

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**ENVIRONMENT
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

TUESDAY 17 JUNE 2003 AT 10.00AM

Agenda Item No.

4

REVIEW OF PERFORMANCE OF 24seven

Report of the Director of Environment

Author: Mike Palmer, Assistant Director, Transport Management.
Tel No: 01992 556121

Executive Member: Derrick Ashley

1. Purpose of Report

This report has been requested by the Members to enable the committee to review the response of 24Seven in dealing with street lighting electricity supply faults and to assess whether or not promised performance improvements have been forthcoming.

2. Summary

- 2.1 The report provides details of the role played by 24Seven in the provision of street lighting within Hertfordshire.
- 2.2 It sets out the history of performance by the Company and describes the steps taken to try and obtain and deliver commitment for a radical improvement in the service provided.
- 2.3 A summary of the progress achieved since the beginning of the year is given, together with an update of the latest performance indicators.
- 2.4 Finally, the report sets out the status of ongoing activity in order to secure a long term improvement in service provision.

3. Conclusion

- 3.1 The report concludes that there is clear evidence that, over the last two months, there has been a dramatic change in the level of service provided by 24Seven over that prior to March. The previously unacceptable standards have significantly improved although there remains further work to do to meet the desired service levels.

- 3.2 The indications are that the company has undergone a fundamental change of attitude and is actively working with the County Council to establish a lasting means of providing service standards acceptable to the Council.
- 3.3 The Scrutiny Committee is invited to consider the information provided in this report and take a view regarding the conclusions reached.

Further scrutiny could be undertaken by :-

Requesting a further report or details;
Calling the company to account at a subsequent meeting;
Monitor performance indicators circulated by the Environment Department to Members as part of routine information exchange.

4. Background

- 4.1 The day to day maintenance of the County's stock of street lighting equipment is provided by Hertfordshire Highways. However, this service does not include dealing with problems of electricity supply which are expressly excluded by statute.
- 4.2 The law currently requires any work on the supply side of any private installation to be carried out by the regional electricity board. In this context, a street light is a private installation owned by the County Council. Since de-regulation, this function is carried out by designated private companies. In the case of Hertfordshire, the relevant statutory undertaker is EPD Distribution who has a contract with 24Seven to carry out the maintenance to their distribution cables.
- 4.3 Typically, when one of the County's street lights fail, Hertfordshire Highways investigate the cause and, if it is a component failure within the lighting installation, they can complete the work. If, on the other hand, the fault is found to be a "Dead Service", i.e. no electricity provision to the unit, Hertfordshire Highways is obliged to notify 24Seven and request rectification of the problem (at no cost). In recent months Hertfordshire Highways' staff have attached information signs on columns awaiting action by 24Seven.
- 4.4 A similar situation exists when a new or replacement lighting unit is installed and it is necessary to order a connection (or disconnection if the item is a replacement) to the supply. In these circumstances the County Council must pay for the service.

5. Street Lighting Performance

- 5.1 The performance criteria relevant to Hertfordshire Highways does not apply to work undertaken by 24Seven. The relevant charter mark promises include a specific exclusion for electricity supply faults.
- 5.2 This anomaly is potentially confusing to the public and has led to increasingly critical comment from members of the public who have repeatedly reported specific lighting units out of service over a protracted period.
- 5.3 Since the start of the new Hertfordshire Highways arrangements in October 2002, the service levels of street lights have been a subject of concern. The lack of response by 24Seven has contributed significantly to that concern.
- 5.4 It is to be expected that at any point in time a number of the County's stock of 120,000 lighting units will fail for some reason. However, the aim is to ensure that the routine scout of the system will enable the vast majority of failures to be found and rectified within a 10 working day cycle. In addition, members of the public are invited to notify failed units and, in these cases, the aim is to achieve repair within 5 working days, except in cases of electricity supply failures.

5.5 The achievement of these aims by Hertfordshire Highways is subject to separate monitor and scrutiny. The situation regarding 24Seven can be summarised as follows:

Table 1							
DEAD SERVICE TABLE							
MONTH	No of Faults	No of Units	No. Added	Total No. of Faults	No. Repaired	No. Outstanding	Percentage Repaired
OCTOBER	86	N/A	46	132	28	104	21%
NOVEMBER	104	N/A	124	228	33	195	15%
DECEMBER	195	N/A	111	306	35	271	12%
JANUARY	271	N/A	156	427	34	393	8%
FEBRUARY	393	N/A	173	566	46	520	8%
MARCH	520	962	113	633	222	411	33%
APRIL	411	733	191	602	316	286	52%
MAY	286	439	51	337	185	152	55%

Total number of faults since October 2002	1,051			
Total number repaired since October 2002	899			
Percentage repaired	86%			
Percentage outstanding	14%			

5.6 The number of lighting units awaiting service by 24Seven are compounded by the fact that, in a significant proportion, service requests have run over many months and, until very recently, none were dealt with in a time frame approaching those required of Hertfordshire Highways. The type of fault has also meant that, in many cases, supply failure has affected multiple units resulting in lengths of streets or whole road junctions being in darkness.

6. Actions taken to effect service improvement

6.1 In order to exert more pressure on 24Seven, senior management within Hertfordshire Highways held meeting with managers of 24Seven in early March. In addition, a Hertfordshire Highways' Liaison Officer was appointed in January 2003 with the specific task of chasing action and improving information exchange between the Customer Service Centre, Area teams and the public.

- 6.2 Progress still remained slow and therefore on 25th March 2003 the Head of Network Services East was summoned to County Hall to be held to account by the Executive Member for Environment together with senior representatives of the County Council.
- 6.3 During this period, the County Council registered its dis-satisfaction with 24Seven, with the Industry Regulator and the Minister of State for Industry and Energy.
- 6.4 At the meeting on 25th March, 24Seven accepted that they had given very little priority to dealing with street lighting service problems, had given little attention to customer care matters and were responsible for a totally unacceptable service. The Head of Network Services East went on to explain that they had completely restructured the company and were intent on rectifying past deficiencies.
- 6.5 Areas of change which have a direct bearing on Hertfordshire included:
- i) The establishment of a dedicated service centre based at Stevenage in order to action Hertfordshire activity;
 - ii) A quadrupling of the workforce and a promise to eradicate the existing backlog by the end of April 2003;
 - iii) A commitment to work with officers of the County Council to establish for the first time a “contractual” service arrangement based on a promise to achieve 10 working day turn round and an attempt to find a way to move towards matching the County’s 5 working day public response.
- 6.6 In view of the poor service so far received, Members requested compensation. However, 24Seven explained that there was no automatic mechanism to enable compensation payment to be made. They would, however, consider a sponsorship initiative involving a community project put forward by the County Council as an alternative. Appendix 1 shows a list of projects currently under discussion.

7. Progress achieved since 25 March 2003

- 7.1 Additional Electricity supply faults will continue to occur whilst the backlog is addressed. Table 1 shows the progress on dealing with the backlog, the extent of new faults and the cumulative totals. The response to dead service over the past 2 months is now averaging 10 - 20 days. A small number of long established faults are proving difficult to resolve. There was a backlog of 520 faults at the beginning of the review period and 9 of these remain. However, during the period a further 355 faults have been added leaving at the end of the second week of May, 152 to resolve. Table 2 provides a summary of the 9 problem sites which are long established and still in need of rectification. Table 3 shows the situation with regard to requests for new service connections during the same time frame.

TABLE 2

<u>NO.of UNITS</u>	<u>LOCATION:</u>	<u>DATE FAXED TO 24/7:</u>
1	ARNETT WAY, RICKMANSWORTH OPP 12	07/02/2003
1	BOURNEHALL ROAD, WATFORD TOP OF ROAD JUNC WITH HERKOMER ROAD. OTHER ONE AT JUNC BOURNEHALL LANE AND FROBISHER CLOSE	03/01/2003
2	COLNE WAY. HEMEL HEMPSTEAD JUNC TUDOR AVENUE	10/01/2003
1	MARSHALSWICK LANE, ST ALBANS O/S No.132	03/01/2003
1	NORTHFIELD ROAD, BOREHAMWOOD O/S 43	17/01/2003
1	OAK LANE, O/S Nos. 3-4, CUFFLEY	12/03/2003
1	ROWLEY LANE, BOREHAMWOOD	07/02/2003
1	WALTON ROAD, O/S TWINNINGS, BUSHEY	12/03/2003
1	WELL ROAD j/w COOPERS LANE & JUDGES HILL	20/03/2003

TABLE 3

New Connections / Transfers of Service / Permanent Dis-connections			
Month	No. of Orders Placed	No. Completed	Quantity Outstanding
February	58	26	32
March	32	4	28
April	42	0	42
Total No. of Outstanding connections			100

