

Minutes of the meeting of the Place Services and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee, held digitally on Thursday, 17 December 2020

Present from the Committee:

Councillor I Grundy (Chairman)	Councillor S Lissimore
Councillor A Wood	Councillor C Pond
Councillor R Moore	Councillor R Pratt
Councillor A Erskine	Councillor D Kendall
Councillor S Hillier	Councillor C Weston
Councillor P Honeywood	Councillor B Massey
Councillor W Schmitt	Councillor I Henderson

Also in Attendance:

Cllr M Mackrory	Cllr V Metcalfe
Cllr A Turrell	Cllr M Buckley
Cllr M Garnett	

1. Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest

There are no changes to the membership of the committee since the last meeting.

It was noted by the committee that this would be a joint meeting, with members of the Corporate Policy and Scrutiny Committee also invited to attend.

2. Minutes

Members approved as a correct record Minutes of the meeting held on 26 November 2020.

3. Questions from the Public

There was one public question.

Mr Rahjam, Chelmsford, asked:

I'm a keen cyclist and something of an evangelist for utility cycling, I'm a great advocate of making short journeys by bicycle rather than car. In an average year I cycle a thousand kilometres of utility journeys all

under 5 km within the city of Chelmsford. That is several hundred car journeys saved.

I was delighted when I saw the section of the Chelmsford growth plan which dealt with cycling on Broomfield Road. I live at the top of First Avenue and so Broomfield Road is involved in many of these journeys. I have always regarded Broomfield Road as one of the most dangerous roads to cycle on in Chelmsford and the previous narrow painted cycle lanes actually increased the risk of cycling on this road as some drivers considered that as long as they were on the road side of the line they had given enough space. This did not take into account the fact that the lane was barely wider than my handlebars in parts. The other members of my family found it so intimidating that they would not cycle on it, greatly reducing their scope for cycle journeys. I was particularly pleased that there was a physical division between the road and the cycle route as there is considerable research showing that this is necessary to achieve a significant risk reduction and that solely painted cycle routes do not significantly reduce risk.

I was, therefore, greatly disappointed when I saw the route under construction to see that it was a demarcated only by a line and a colour change. I was unable to find any material relating to this change on the council or Essex highways website.

My questions are:

- 1. are there any plans to add wands or other physical demarcation before the project is finished?*
- 2. Was the cost benefit analysis of the project revisited in light of the reduced benefits due to lack of physical demarcation and what was the result?*
- 3. What risk assessment was done of the change?*

It was noted that the question was outside of the scope of this particular meeting, but that the Cabinet Member was happy to take the question offline and share the answer with the committee.

4. Update on Ringway Jacobs Contract

Members noted report PSEG/15/20. Members also received a presentation outlining a high-level update on contract performance, the impact of the pandemic on maintenance services and a recap on the decision to extend the contract in early 2020.

Key points raised included:

Covid implications:

- Most highways functions have continued to operate throughout the pandemic.
- Responding to the pandemic has driven innovation – e.g. online NDORS courses and VISALA inspection technology.
- Significant reductions in income as a result of reduced applications, developer activity and traffic volumes.
- Preparations in place for increased Winter Maintenance resilience.
- Significant push on sustainable and active travel as a result of increased levels of use prompted by COVID.

Contract Extension:

- Evidence gathering took place throughout 2018/19.
 - Benchmarking for value for money highways services, ECC scored 7th highest out of 21 authorities assessed.
 - Current contractual model assessed and deemed most favourable
 - ADEPT survey identified RJ as the 2nd highest performing Tier 1 supplier in the marketplace and the most improved since 2015.
 - £2.3m market testing conducted – 75% of work through RJ delivered better value for money.
 - Market conditions considered – levels of instability and innovation.
 - Engagement with 20 other local Authorities to review options.
 - Scrutiny task and finish group assisted with the process.
 - Thorough supply chain audit – good work in place and improvement opportunities identified.
 - RJ demonstrated forward plan for innovation.
- Roundtable discussions took place in November.
 - £5.029m saving target (20% of commissioned budget) agreed.
 - Other contractual considerations including red claims and payment mechanism revised.
- Decision to extend taken at January Cabinet Meeting.
- Since extension, key contract updates include:
 - Savings board established to track delivery of the identified cost reductions.
 - Regular Member chaired technology & innovation board reporting to Strategic Partnership Board.
 - Contractual documents progressed including complete re-write to schedule 4 (payment mechanism) and HoT for contract amendments to facilitate the extension.
 - Long running red claims disagreement resolved and contract amended to provide clarity for future claims.
 - Lean review commenced across the service to drive transformation and cost reductions.
 - Various income streams developed to increase the current circa £12m of income the service relies upon on an annual basis.
 - COVID has delayed some progress on extension related activity while the service focused on responding to the pandemic.

Following the presentation, members of the committee were invited to ask questions. Key points raised by the committee included:

- Escooter pilot schemes – Members raised concerns regarding escooter pilot schemes greenlit for areas of the county, including Basildon. Members were assured that the safety of pedestrians, drivers and scooter users was central to proposals. Local accessibility groups have been engaged when drawing up the bid to central government and the routes and areas in which the scooters will work have been geofenced to prevent them from leaving designated pilot areas.
- Public transport – members were assured that every effort was being made to encourage passenger transport use and cement congestion gains made during the pandemic. The safety of passengers was obviously the central concern though.
- Scrutiny of renewal process – members were reminded that the contract was extended, not renewed. When the time came for full reprocurement or renewal, members were assured that every effort to involve scrutiny would be made.
- Works carried out by utility companies – members raised concerns around the ‘like for like’ repair of roads damaged by utility works. Members were invited to share examples of poor repair works when they arise to ensure that work is carried out effectively and to a good quality. The Cabinet Member assured members that sample tests of utility work are carried out as standard to ensure that work was effectively quality controlled.
- The buddy system – the cabinet member was praised for the rollout and effectiveness of the buddy system. Members did note, however, that there was some inconsistency with the responsiveness of staff. The Cabinet Member agreed to take this away and look into it.
- ‘Make safes’ – members raised concerns around the quality of makesafe work. Members were assured that all make safe work did exactly that, it made the imminent issue safe for a much longer time. Issues raised with regards to signage were also addressed, with the Cabinet Member outlining how communication had improved in this area.

ACTION: Members requested that a future session be scheduled for the Cabinet Member to update members of the committee on the recommendations presented by the Ringway Jacobs Task and Finish group in 2019.

ACTION: Members requested a discussion on the future role of the Task and Finish group with regards to ongoing scrutiny of the Ringway Jacobs Contract.

5. Date of Next Meeting

Members noted that the next committee activity day is scheduled for Thursday 21st January

6. Urgent Business

None received

7. Urgent exempt Business

None received

Close of meeting

The formal meeting was closed at 11.52