

ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 23 MARCH 2004

UPDATE AND WORK PROGRAMME 2004

Agenda Item No.

11

RECOMMENDATIONS MADE TO CABINET/EXECUTIVE MEMBER/CHIEF OFFICER AT THE LAST MEETING:

- **SPEED LIMITS ON RESIDENTIAL ROADS – Minute 3 (2)** – The Committee recommended that the Transport Panel carefully review the issue of 20 mph speed limits, including consideration of the criteria for the introduction of 20 mph schemes to be included in the Speed Management Strategy.

Response:

The Transport Panel will review the issue of 20 mph speed limits as part of its consideration of the Speed Management Strategy at its meeting on 16 June 2004.

- **ENVIRONMENT PROPOSED RESOURCE BUDGET 2004/05 –2007/08 – Minute 3 (3)** – The Committee expressed disappointment that the LTP allocation meant that HCC is unable to progress some much needed schemes. Arising from this issue, the Committee wished to note their frustration about the delays to schemes in North Herts caused by difficulties experienced with the rail authorities. It was recommended that the Executive Member write to the rail authorities and raise the issue through the LGA to seek to progress the scheme.

Response:

Done.

- **UPDATE AND WORK PROGRAMME – Minute 5 (1b)** – The Committee asked officers to clarify the position of item 6 – Review of North Herts Highways Partnership. Arising from the discussion, the Committee expressed concern that best practice was not always shared between Highways Partnerships around the County and recommended that the Hertfordshire Highways Topic Group, established in October 2003, should review this issue.

Response:

Officers attended the NHDC scrutiny meeting on 21 January. Members of the Committee explained that they planned undertake a general overview of the services of North Herts Highways with more focused discussion on a few areas over a series of six meetings. They were not looking for a constituted group with Members of the Environment Scrutiny Committee, but invited input

from County Council Members. Officers have agreed to support the scrutiny process and have suggested that their conclusions are fed into the Hertfordshire Highways Topic Group (see items 6 and 12).

UPDATE ON PETITIONS PRESENTED TO THE LAST MEETING:

None

UPDATE ON PREVIOUS SCRUTINY ITEMS

	ITEM	C'TTEE DATE	EFFECTS OF SCRUTINY	STATUS* (see endnote)
1	Planning Obligations	23/01/01	<p>A Topic Group was established (by Resources Scrutiny Committee) comprising 8 members to scrutinise planning obligations. The first meeting was held on 27 November and a further was held on 16 January. The Group is scheduled to report back to the Resources and Scrutiny Committee in July 2004. The Topic Group membership consists of B N W Hammond, R S Clements, R N Copping, M Green, S E Jones, D E Lloyd, S J Mills, R J Smith with the Labour Group substitute being : I H Laidlaw – Dickson.</p> <p>A progress report on the work undertaken within the Environment Department to implement improvements to S106 processes (see below) is on the agenda for this meeting.</p>	<p>Investigation</p> <p>Update report in March 2004</p>
2	Transport Operations Best Value Review Implementation Monitoring	19/03/02	<p>The Scrutiny Committee considered this issue in response to a request by the Resources, Prosperity & Consultation Select Committee (July 2001).</p> <p>The Committee considered a progress report on the original Best Value Review recommendations, a revised Improvement Plan and the Outcome of the Audit Commission’s Best Value Inspection into this service.</p>	Monitoring

	Transport Operations BVR Cont'd. . .		The Committee welcomed the Inspector's report, accepted its Recommendations for incorporation into the Improvement Plan and noted that it may consider scrutiny at a later date.	
3	Hertfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan – A Review of Actions to Date	21/01/03	The Committee's concerns about realistic targets and clear reporting lines have been conveyed to the Hertfordshire Environment Forum. Member briefings on the BAP review timetable were subsequently done and green tourism implications are being prepared.	Monitoring
4	The Provision of the Highway Grass Cutting Service	21/01/03	The Scrutiny Committee recommendation to adopt the Contractors Frequency Method for cutting County managed verges has been adopted as operational practice commencing April 2003. A further report reviewing the performance achieved with the new method of specification together with an overview of District managed Highway grass performance is on the agenda for this meeting.	Monitoring Report in March 2004
5	Fly Tipping and Dumping in Hertfordshire	18/03/03	The Scrutiny Committee recommended that this issue be taken forward through the Waste Management Panel potentially by setting up a joint working group to include the Police, the Fire Service, the National Farmers Union, District Councils and the Environment Agency. Subsequently, the Herts Rural Forum as been asked to arrange a regional conference on fly tipping. The conference will be held on 23 April 2004 and will involve the Police, the Fire Brigade Union, the Environment Agency, and other local authorities. It is hoped that an action plan for dealing with fly tipping and dumping in the east of England will arise from the conference.	Work outside Scrutiny
6	Review of North Herts Partnership	18/03/03	The Scrutiny Committee asked for a single report to be brought to a future meeting on the issues that are arising across the panels. NHDC Scrutiny Committee in June established a need for a Topic Group to take forward a structured scrutiny programme. They resolved to invite County Members to engage in the process, the details of which are awaited, although NHDC has recently invited six County Members to a meeting on 21 January 2004. The Committee in January 2004 requested that officers clarify the current position.	Investigation

