic had resulted in a delay in progressing the new policies, as resources had been diverted elsewhere and workload prioritised accordingly.
- Enforcement would be undertaken both by Planning Enforcement Officers and the Street Works Team.
- Consideration would be given to a deposit scheme where money would be retained if signage was not removed within the designated timescales.
- Set guidelines regarding size of signage, distance from highway etc was available on line and formed part of the on line application process.
- Public liability insurance was necessary and formed part of the application process.
- Currently, there was no reduced charges available to charitable organisations, but most applications related to development signage.
- Delegation of the responsibility for these policies would be investigated.
- Currently the changes to the policies would include local variations as necessary.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee:

- a) Notes the contents of the report and provides a steer of any other areas of review it considers to have not been addressed.

- b) Confirms agreement for the working group and officers to consult further with other Councils in order to identify 'best practice', provision for specific retail centres and any local conditions that would be beneficial.
- c) Supports the development of a revised policy and process for Banners, Bunting and Christmas Illuminations.
- d) Supports a review of recommended amendments to the current Temporary Signage policy and process.
- e) Agrees the principle of charging for the administration of applications for Temporary Signage to enable officers to identify appropriate recovery of costs and enhanced enforcement to reduce clutter, for inclusion within the council's annual fees and charges review.
- f) Receives an update on progress at its meeting in October 2021.

11 Place Overview Committee Work Programme

The Scrutiny Officer presented the Place Overview Committee's proposed work programme for the 2021-2022 municipal year. He stressed that the Committee made the decision whether to include items within the programme and to decide the priority for consideration. He thanked all Members for their input into the programme and commented that it represented a packed programme with some useful areas of work.

Members considered the work programme and made the following additional points:

- All Members and local Town and Parish Councils should be consulted prior to the Committee's consideration of the item relating to the reduction in the number of Planning Committees.
- Delegation of planning items should be considered (it was noted that the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the appropriate Planning Committee were currently involved in this decision-making process).
- Progress on the Retro Fit Motion, agreed by Council, would be more appropriately referred to the Communities Overview Committee.
- Issues for future inclusion on the work programme were suggested: the return of flood management in-house, street lighting (LED), footpath clearing, waste bins and consideration of the provision of lids to boxes.

RESOLVED:

That the Place Overview Committee's Work Programme 2021/22 be agreed.

12 Date/Time of Next Meeting of the Committee

It was noted that the next meeting of the Place Overview Committee was scheduled to be held on Thursday, 09 September 2021 commencing at 2.00 p.m.

Signed (Chairman)

Date: