

STRONGER COMMUNITIES & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY BOARD

14 SEPTEMBER 2022

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(HYBRID MEETING)

MINUTES

Present: Councillor W Qais (Chairman); Councillors M Carthew, B Donnelly, A Feeney, B Groom, P Hogarth MBE, J O'Nyons and Mrs G Sleigh.

Apologies:

Councillor D Howell – Cabinet Member (Communities & Leisure).

Councillor S Sheshabhattar.

Report authors/witnesses in attendance:

Mrs Alison McGrory (Assistant Director – Communities & Partnerships).

Alan Brown (Assistant Director – Highways & Environment).

Paul Tovey (Solihull MBC - Head of Highway Management).

David Keaney (Solihull MBC - Traffic Manager).

Kim Stone (Solihull MBC - Highway Permit Scheme Manager).

External Witnesses in attendance:

Patrick Gibson (West Midlands Fire Service – Solihull Station Commander).

Cabinet Members in attendance by invitation:

Councillor K Hawkins – Cabinet Member (Environment & Infrastructure) [Virtual].

Other Elected Members in attendance by invitation:

None.

Democratic Services

James Hughes (Democratic Services Officer).

1. HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

All those in attendance stood to observe a minutes silence in memory of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

2. DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST AND CONFLICT OF INTEREST

It was recorded that Councillor B Groom declared a pecuniary interest (employment) in the report pertaining to the Council's Highway Works Permit Scheme. Cllr Groom withdrew from the meeting for the duration of that agenda item.

It was also recorded that Councillor P Hogarth MBE currently served as a Member of West Midlands Fire & Rescue Authority representing Solihull MBC. Cllr Hogarth remained in the meeting and participated in the report pertaining to West Midlands Fire Service's 2022-2025 Community Risk Management Plan.

3. QUESTIONS AND DEPUTATIONS

There were no questions or deputations.

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4. MINUTES

The Chairman invited the Board to receive, for approval, the Minutes of the last meeting held on 7 June 2022. In considering the Minutes, Cllr M Carthew highlighted that it would be useful to attribute questions and comments to individual Members in future Minutes. The Chairman indicated that the observation would be duly noted.

RESOLVED

That, the Minutes be agreed as a correct record.

5. WEST MIDLANDS FIRE SERVICE – COMMUNITY RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN

In attendance: Patrick Gibson (West Midlands Fire Service – Solihull Station Commander).

West Midlands Fire Service presented their 2022-2025 Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) for consideration and discussion.

The Board was advised that the purpose of the Plan was to identify and assess all foreseeable risks that communities in the West Midlands might face – from house fires and road traffic collisions, through to flooding and terrorism. That information was then used to shape WMFS priorities, their Service Delivery Model and how they used their resources to reduce risk and vulnerability in local communities.

WMFS delivered a PowerPoint presentation to support the item and a copy of the Plan was circulated together with further detail background information.

In summary, the key work-streams to identify community risk included:

- Risk Modelling - historic incident data alongside a range of other people and place datasets were used to identify characteristics present within communities that had the highest and lowest risk of an incident occurring.
- Trend Analysis - strategic risk analysis, incident reports and performance dashboards helped identify annual and temporal trends in all incidents reported to WMFS.
- Research - literature reviews of credible academic work to understand the research that existed globally into incident response management planning.
- External Environment – to consider the social, technological, economic, environmental, political, legal and ethical factors that might affect service delivery and/or presented opportunities for inclusion within the Plan.
- Forecasting – looking beyond the three-year CRMP planning cycle to understand potential future requirements taking account of global factors and major incidents to better understand unprecedented events.
- Current Service Capabilities - reviewing existing capabilities and whether they were proportionate to the foreseeable hazardous scenarios WMFS were likely to respond to.

In addition to the above, the Board also received a detailed appraisal of calls for service and service performance.

Having considered the report, the Board asked the following questions and made the following observations:

- Cllr Mrs Sleight asked for further detail in relation to the next round of CRMP public consultation and was advised that research and data which highlighted emerging risks would form the basis for community consultation. A comprehensive communications plan would also support the launch of the consultation to ensure strong engagement with the public and partner agencies.

