

**HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

**ENVIRONMENT  
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**TUESDAY 29 JUNE 2004 AT 10.00 AM**

Agenda Item No:

**2**

**HERTFORDSHIRE HIGHWAYS TOPIC GROUP**

Report of the Director of Environment

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**1. Purpose of Report**

To advise the Scrutiny Committee of the work of the Hertfordshire Highways Topic Group and to make recommendations to the Committee on the various aspects of the work it was asked to carry out

**2. Summary**

The Hertfordshire Highways Topic Group has reviewed the range of issues referred to it by Environment Scrutiny Committee. It received presentations from staff within Hertfordshire Highways (from all three partners) and was able to question those staff in a number of different areas. Attention focused on Performance Measurement, Joint Member Panels, Recruitment and Retention and Communication with Members and the public.

**3. Conclusion**

3.1 Having considered the information with which it had been provided, the Topic Group has concluded that:

1. The performance regime developed to monitor the performance of Hertfordshire Highways is robust and that the output from this system should be reported annually to Scrutiny Committee.
2. A Code of Good Practice should be prepared for the operation of Joint Member Panels to be presented to a joint meeting of the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the Joint Member Panels.
3. Current management actions to address recruitment and retention difficulties are being effective and should be shared within the Authority.

4. Communication with members is generally effective and where shortcomings have been identified through the member survey, these will be specifically addressed. Communication with the public needs to be improved with regard to feedback on the repair of faults.

## 4. Background

### 4.1 Remit of the Topic Group

At its meeting on 21 October 2003 Environment Scrutiny Committee considered a number of reports on various aspects of Hertfordshire Highways. The Committee decided to establish a five-member Topic Group to consider, and report back on, a range of issues relating to the operation of Hertfordshire Highways.

### 4.2 The following issues were referred for consideration:

- Scrutiny of the performance of Hertfordshire Highways
- Consistency and good practice across the ten District Joint Member Panels (JMPs)
- Recruitment and Retention
- Performance of EDF
- Timing of traffic signals

### 4.3 At its meeting on 23 March 2004, Environment Scrutiny Committee also included the output from the Rectory Lane, Stevenage Scrutiny process into the remit of the group.

### 4.4 Following an initial discussion in the Topic Group, it was agreed to focus on the first three items on this list (which would include the Rectory Lane output). EDF performance had been the subject of further review at Scrutiny Committee and Traffic Signal timings was considered to be an operational matter.

### 4.5 Process

The Topic Group comprised:

Richard Roberts (Chair)

Mary Bayes

Roy Clements

Brian York

Tanis Kent

With Elam Singam and Sue Jones as substitutes.

### 4.6 The Group met on seven occasions and received presentations on:

Background to Hertfordshire Highways Concept and Controls

Hertfordshire Highways Performance Management System

Fault reporting

Works Team approach to contract

Recruitment and Retention

## 5. Issues and Recommendations

### 5.1 Performance

Hertfordshire Highways has developed and has been applying a performance measuring system for assessing the performance of both suppliers (Works Team and Design Team). This system was explained at the October 2003 Scrutiny Committee and the Topic Group received a more comprehensive presentation on the system as part of its work.

- 5.2 The system comprises a set of Performance Indicators (PIs) for each supplier (25 for the Works Team and 23 for the Design Team). Each PI generates a score that is determined from a graph (see example in Appendix 1). Each PI's graph has a different "shape" or "curve" depending on what has been determined to be "unacceptable", "acceptable" and "outstanding" performance. For example, using the graph in Appendix 1, a performance of 93% would generate a score of 80%.
- 5.3 Through negotiation, these curves are to be tightened through the duration of the contracts so a higher performance will be needed to achieve the same score. In this way, continuous improvement should be achieved.
- 5.4 Each score is then given a weighting and the weighted scores for all PIs are then added together to give an overall score for that contract.
- 5.5 Annual bonuses and contract extensions are awarded or not on the basis of the scores achieved by each supplier.
- 5.6 The Topic Group has concluded that the performance measuring system for Hertfordshire Highways is comprehensive, robust and will allow performance to be satisfactorily assessed and reported.
- 5.7 **It is recommended that the Scrutiny Committee should receive an annual report on the performance of Hertfordshire Highways. This will allow Scrutiny Committee to take a strategic overview of the performance of the alliance. It is suggested that this should take place in June of each year (allowing the figures for the financial year to be gathered). For the first report it is suggested that this be presented to the October 2004 meeting. Following this report each year, Scrutiny Committee can select items for further scrutiny throughout the year if it so wishes.**
- 5.8 At a more local level, quarterly performance figures are presented to each Joint Member Panel for each District. **It is recommended that this continues and that JMPs may refer performance concerns via delegated officers to help develop a programme of further scrutiny referred to in 5.1.7.**