- 7.2 Regular progress monitoring meetings are held between representatives of Hertfordshire Highways and 24Seven and significant improvements in service are now being achieved.
- 7.3 In addition, discussion is proceeding in establishing a formal agreement between the County Council and 24Seven. At this stage a target 10 working day cycle for dealing with new supply faults has been put on the table together with 28 day target for dealing with new connections. With respect to the public reported faults, there remains difficulty on agreeing a workable target. The initial response has to be provided by Hertfordshire Highways and this will continue to be measured as for all publicly reported faults. However, much of the elapsed time will have past by the time confirmation of a supply fault is established. If 24Seven were able to provide a 5 working days response from this point then all faults, in theory, could be targeted within a 10 working day cycle. 24Seven however are reluctant to commit to such a target but have offered to aim to resolve the 10 highest weekly priority supply faults judged by HCC within 5 days whilst working to 10 days for all others.

- 7.4 Achievement of this would be a major advance on previous performance and is likely to be easier for the public to understand than the present arrangement.
- 7.5 With regard to new service requests the 28 day target offered by 24Seven reflects the different way in which this service is provided and the need to comply with statutory notices required under the New Roads and Street Works Act.

8. Financial Implications

- 8.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from 24Seven activity to re-establish electricity supply to “dead services”.
- 8.2 Payment for disconnections and reconnections with respect to new or replacement lighting units falls under two headings. Installation arising from acts of vandalism or road accidents is a contractual risk borne by the contractor partner within Hertfordshire Highways. Consequently, there are no financial implications for the County Council. With regard to programmed replacements or lighting changes associated with improvement schemes the associated costs are borne as part of the specific project costs.

9. Rural Implications

- 9.1 An improvement in the speed of response with regard to electric supply to street lighting will be of benefit to rural communities. It will enhance the feeling of well being and improve community perception of safety if street lighting can be maintained at the highest possible levels of serviceability.

10. Conclusions

- 10.1 The performance achieved by 24Seven since their re-organisation and their commitment given to Members on 25th March 2003, has been dramatic.
- 10.2 The response to new dead service is now averaging 10-20 days. A small number of long established faults are proving difficult to resolve.
- 10.3 The response to new service requests is similarly improving with the average response time for those actioned now between 21 and 28 days. However, 24Seven are still running a significant backlog which do not meet these improving timescales and which needs to be addressed.

- 10.4 The commitment given by 24Seven to deal with the March backlog for Dead Service by end of April has been difficult to confirm due to the continuing incidence of failure of supply at new locations which must be expected to occur. In numerical terms, the 520 backlog of faults in March have been dealt with with the exception of 9. However, during the period, significantly more new faults have occurred and the current backlog stands at 152 faults.
- 10.5 Progress is being achieved at setting out the terms for a formal agreement and Members comment from the scrutiny process will be helpful in drawing the matter to a conclusion.

Background papers used by the author when preparing this report

Performance Reports from Hertfordshire Highways
Correspondence files with 24Seven

Appendix 1

List of Potential Sponsorship Schemes

- ◆ Establishment of Village Travel Plans
 - Designed to improve better living and working environment in rural communities
- ◆ Crime Reduction Project
 - to identify an initiative to reduce the fear of crime in the community
- ◆ Sponsor additional street lights
 - provide additional levels of lighting in vulnerable areas which would not normally meet existing county priorities for provision
- ◆ Industrial Therapy Organisation, South Oxhey
 - help people with disabilities develop the skills they need to enter employment in quality jobs
- ◆ HARVEST
 - to help fund a service which trains community and voluntary groups to be effective deliverers of services. Being re-launched with the FE Colleges so they could sponsor the new marketing drive
- ◆ HertsCAN (social enterprise)
 - getting community groups to become social entrepreneurs and also to exploit ICT to deliver their work. Business in the community angle. Could have a rural focus too
- ◆ EQUAL
 - social enterprise opportunities for the hard to reach groups. Good county-wide scheme
- ◆ Rainbow Network
 - aimed at BME businesses to really get them off the ground in Hertfordshire (We already pulled in a grant to set this up so its an active HCC sponsored project already.) Urban focus
- ◆ Development funding for CVSs
 - This would give 24/7 a profile in each of the 10 district areas. The CVSs are now setting themselves up in new ways to lead their local voluntary sector.