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- Cllr M Carthew highlighted from the report the work undertaken with schools and colleges and asked if similar work was also undertaken with community, youth and religious groups. WMFS advised that all community fire stations either undertook, or were part of, a number of community initiatives throughout the year.
- Cllr P Hogarth MBE highlighted and endorsed WMFS community initiatives such as the Fire Cadets; a national uniformed cadet group open to young people between the ages of 11 to 16. Cllr Hogarth also highlighted Safeside, WMFS's learning and interactive safety village for children, young people, adults and in the future, businesses.
- Mrs A McGrory asked if within the WMFS risk analysis for the coming winter (and taking account of the cost of living crisis), had the scenario of residents using different methods of heating their homes been taken into account. WMFS confirmed that it had already been acknowledged as an emerging risk. In terms of targeting those at high risk of vulnerability, WMFS were also asked if those groups were identified through direct referrals or via data analysis. WMFS advised that numerous data sources were used to trigger support interventions to protect those groups.
- The Chairman asked how the public were kept informed of emerging local risks. WMFS referred to their website which publicised current hot spots for certain types of incidents together with seasonal safety advice. In addition to that, Cllr P Hogarth MBE also highlighted that, previously, WMFS had undertaken checks on electric blankets and given the likelihood of residents turning their heating down (or off) this winter, he asked if it was prudent to offer the same initiative again. In response, WMFS highlighted the ongoing prevention work undertaken at each community fire station.

RESOLVED

That, the contents of the presentation and report be noted and welcomed.

6. HIGHWAY WORKS PERMIT SCHEME

In attendance: Councillor K Hawkins – Cabinet Member (Environment & Infrastructure); Alan Brown (Assistant Director – Highways & Environment); Paul Tovey (Solihull MBC - Head of Highway Management); David Keaney (Solihull MBC - Traffic Manager) and Kim Stone (Solihull MBC - Highway Permit Scheme Manager).

The Board was invited to undertake a performance review of the Council's Highway Works Permit Scheme.

Officers reported that the Council, as Local Highway Authority, had statutory responsibilities for the efficient co-ordination of all street and road works within the Borough. The Traffic Management Act 2004 allowed Highway Authorities to introduce Permit schemes to deliver that duty.

In October 2018, the Council launched its own Permit scheme which, to date, had resulted in greater control over road and street works taking place in Solihull and by directing works to be carried out at the least disruptive times. Along with suitable traffic management, the impact of works had also been reduced.

In summary, the report highlighted:

- Operational Performance - Local Authorities were required to review the 1st, 2nd and 3rd year's operational performance (and every 3rd year thereafter). Performance reviews for Years 1 and 2 had previously been completed and published in line with DfT guidance. The review of performance in Year 3 had now been completed and

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was scheduled to be presented to the Cabinet Member for Environment & Infrastructure in December 2022, along with any recommendations from this Scrutiny Board. A full appraisal of the performance data was submitted for review and consideration.

- Resources – there were now 10 members of staff working full time on the Permit scheme, all fully funded from the ring-fenced revenue generated from the Permit applications and fixed penalty fines.
- Emerging Priorities - since the introduction of the Scheme in 2018, there had been significant changes in network use and layout. Some of those changes had come about as a result of known planned works such as HS2, the Commonwealth Games and National Highway Improvements, whilst others such as Covid-19 were not.
- Street Manager System - in July 2020, the DfT launched a new data management and communication convention to aid the sharing of street and road works information. The new protocol had been successfully implemented into the Council's existing Permit system and additional costs associated with operating the new system had been funded directly from Permit scheme revenue.
- Statutory Guidance - the DfT had recently updated their Statutory Guidance, which was due to come into force in April 2023. It would introduce changes associated with work inspections and charging, aiming to simplify the inspection process and enable a more tailored approach to be established to manage poor performance and encouraging improvement.

In addition to the above, it was reported that as part of the annual review process to consider how the scheme was performing, a number of key recommendations had come forward which were summarised within the report. Those recommendations were intended to ensure that the scheme continued to add value and benefit residents of the Borough.

Having considered the report, the Board asked the following questions and made the following observations:

- Cllr P Hogarth MBE welcomed the report. In doing so, he highlighted an ongoing concern that utility companies did not always ensure that site signage was fully removed and, in some cases, diversion signage and sandbags remained on grass verges awaiting collection after works had been completed. Officers advised that site clearance was a standard Permit condition and encouraged Members to report any known issues for investigation.
- Cllr A Feeney asked if the Permit conditions required like-for-like reinstatement, especially on newly surfaced roads. Officers advised that once a road had been resurfaced, planned works were not permitted for a set period of time following resurfacing. Instances of unplanned or emergency works were however permitted. Disruption was minimised as much as possible by quarterly coordination meetings with utility companies at which the Council's 3-year resurfacing programme would be shared. A standard national specification also existed for the reinstatement of works openings on the highway. Cllr Feeney also asked what was driving the increase in Permit applications and, also, could a Permit (and fee) scheme act as a deterrent to repairing and maintaining the infrastructure. Officers advised that the initial assumption of 5000 Permit applications per year was based on historical data from the former Noticing system. Significant growth in works taking place was now being seen although more resources were in place to manage that demand. Fee's were set nationally and Solihull had opted to charge the maximum fees permissible under that framework.
- Cllr J O'Nyons highlighted the operating cost summary for the scheme and noted that whilst the service broke even in 2021-22, it appeared to have generated surplus