## 5.9 Joint Member Panels

There are Joint Member Panels in each District that meet generally on a quarterly cycle. JMPs are advisory, Appendix 2 shows a table that demonstrates how each Panel operates. There are a number of common or consistent approaches but there are also some inconsistencies. Whilst some local discretion may be desirable as to how each Panel operates, the Topic Group feels that there are some features which ought to apply across all ten JMPs. In particular the Topic Group considers that all JMPs should be open to the public and chaired by an elected member. Further it is suggested that JMP papers should be available to all members of both authorities (including members not on the JMPs) and that these are posted on the appropriate District Council websites.

5.10 The Topic Group also feels that there should be more cross-fertilisation between the various JMPs to enable best practice to be shared.

5.11 **The Topic Group recommends that a Code of Good Practice be prepared and presented to a joint workshop of chairs and vice-chairs of all JMPs. Clearly the output from the Rectory Lane scrutiny process needs to be incorporated into this guidance.**

## 5.12 Recruitment and Retention

The Topic Group reviewed the current vacancy situation for HCC staff in Hertfordshire Highways. Whilst the situation varied across the County, overall there are, and have been, a high number of vacancies that has had an impact on service delivery.

5.13 The Topic group reviewed the management action taken to address this, such as:

- Development of website
- Tracking former applicants
- Initial application by CV
- Graduate training scheme
- Reviewing required skills
- “Recommend a Friend” scheme
- Improving advert text
- Improved supporting information to candidates
- Learning from other Councils

5.14 The Topic Group believes that this has already, and should continue to bring about significant improvements in recruitment. In the last 4 months, 5 engineers and 2 administrative staff have been appointed with 6 of these staff appointed to positions in the South-West and Mid-West quadrant offices. The Topic Group welcomes this progress.

5.15 The Topic Group has also raised the issue of recruitment with the countywide panel for recruitment and retention to satisfy itself that sufficient corporate attention is put on the problem in Hertfordshire Highways.

5.16 **The Topic Group recommends that the learning from this process be shared within the Authority. It also recommends that JMPs are given regular updates on staffing levels in their areas.**

5.17 Communication with Members and the Public

The Topic Group reviewed how Members are kept informed about the activities of Hertfordshire Highways. All Members receive a monthly bulletin giving information about schemes in the Integrated Works Programme for their Divisions. The main Performance Indicators for the routine part of the service are reported to each meeting of all JMPs for that District area.

5.18 The Topic Group has carried out a survey of Members to determine the level of satisfaction amongst that group with the amount, quality and reliability of information they receive from Hertfordshire Highways. This information is summarised in Appendix 3. This showed that, in general, Members are satisfied with the clarity, reliability, frequency and timeliness of information they receive from Hertfordshire Highways. The Topic group feels that this feedback reflects the improvements that have been implemented since the creation of Hertfordshire Highways. **It is recommended that where individual Members have raised specific comments, these are addressed.**

5.19 Feedback to the public has been an area for concern. Having reviewed the fault reporting system, the Topic Group supports the management action taken to ensure that greater use is made of the opportunity to feedback to the public when reported faults will be repaired. Every effort must continue to be made to improve the proportion of faults repaired "on time". Those that are not repaired need to have up to date and reliable information available to the public via the website or Customer Service Centre to explain when the fault will be repaired. In this way the public will be better informed, customer satisfaction will increase and complaints will reduce.

5.20 **It is recommended that the feedback to the public via the website (and hence Customer Services Centre) continues to be monitored to ensure that completeness and accuracy continue to improve.**

## 6. Financial Implications

There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

## 7. Access to Services

Improvements in communication with the public will enhance their ability to register faults and monitor progress of repair.

## **8. Conclusion**

- 8.1 Having considered the information with which it had been provided, the Topic Group has concluded that:
- 8.2 The performance regime developed to monitor the performance of Hertfordshire Highways is robust and that the output from this system should be reported annually to Scrutiny Committee.
- 8.3 A Code of Good Practice should be prepared for the operation of Joint Member Panels to be presented to a joint meeting of the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the Joint Member Panels.
- 8.4 Current management action to address recruitment and retention difficulties are being effective however this should be kept under review.
- 8.5 Communication with members is generally effective and where shortcomings have been identified through the member survey, these will be specifically addressed. Communication with the public needs to be improved with regard to feedback on the repair of faults.

### *Background papers used by the author when compiling this report*

Reports to Environment Scrutiny Committee 21 October 2003

Rectory Lane Report to Environment Scrutiny Committee