

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 11th November 2014 at Pippbrook, Dorking from 7.00pm to 9.56pm

Present: Councillors Stephen Cooksey (Chairman), Lucy Botting, Lynne Brooks, Clare Curran, David Draper, Paula Hancock, Raj Haque, Mary Huggins, Howard Jones, Paul Potter and Peter Stanyard.

Also present: Councillors Margaret Cooksey, Valerie Homewood, Bridget Lewis-Carr, Vivienne Michael, John Northcott, David Preedy and Chris Townsend.

41. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors Helyn Clack and Tim Hall.

42. Disclosure of Interests

Councillor Lynne Brooks declared a non pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 3 – Dorking and Leatherhead Citizens Advice Bureau as she was a Council representative on the Dorking and Leatherhead CAB, and Agenda Item 5 – National Trust as she was a member of the National Trust.

Councillor Stephen Cooksey declared a non pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 5 – National Trust as he was a member of the National Trust, and Agenda Item 6 – Surrey Highways as he was a member of Surrey County Council and a member of the Local Committee.

Councillor Clare Curran declared a non pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 4 – East Surrey Domestic Abuse Partnership as she was a member of Surrey County Council, Agenda Item 5 – National Trust as she was a member of the National Trust, and Agenda Item 6 – Surrey Highways as she was a member of Surrey County Council.

Councillor David Draper declared a non pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 5 – National Trust as he was a member of the National Trust.

Councillor Raj Haque declared a non pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 6 – Surrey Highways as he was a member of the Local Committee.

Councillor Mary Huggins declared a non pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 5 – National Trust as she was a member of the National Trust, and Agenda Item 6 – Surrey Highways as she was a member of the Local Committee.

Councillor Paul Potter declared a non pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 6 – Surrey Highways as he was a substitute member of the Local Committee.

Councillor Peter Stanyard declared a non pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 6 – Surrey Highways as he had been employed by Tarmac.

43. Leatherhead and Dorking Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)

The Committee received a presentation from Deborah Jones, the District Manager, Leatherhead and Dorking CAB on the Bureau's work over the last year. Peter Jackson, Chair of the Board of Trustees, and Ian Tucker, Trustee and Treasurer, were also in attendance. During the course of the presentation the following points were noted:-

- Last year the CAB had helped over 4,300 people in Mole Valley to resolve almost 18,000 issues with a financial gain of £810,000 for the local community.
- Core funding enabled the CAB to provide advice and information, training and resources and work with local charities and local groups. Partnership working was increasingly important and the CAB was developing partnerships with other local agencies and organisations. The Wenceslas Project providing winter fuel support through the Leatherhead Lions had provided £14,000 in grants. The CAB was also working with other voluntary organisations to make best use of volunteers and to share activities, expertise and training.
- The provision of advice was an essential and valued service by the community and helped to reduce the burden on local and national government agencies and contribute to the establishment of positive communities.

- Going forward, the CAB was working on projects to increase the channels of advice available through the development of electronic communications facilities and the launch of its website. It was also diversifying its funding to make maximum use of charitable funding, and had launched a campaign to seek funding or other resources from local businesses.
- Office opening hours had been reduced because of a reduction in funding, but the CAB was working to ensure that service provision was not directly affected and that advice remained free at the point of contact.
- The Annual Public Meeting would be held on 18th November 2014, celebrating 75 years of the CAB. The Leatherhead bureau had opened in 1939 and Dorking in 1941.

The Committee asked Ms Jones and Messrs Jackson and Tucker a number of questions about funding, electronic advice, partnership and outreach working and volunteering.

Mr Jackson advised that two sources of funding would come to an end over the next year, namely the Big Lottery Fund and the Healthwatch Project. Further reductions in the hours of the core service provision were, however, not envisaged. With regard to electronic advice, Ms Jones confirmed that the intent of widening communication channels was to offer more choice, rather than the exclusive use of one channel. It was likely that generalist advice could be provided electronically but face to face communication would still probably be necessary for specialist advice and to maintain confidentiality. Outreach work took place in the area's SureStart Centres and satellite areas and there was also a presence in some local shops. The availability of the service in both town centre and outreach locations would provide the best level of choice for clients. Ms Jones advised that the CAB was also investigating working with doctor's surgeries and in partnership with the new help shop in Bookham, and she undertook to consider the suggestion of locating the service within supermarkets for the provision of generalist advice.

The recruitment of volunteers had not been a problem, although as a number of existing volunteers had left during the past year a recruitment drive was due to be launched.

