

**Economic and Environmental Wellbeing Scrutiny and Policy Development
Committee**

Meeting held 10 July 2013

PRESENT: Councillors Cate McDonald (Chair), Ian Auckland (Deputy Chair), Trevor Bagshaw, Jayne Dunn, Terry Fox, Steve Jones, Alf Meade and Tim Rippon

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1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Alison Brelsford, George Lindars-Hammond and Steve Wilson.

2. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

2.1 No items were identified where resolutions may be moved to exclude the public and press.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3.1 There were no declarations of interest.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

4.1 The minutes of meetings of the Committee held on 21st March, 18th and 23rd April and 15th May 2013, were approved as correct records and, arising therefrom, in respect of the minutes of the meeting held on (a) 21st March 2013, Councillor Alf Meade expressed his concerns (i) that the Council, as part of the City's Climate Change Adaption Strategy, was being too limited in terms of the initiatives it was undertaking, referring specifically to the need for the harvesting of trees for the purposes of supplying fuel for biomass boilers and (ii) at the ability of Veolia to continue providing energy under the Council's District Heating Scheme due to its resources running out and (b) 18th April 2013, Councillor Alf Meade referred to the City's successful bid for funding from the Department for Energy and Climate Change for undertaking a review of governance and ownership of the City's district heating network, and queried what progress had been made with regard to this.

5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

5.1 Barry Bellamy, High Green Action Trust, raised a number of questions regarding Amey's performance as part of the Streets Ahead Project, namely:-

(a) In the light of evidence of alleged incidents of poor performance, which had included, in his opinion, lack of planning, little or no supervision and poor health and safety,

was the City Council supposed to be overseeing the works?

- (b) In the light of his evidence regarding dangerous excavations on footpaths, and that such incidents were reported as taking 28 days to investigate, when were Amey going to take the necessary action to address this issue?
- (c) They were also putting new tops on old street lights, which were going to be replaced by new ones, when the new street lights had been erected next to the old ones. Who was going to pay the costs in terms of Amey having to dig up newly laid footpaths and to remove the old street lights and connect the new ones?

5.2 The Chair stated that the responses to the above questions would be provided as part of next item of business.

6. STREETS AHEAD - PROJECT UPDATE

6.1 Steve Robinson, Head of Highway Maintenance, City Council, and Graeme Symonds, Network Director, Amey, gave a presentation updating Members on the Streets Ahead Project. In support of the presentation, a report of the Head of Highway Maintenance, containing further details on the present position, together with a paper containing a number of responses to questions raised by Members of the Committee prior to the meeting, were circulated at the meeting.

6.2 Steve Robinson reported on the progress made to date in respect of the Project, indicating that in general, such progress had been good and also, that the expenditure had been in line with what had been expected. In terms of the statistics, it was reported that three zones had been completed, works in 10 zones had commenced, with a further 10 to commence this year and there were 13 surfacing crews working in the City. In terms of communications, 23 public roadshows had been held and approximately 75,000 letters delivered to households. 3,052 street lights had been replaced, with 99.2% of all street lights in the City now working, 5,700 responses had been provided to written and verbal customer requests and 260 new staff had been employed by Amey, which included 29 apprentices and 15 graduates.

6.3 Graeme Symonds reported on the performance under the Project, indicating that, apart from problems regarding grass cutting, which were now being addressed, there had been no major issues. He referred to a number of issues, including the successful staff transfer, winter maintenance, the health and safety record, relationships with stakeholders, day-to-day issues, such as litter picking, repairing potholes and fixing lights, tree maintenance and the self-service reporting system. In terms of communications, Amey were looking at

possible ways of improving its zone information processes prior to works commencing in specific zones.