	Review of North Herts Partnership cont'd. . .		Officers attended the NHDC scrutiny meeting on 21 January. Members of the Committee explained that they planned undertake a general overview of the services of North Herts Highways with more focused discussion on a few areas over a series of six meetings. They were not looking for a constituted group with Members of the Environment Scrutiny Committee, but invited input from County Council Members. Officers have agreed to support the scrutiny process and have suggested that their conclusions are fed into the Hertfordshire Highways Topic Group (see item 12).	
7	Managing S106 Agreements	18/03/03	The Scrutiny Committee on 21 October 2003 agreed that this report should go to the Planning Obligations Topic Group set up by the Resources Scrutiny Committee, and that a further report come back to the Committee in March 2004. The report also went to the Audit Committee on 11 December 2003. A report on this item is on the agenda for this meeting.	Investigation Report in March 2004
8	Withdrawal of the Traffic Warden Service	18/03/03	<p>A Topic group was set up to discuss with Chief Supt. Burden the timetable for withdrawal and the principle of interim cover post 1 April 2004. The Group met and subsequently, the Assistant Chief Constable formally confirmed that Area Police Commanders had been requested to discuss transitional arrangements with District Councils. County Council officers meanwhile are supporting and facilitating District Councils in their feasibility studies and preparations.</p> <p>At its meeting in January 2004, the Committee agreed that a second meeting be held between the Topic Group and the Chief Constable to discuss enforcement arrangements. It was also noted that the Community Services Scrutiny Committee had an interest in scrutinising this issue and that efforts should be made to co-ordinate the Council's approach.</p> <p>The Constabulary has declined to meet with the Topic Group in view of the fact that they will be providing an extensive answer on this matter to County Council on 30 March. If Members still have questions subsequent to this, a meeting will be arranged.</p>	Investigation

9	Thameslink 2000	17/06/03	<p>Initial meeting held on 2 September 2003. Scope of scrutiny further extended to include current franchise. Further meetings being planned by Keith Shephard.</p> <p>A brief report updating Members on progress is on the agenda for this meeting. The final report and recommendations of the Thameslink 2000 Topic Group will be submitted to the Committee in June 2004.</p>	<p>Investigation</p> <p>Update report in March 2004 Final report in June 2004</p>
10	Review of Performance of EDF (24/7)	17/06/03	<p>A report on this item is on the agenda of the Scrutiny Committee in March 2004. A representative from EDF Energy has been invited to attend the meeting.</p>	<p>Investigation</p> <p>Report in March 2004</p>
11	Review of Flooding	17/06/03	<p>The Scrutiny Committee agreed to set up a Topic Group with 3 members, in consultation with the Community Services Scrutiny Committee (to be invited to the meetings), to look at the issues surrounding flooding in more detail. The remit of the topic group is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examining the effectiveness of current land drainage and flood defence arrangements. • Addressing issues of long-term, cross-boundary, integrated flood prevention and relief planning. <p>The final report of the Topic Group is on the agenda for this meeting.</p>	<p>Ongoing investigation</p> <p>Report in March 2004</p>
12	Review of Hertfordshire Highways	21/10/03	<p>The Committee agreed to set up a Topic Group to consider the best way to produce accurate and useful performance management information to enable members to effectively scrutinise performance, and any other issues raised in the debate on 21 October 2003.</p>	<p>Investigation</p>

	Review of Hertfordshire Highways Cont'd. . .	21/10/03	<p>A Topic Group of 5 (3:2) has been set up with the following membership: Mary Bayes, Roy Clements, Richard Roberts, Brian York and Tanis Kent. The first meeting will have been held on 6 February.</p> <p>The Committee on 20 January 2004 recommended that the Hertfordshire Highways Topic Group should review the sharing of examples of best practice between the partnerships.</p> <p><u>Highways Scheme Development, Programming and Implementation</u></p> <p>The Committee asked the Transport Panel to explore the input that public consultation and scheme supervision had on the ability to meet the Scheme programme and related performance targets.</p>	Report in June 2004
13	Operation Coachman	21/10/03	<p>The Committee agreed that child protection issues should be referred back to the Children, Schools and Families Scrutiny Committee.</p> <p>At its meeting on 21 January, the Children, Schools and Families Scrutiny Committee agreed to scrutinise child protection issues arising from Operation Coachman, in particular enhanced checks on taxi drivers and escorts on County Council contracts. The timing of report was to be agreed at the agenda setting meeting.</p>	Monitoring
14	Noise Levels on Trunk Roads	21/10/03	<p>The Committee asked the Director to write to the Highways Agency setting out concerns regarding lack of action in dealing with motorway noise and asked to be kept informed of progress. They also agreed that it should be made clear to the Highways Agency that noise mitigation measures should be included in the consultation proposals for the M25 and M1.</p> <p>Following the meeting the Director has written to the Highways Agency. A response was received on 22 January.</p>	Monitoring