The Committee thanked Ms Jones and Messrs Jackson and Tucker for attending the meeting and answering questions from Members.

44. East Surrey Domestic Abuse Services (ESDAS)

The Chief Executive of East Surrey Domestic Abuse Services, Michelle Blunsom, attended the meeting to provide the Committee with an annual update on its work. During the course of the presentation the following points were noted:-

- Domestic abuse could take a variety of forms and affected more than 1 in 4 women and around 1 in 6 men in the UK. Women were more likely than men to experience longer periods of partner abuse, repeat victimisation and injury or emotional effects as a result of the abuse.
- ESDAS engaged with clients through self or agency referral, although agency referral must be with the client's consent. The Service offered advice, information, advocacy and support and undertook risk assessments and safety planning. The Service aimed to minimise risk and maximise safety and did this by listening to a client's individual needs.
- ESDAS worked closely with other agencies, including the CAB, with the aim of co-working rather than duplicating work. Good relationships were maintained with all the agencies in East Surrey working on the abuse agenda, including the Police, Probation Service and the South East Area Children's Services. ESDAS also worked with a number of voluntary sector organisations and was currently working with the Diocese of Guildford to train clergy.
- Services provided included outreach, children's services, a free counselling service, a volunteering project which focussed on harnessing the skills of domestic abuse survivors, group work, legal advice drop-in, a Sanctuary Scheme which provided safety measures to a victim's home to enable them to remain in their home, victim support services in the specialist DV Court at Redhill and training and awareness raising together with other agencies.

The Committee asked various questions of Ms Blunsom on a number of subjects, such as the Sanctuary Scheme, service activity levels, and work undertaken with children and young people.

Ms Blunsom reported that the Sanctuary Scheme could only be used if the parties had separated. An assessment of the property was then undertaken to see what was required to make it safe, for example, changing locks, fire proof letter boxes, the installation of a safe room, etc. Members were advised that referral levels to the Service since last year had stayed the same, although reporting levels to the Police had increased. It was likely that referral levels would increase in the future because of changes in legislation. The most limiting factor for the Service was its lack of capacity to accept all Police referrals. ESDAS was currently working with the Police and Crime Commissioner and Surrey Police with a view to identifying additional funding for this in 2015/16. With regard to working with children and young people, Ms Blunsom confirmed that healthy relationships and domestic abuse lessons were provided in schools, but these were funding reliant. There was also an issue of persuading a school to include such lessons in its curriculum as they were currently optional. ESDAS was also involved in the work of Peer Productions who had recently written and produced a play based on children's experiences from ESDAS.

The Committee thanked Ms Blunsom for attending the meeting and responding to Members' questions.

45. National Trust

The Committee received a presentation from David Kennington, the National Trust's Surrey Hills Manager. During the course of the presentation the following points were noted:-

- The National Trust was concerned with access, landscape and historic places for the benefit of the nation for all time. Current National Trust policies which were relevant to the Surrey Hills included the getting outdoors and closer to nature campaign which sought to reconnect people, especially children, with nature, and the land and nature programme which considered the Trust's use of its land holdings, particularly farm land, and how access and nature conservation could be improved.
- National Trust land/property in Mole Valley included Box Hill, Leith Hill, Headley Heath, Ranmore Common, Polesden Lacey, Abinger Roughts, Holmwood and Brockham Big Field.
- Current issues in Mole Valley related to:
 - the cycling and vehicle interface
 - the future for Leith Hill Place and how it could be marketed to increase visitor numbers. It had been open to the public for the last two years in a low key way and the planning permission for the current opening arrangements would last until October 2016. The extension of the car park and the inclusion of the property in the 2015 National Trust handbook could result in more visitors.
 - Gatwick airport over flying particularly in the Holmwood area. The National Trust's national planning advisors would comment on flight paths and airport expansion.
 - Polesden Lacey where the YHA were putting more resources into the hostel at Tanners Hatch.

Members noted the points from the presentation and asked a variety of questions on matters such as the future use of Box Hill and Leith Hill and cycling sports.

Mr Kennington advised that the increased recreational use of Box Hill and Leith Hill was limited by the number of car parking spaces that could be provided in light of the land designation on these sites. The land and nature programme, which was looking at how National Trust land was used, could potentially lead to the expansion of recreational use into farm land to meet increasing demand. In response to a question regarding the visitor experience at Box Hill Fort, Mr Kennington advised that the fort could not be treated in the same way as other similar forts, for example Reigate Fort, because of the presence of bats. Rangers were currently investigating restrictions on access to the fort in conjunction with local bat groups, with a view to improving the visitor experience.