6.4 Members of the Committee raised questions and the following responses were provided:-

- It was accepted that there had been problems in terms of grass cutting this year which had been due to a number of reasons, including the purchase of new equipment which, as well as problems in terms of malfunctioning, had necessitated additional staff training, which had caused delays. These problems had been identified and additional resources were bought in, at no extra cost to the Council, to deal with this. There was not a set figure in terms of the number of cuts carried out during any year, but the grass was cut when it reached a certain height. A special monitoring team would make this decision.
- Lighting levels on roads in the City were set by national standards. There was a possibility that some roads were not being lit after the works at the same levels as previously on the basis that they could have been over-lit in the past. No street would be left unlit in that the old street lights would only be removed once the new lights were working, and any cases where this practice was not being carried out would be investigated if reported. There had been some delays in making new lights operational due to difficulties working with the existing supply cables. The example mentioned of new steel tops being fitted to old columns was because of faults in the old lights that needed to be repaired.
- It would not always be possible to carry out works in the preferred sequence. There had been some examples where footway works had been completed before the lighting had been commissioned, and which had led to the excavation of footways. This additional work was at no cost to the Council.
- In terms of resurfacing materials on pavements and roads, the general principle under the Project was to replace like for like. This principle would certainly be adhered to in Conservation Areas and Amey had to request the permission of the Council if they wished to change any materials in such areas. The new street lights designed for Conservation Areas had not yet been installed in Broomhill, but there were plans to send pictures of them to the Broomhill Ward Councillors, as well as providing them with details of installation dates, prior to announcing this publicly.
- Health and safety was viewed as paramount and any details where such practices had not been adhered to or had raised any

concerns should be reported to Amey via the Council's Customer Service Team.

- The City Council and Amey were continuously reviewing the issue of communications, and were looking at the practicalities of setting up a 'zone blog' or a zone Twitter account, with the aim of providing a daily diary in order to keep people up to date with progress under the Project. Efforts were also being made to look at how people who did not live in an area that was being treated, but visited for work or other purposes, could be informed as to when works in that area would be taking place.
- Most of the staff working on the Project were from the local area.
- Any replacement double-yellow lines or marking out of parking bays would take at least five working days.
- The Council was going to be very firm in dealing with the utility companies in connection with the works under the Project. A protection notice was issued for completed surfaced areas, which meant that unless there was a requirement to undertake emergency works, the companies would not be able to dig up pavement or road surfaces for between three to five years. If any of the repair works, in terms of emergency works, and in respect of planned works, were not completed to the satisfaction of the Council, steps would be taken to have the work redone by the companies or Amey and recharge the relevant utility company. The Council could also challenge utility companies over what they deemed as emergency repairs, but, to date, there had been no success in terms of the challenges made.
- It was accepted that the standard and timescales in respect of works undertaken by the Northern Power Grid (NPG), in terms of repairs to street lights, was not very good. The Northern Power Grid worked within a regulated industry, and performed within set timescales, which the Council had no influence over. However, Council officers had met with the Company and Councillor Jack Scott, Cabinet Member for Environment, Recycling and Streetscene, and it had been agreed that signs would be fixed to street lamps, indicating that any works connected to power failures were the responsibility of that Company, and not the Council or Amey. Amey were also working positively with NPG to find improvements.
- The Local Transport Plan (LTP) funding in respect of additional safety and improvement for small scale works in each of the 108 zones in total, was between £20-£30,000. It was not envisaged that any areas in the City would not be treated.

- In terms of Members' queries, the Council's Highway Maintenance Team was meeting with the Council's Customer Service Team to look at how this service can be improved, particularly in the light of the issue raised relating to the fact that it was not always easy to identify what the responses received related to as there was no e-mail trail.
- It was not considered that residents on Fulwood Head Road received a poor service in terms of winter maintenance. It was considered that the expectations of the residents of this area far exceeded what service could be delivered. However, discussions with local Councillors were ongoing.
- Those situations where street lights were covered with trees posed a very difficult situation for the Council and Amey in that, whilst there was a requirement to light the streets to a specific standard, at the same time, there was no will to damage the green canopy. It may be that, due to the amount of trees covering street lights, there may be a requirement to undertake some pruning works, but such works would be kept to a minimum and, in any event, lighting standards would be achieved. Amey had offered to meet Mr Bellamy and local Ward Councillors in High Green to discuss the issues raised.