15	Speed Limits on Residential Roads	20/01/04	Following the referral by County Council in November 2003 of a motion by J T Metcalf, the Committee considered a report on 20mph speed limits. The Committee recommended that the Transport panel carefully review the issue of 20 mph speed limits, including consideration of the criteria for the introduction of 20 mph schemes to be included in the Speed Management Strategy.	Work outside scrutiny
16	Town Centre Improvements		<p>To conduct a joint review with North Herts DC to examine the long-term impact of the comprehensive enhancement of Hitchin Town Centre. The review will examine the implementation in terms of disturbance and impact on local businesses and their ongoing viability as a result of the changes. The review will also examine provision of long term maintenance and the way in which split responsibilities for highway and environmental maintenance is handled.</p> <p>The Committee in January 2004 asked the Director of Environment to develop a protocol to help address the potential problems for long term maintenance arising from town centre enhancements. The Chairman was also asked to write to local members for North Herts to seek their agreement for removal of this item from the scrutiny work programme. An oral update will be provided at the March Committee under this item.</p>	<p>Work Outside Scrutiny</p> <p>Oral update in March 2004</p>
17	Rectory Lane	20/01/04	<p>The Committee in October 2003 was presented with a petition against the re-opening of Rectory Lane, Stevenage. At the meeting in January the Chairman reported that some Members had been approached by the Rectory Lane Residents Association (RLRA) and the Police with significant concerns about the processes used to reach the recommendation of the Stevenage Highways Joint Member Panel (JMP). A Topic Group was set up to scrutinise the processes used.</p> <p>The Topic Group met and heard the views and comments of the RLRA, the Police, the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Joint Member Panel and Herts Highways. It recommended that the JMP were afforded a chance to review its position and made some further recommendations about the general processes and practices used by JMPs.</p>	

	Rectory Lane cont'd. . .		<p>The JMP held a special meeting on 27 February and recommended that:</p> <p>(i) the road be re-opened, that the County Council work with the local community and its representatives to look at the problems afresh, considering all available solutions, the duties of the Highway Authority and the aims of the Safer Routes To School Project, with a view to coming to a conclusion 12 months after the road is re-opened; and</p> <p>(ii) that all criteria be agreed by the Stevenage Highways Joint Member Panel before any work commences.</p> <p>A report on this matter is on the agenda for this meeting.</p>	
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* Status definitions:

- **Investigation** – The scrutiny committee has commissioned work, which could be from a topic group, officers, consultants or other parties which is not yet complete but will report to the main committee in the future.
- **Work outside scrutiny** – an item which has been raised by the scrutiny committee where work is being taken forward through another mechanism in response to the item being raised by scrutiny– a panel, external body or officer mechanism for example.
- **Monitoring** – Items which the scrutiny committee has scrutinised in the past where it has asked for occasional or regular updates. This update could be a planned report, in which case the dates should be given, or monitoring through the update report. Items where there is work outside scrutiny can also be monitoring items.
- **Awaiting Action** – Items the committee wishes to scrutinise or review where the timing is unclear due to awaiting events or the outcome of other investigations. e.g. government guidance

FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

ITEM	DATE	SCRUTINY FOCUS
1. Thameslink 2000	June 2004	To receive the final report and recommendations of the Thameslink 2000 Topic Group.
2. Number of Affordable Homes Built	June 2004	Referred from Resources – to be considered in a Topic Group once the (Congestion) Topic Group looking at the CPA assessment has concluded its work (March 2004)

3. Buses & Bus Subsidies	June 2004	Process for withdrawal etc and use of alternatives. Item requested by Chris White.
4. Hertfordshire Highways	June 2004	Update from Topic Group set up in October 2003.
5. Environmental Management Systems (EMS)	June 2004	To review progress on the introduction of Environmental Management System (ISO 14001).
6. Restoration of Minerals and Waste Sites	June 2004	To consider examples of best practice and whether there are lessons to be learnt for inclusion in the County Council's two new Local Plans.
7. Obstructions and Rights of Way	June 2004	Requested by Brian York (October 2003).
8. Congestion Management Topic Group	June 2004	To receive the final report and recommendations of the Congestion Management Topic Group.
9. Cycling Facilities	June 2004	Requested by Brian York (March 2004)
10. Representation to DEFRA on Environmental Impacts of Agricultural Set-aside	After the announcement of the changes to the Common Agricultural Policy.	Requested by Nigel Agar (October 2003).
11. Recruitment and Retention		The January Committee agreed that it wished to propose this as an item for future scrutiny. The issue was referred to the next agenda planning meeting of the group spokesmen to decide who should scrutinise this issue and how it would progress.

Note: Each meeting will also have Budget Monitor, Traffic Light Monitor (except January) and Scrutiny Update & Work Programme report.