With regard to cycling sports on National Trust land, Mr Kennington confirmed that the National Trust welcomed sports cycling but did not actively promote it. In order to manage activity, sports were licensed and therefore controlled and regulated, which did discourage some activity. He advised that facilities for cyclists were located at the top of Box Hill.

The Committee thanked Mr Kennington for attending the meeting presenting his update.

46. Surrey Highways

The Committee received a presentation from John Furey, the Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Flooding, and Richard Bolton, Local Highway Services Group Manager, on the Surrey Highways service. During the course of the presentation the following points were noted:-

- The highways asset in Surrey was ageing and, as such, the County Council had launched a £100m five year programme, Project Horizon, to repair and resurface roads across the county. It was intended that work on 10% of the county's roads would have been completed by the end of the five year programme. Some of the planned schemes had been deferred because of the essential flood recovery programme, but were now back on track.
- A fund of £27m had been allocated to aid flood recovery on top of the highways programmed budget. 97% of the flood recovery programme had been completed by the end of October. In addition, £7.2m top up funding to deal with pothole repairs following flooding had been awarded by the Government.
- A large proportion of highways funding was now secured through bids to Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), but there were costs to the bidding process. Surrey County Council (SCC) was aiming to secure £300-400m funding through the LEPs in 2015/16.
- The new permit scheme for utility companies was reducing the disruption caused by utility companies digging up roads. Under the provisions of the Scheme, they were given three months notice of road maintenance works to allow them to schedule any works prior to the road maintenance works starting, and would not be able to dig up the road for five years after completion of the maintenance work unless in an emergency.
- Members were encouraged to feed requests for road maintenance schemes through the Mole Valley Local Committee, which had a £374,000 annual budget for capital schemes and a £252,000 revenue budget. The Local Committee could also prioritise roads for inclusion in Project Horizon.
- A large number of pothole improvements had been undertaken over the last four years, but flooding had presented recent challenges. 11,201 potholes had been reported in Mole Valley over the period September 2013 to August 2014. 95% of these had been fixed within published timescales in the last quarter of the year, but in previous quarters this figure was lower because of the poor weather conditions.

Committee members raised a number of issues regarding specific roads, road markings, cycle paths, highways structural works and the safety of new road surfaces for horse riders. Mr Bolton undertook to follow these up with the relevant highways officer. With regard to the repairs on Brockham Green and Middle Street, Brockham, Mr Bolton confirmed that the works were scheduled for the early part of the 2015/16 financial year.

The Committee asked a number of questions about potholes, both general and specific. Mr Bolton advised that 5-10% of pothole repairs were audited in accordance with key performance indicators. He confirmed that the contractor was paid a lump sum for the repair of potholes and not per pothole and therefore it was in their interests to correctly fix the pothole the first time. Repairs should be permanent repairs within 20 days and were guaranteed for two years. SCC had adopted criteria regarding what constituted a pothole to ensure funding was allocated where it was most needed. It was necessary to target funding at those potholes which were considered a safety risk. Those potholes reported which did meet the criteria for fixing were identified by orange paint markings. Members were advised that potholes should be reported through the SCC website. Mr Furey noted website reporting problems in some of the more rural areas of the District and undertook to investigate this. He advised that meetings had been held with 'Fix My Street' and discussions were

ongoing with a view to harmonising the two systems so that any repairs reported through Fix My Street did not have to be manually entered onto the SCC system. Monitoring systems for contractors had also improved. Photos of the pothole to be repaired were taken before the work was undertaken and then again once fixed in order to ensure an audit trail. Finally Members were advised that insurance claims in respect of damage to vehicles caused by potholes had been lower than expected.

In response to questions, Mr Bolton reported that Surrey Highways had embarked on a comprehensive three year programme of white line refreshment and confirmed that there was no policy to remove cats' eyes from road surfaces.

The issue of unclear or hidden road signs was discussed. Members noted that Surrey Highways did have a hedge cutting programme, but a number of private hedges also encroached onto the highway sometimes obscuring signs and, whilst Highways liaised with landowners, this was an ongoing issue. With regard to dirty and therefore unclear signs, Mr Bolton advised that signs were cleaned, but if they were located under the tree canopy the problem did recur.

The Committee thanked Messrs Furey and Bolton for attending the meeting and answering questions from Members. The Chairman commented that the dialogue had been very useful and expressed the hope that a similar session could be held in a year's time.