6.5 Members also made the following comments:-

- There had been no major problems or issues in terms of the progress of works in the Manor and Castle Ward.
- The feedback in terms of the works undertaken in the Broomhill area had been generally very positive.
- The new street lights look very good.
- The feedback in terms of tree cutting had been positive to date.
- Vernon Silcock, Amey Link Officer for the former South Community Assembly area, had been very helpful and responsive in dealing with Members' queries.

6.6 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) notes the information reported as part of the presentation, the contents of the papers now circulated and the responses to the questions raised; and
- (b) requests (i) Steve Robinson and Graeme Symonds to (A) attend a future meeting of the Committee in six months' time to provide a further update on the Streets Ahead Project and (B)

feed back to Members on any issues or queries raised at the meeting, to which a responses could not be provided, and (ii) that, if performance from Northern Power Grid does not improve, it will invite a Senior Officer from the Company to attend a future meeting to report on the Company's performance.

7. REVISING THE OPENING HOURS OF THE HOUSEHOLD WASTE RECYCLING CENTRES

7.1 The Executive Director, Place, submitted a report containing proposed amendments to the opening hours of the Household Waste Recycling Centres. The report attached the Individual Cabinet Member Report of Councillor Jack Scott, Cabinet Member for Environment, Recycling and Streetscene, together with the relevant Equality Impact Assessment. The report was supported by a presentation from Councillor Jack Scott.

7.2 Councillor Scott reported on the reasoning behind the proposed changes, indicating that, following the changes made to the opening hours and days in 2012, further changes had been proposed to adjust the opening days at three of the Centres. The changes had been proposed in the light of the Government budget cuts, accessibility and demand, and included the opening of the facility on Blackstock Road for an additional two days (Tuesday and Thursday) and the closure of the facilities at Deepcar and High Green for one additional day during the week.

7.3 Councillor Scott reported on the current situation in terms of accessibility to and demand at the five Centres during 2012/13, and referred to the budget savings related to the proposed changes.

7.4 Members of the Committee raised questions and the following responses were provided:-

- The income in terms of the sale of recyclable material collected at the Centres was shared between Veolia, who managed the sites, and the sub-contractor, which ran the sites.
- All options had been explored to see if any other savings could be made as an alternative to closing Deepcar and High Green Centres for a further day, including changes to staffing levels. Staffing levels at the Centres were continually monitored, to ensure that the Centres were being run efficiently.
- Considerable efforts had been made to look at an alternative to closing the Centres at Deepcar and High Green for a further day but, there was simply not enough funding available. The fact that car ownership in rural areas was generally higher had also

been a consideration.

- The statistics regarding usage, together with customers' comments, had provided proof that the majority of visits to the Centres were made on a Saturday and Sunday, followed by Friday and Monday.

7.5 The Committee noted the contents of the report now submitted, the information reported as part of the presentation and the responses to the questions raised.

8. WORK PLANNING 2013/14

8.1 The Policy and Improvement Officer submitted a report containing details of the proposed approach to work planning for the Committee during 2013/14.

8.2 Matthew Borland indicated that there was a need for Members to look at how the Committee could have an increasingly bigger impact, in terms of the work it undertook.

8.3 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) notes the contents of the report now submitted, together with the comments now made; and
- (b) requests the Policy and Improvement Officer to write to all Members of the Committee, with the aim of establishing which Members wished to be on the Task and Finish Group, and arrange for the Group to meet and undertake the tasks set out in Section 2 of the report now submitted.

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

9.1 It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on Wednesday, 11th September 2013, at 4.30 pm, in the Town Hall.

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