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revenues during 2018-19, 2019-20 and 2020-21. Officers advised that the intention of the scheme was to operate on a cost neutral basis. Over the course of the scheme, it had become necessary to increase resources and the infrastructure associated with the team. Any small surpluses were ring-fenced to support (and respond to) any in-year changes and fluctuations in Permit application demand.

- Cllr Mrs G Sleigh welcomed the report and noted that from her own perception, road works were now of a shorter duration typically.
- Cllr B Donnelly asked if any study had yet been carried out to measure the reduction in disruption on the road network following the introduction of the Permit scheme. Additionally, the preparation of a national underground asset register was highlighted and officers were asked if the Permit scheme would link into that resource. Officers advised that the last 3-year period had been very challenging owing to Covid-19 and changes to travel behaviour. Those factors made drawing comparisons with the former Noticing system very difficult and it was felt that two more years was needed before a robust baseline of data was available for detailed analysis. Officers also confirmed that they were actively engaged in the establishment of the national underground asset register.
- The Chairman highlighted the new Statutory Guidance that would come into force in April 2023, and asked what effect those changes might have on the current Permit scheme. Officers advised that the new Guidance would bring about changes to the simplification of inspections and charging.
- Cllr P Hogarth MBE asked how utility companies reacted when they were served with a fixed penalty notice for being in breach of their Permit conditions. Officers advised that their reactions were mixed albeit the scheme encouraged good compliance in most cases.
- Cllr M Carthew referred to the “one.network” platform and sought clarification if utility company works such as Severn Trent Water and Cadent Gas would be included within the information that system provided. Additionally, were other entities such as Google Maps provided with the same level of information to update their databases. Officers advised that one-network took a direct feed from Street Manager, a national system to aid the sharing of street and road works information. Live-feed satellite navigation devices (such as Google Maps) would also receive that information in real time. Similarly, bus companies had access to the same level of information as provided via one.network and similar information issued via temporary Traffic Regulation Order notifications. It was noted that TfWM now coordinated route network information through the Regional Traffic Control Centre for the bus operators. Cllr Carthew also highlighted the importance of timely communications with residents to ensure their disruption was kept to a minimum.
- The Chairman reaffirmed the importance of communications with residents and whilst acknowledging the numerous communication tools in use, care was needed not to digitally exclude those residents who did not use modern methods of communication. Officers acknowledged that sentiment and advised that, quite often, letter drops were utilised to give advance notification of works. In conclusion, a tailored and blended approach to communication was often undertaken.

RESOLVED

That, subject to the comments and views recorded in the preamble above, the Board **UNANIMOUSLY** made the following recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Environment & Infrastructure:

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- (i) That, the progress against the Highway Works approved Solihull Permit Scheme objectives be endorsed and welcomed;
- (ii) That, the 3-year outputs and benefits delivered from the scheme since it went live in October 2018, be endorsed and welcomed;
- (iii) That, the suggested Service Priorities Action Plan as set out in the report be endorsed and welcomed, taking account of the views expressed above; and
- (iv) That, a further report be considered at a future meeting if ever there are any material changes to Government policy pertaining to the Permit scheme.

7. WORK PROGRAMME 2022/2023

The Boards most recent Work Plan was submitted for information and comment. The Plan highlighted a number of topics for consideration during the Boards remaining meetings in 2022/23. A proportion of the Plan was also set around the requirement to act as the statutory "Crime & Disorder Committee".

In considering the Work Plan, Mrs A McGrory sought the Boards agreement to defer the report on the Strategic Assessment of the Third Sector from 16 November 2022, to a later date in the Work Plan.

RESOLVED

That, the Board:

- (i) Approves its current Work Plan for 2022/23, as submitted, subject to the deferral of the Strategic Assessment of the Third Sector to a later date in the 2022/23 Work Plan.

(End time 7.25pm)