

Minutes of the Place and Environment Scrutiny Committee held at 7pm on Tuesday 19th December 2023 in the Council Chamber, Corby Cube, George Street, Corby, Northants, NN17 1QG

Present: -

Members

Councillor Gill Mercer (Chair)

Councillor Melanie Coleman

Councillor Philip Irwin

Councillor Mark Pengelly

Councillor Kevin Watt

Councillor Geoff Shacklock

Councillor Lee Wilkes

Officers

Graeme Kane, executive Director of Place & Economy

Steve Smith, Assistant Director of Highways & Waste

Rob Harbour, Assistant Director of Growth & Regeneration

Carol Mundy, Senior Democratic Services Officer, (Committees/Members)

Emma Robinson, Democratic Services Support Officer.

All present Mr Coombes and Mr Caroll from Kier Transportation.

The Chair welcomed members and the viewing public to the meeting.

20 Apologies for absence

Resolved to note that an apology was received from Councillor V Anslow.

21 Members' declarations of interest (if any)

The chair invited those who wished to do so to make a declaration as follows:

Councillor Coleman	Minute 23 – New Highways Contract Provider	Personal – Husband previously worked for Marriott's who became Kier and receives a pension.
--------------------	--	---

Resolved that the declaration be noted.

22 Minutes of the meeting held on 31 October 2023

The minutes of the meeting of 31 October 2023 were received.

It was proposed by Councillor Wilkes and second by Councillor Coleman that the minutes be approved, on being put to the vote this was declared carried.

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting of 31 October 2023 be approved as an accurate record thereof.

23 New Highways Contract Provider

The circulated report of the Assistant Director Highways and Waste, Steve Smith, was received to provide a review of the performance of the council's contract with Kier Transportation to provide Highways & Maintenance works and services following the first year of operation. The report referenced performance for the period 1 October 2022 to 30 September 2023.

The assistant director gave a presentation to the committee detailing the background, performance and issues over the contract period. He was accompanied by John Coombes and Rob Carroll of Kier Transportation.

Appended to the report were the following:

- Appendix A – Contract Governance meetings;
- Appendix B – Key performance indicators and October 2023 performance;
- Appendix C – Strategic Performance Indicators

The report detailed the commencement of the contract on 12 September 2023, and the significant changes to the previous contract, previously operated by Northamptonshire County Council initially then as a shared service between NNC and West Northamptonshire Council. It was noted that the current contract was provided by Kier Transportation, a separate entity to KierWSP, and had required a significant transition of staff, systems and processes between the old service provider and the current service provision.

The assistant director clarified that Kier Transportation had generally exceeded performance target requirements within the contract. Where there had been any issues Kier had promptly put in place corrective actions to enable performance to be consistently met.

Kier had also significantly exceeded the level of social value, above and beyond operational requirements with £13.8million of added value provided in the first year of operation.

In relation to the highway network, officers were aware that the overall condition of the highway was deteriorating, increasing the level of demand for pothole repairs above that anticipated in the first year of the contract. This was a known national issue and is replicated across all highway authorities which are not subject to Private Finance initiatives (PFI).

Mr Smith, Mr Coombes and Mr Carroll were present to take any questions from the committee.

The chair thanked Mr Smith for his presentation and for the information within the report and asked members if they wished to ask any questions.

In summary members raised the following issues:

- The number of complaints from constituents had risen and all related to the poor state of the highway, issues with large potholes, causing damage to tyres and vehicle suspension and the equally poor and dangerous footpaths. Whilst there had been some evidence of improvement, members considered it would

be helpful to receive percentage numbers for the number of potholes reported and the number repaired within a given period for each ward. Concerns were also expressed about the fact that bollards, and street signs were no longer cleaned, and that vegetation was not cut back at the side of roads and around kerbs or near to street signs which made them hard to read. Gully cleaning was also needed. A question was asked about the current policies and performance measures.

Officers responded firstly to explain that there was a distinction between policy and performance and that it was the policy that reflected many of the members concerns and not Kier's performance, so for example a policy would state that defects had to meet a level deemed to be unsafe to be repaired within a given time, but each report would have to be assessed, with officers explaining the process and timescales for this, prior to it being added to the repairs list.

The current policies for NNC were being updated and would be the subject of review to committee and would consider targets for lots of issues including the cleaning of bollards, removal of vegetation for example. Some issues with overgrown vegetation took longer to resolve as often the problem could be on private land.

All issues and concerns over the highway could be logged using the 'Fix My Street' service, which was a nationally used reporting process. Complaints would then go through to the service for assessment. Updates would be provided via email along with notification of when the job had been completed.

- Reference was also made to the report and the failures highlighted therein which the committee considered to be of concern along with quality issues.

Officers explained that this was a new contract with a new culture and new systems, including technology and it had taken some time to transfer the employees over, and to provide induction training on new processes and equipment. There was also the ability for officers to manage desk top assessments, and to supervise and inspect. Kier were also now informing NNC of what was required and what problems were being found following regular inspections of roadways. The team was now in place and progressing well.

- Members asked if they could be provided with statistics about the number of potholes reported and the percentage of those repaired within the set timescales and if Kier was paid for each pothole repair.

Officers clarified that there was a target cost price to repair a set level of defects each year and this provided an incentive to Kier to carry out repairs in the same area. Funds are limited and it was becoming more and more challenging with a reduction in funding.

- Members noted the significant volume of salt that was stored and asked if this was in preparation for bad weather and whether it was expected to be enough.

Officers clarified that the storage meets national requirements and with the current weather predictions this was expected to be adequate and more could be ordered if needs be.

- The issue of funding was raised to, including the need for Section 106 Developer Contribution monies to be claimed and spent wisely and appropriately. Reference was made to individual wards which officers would need to investigate outside the meeting, should members wish to raise directly.

An example was given that £1m of funding spent on potholes would fix around 4,000 potholes, with a maximum of 6,000. On average 700 defects were reported each month. There were 10 gangs working on the defects and on average 30 were repaired per day. There was always a backlog in the system and work in progress.

Resolved that:

- (i) The contents of the report be noted;
- (ii) The issues of concern were as detailed in these minutes and would continue to be monitored.

24 Progress of Sustainable Urban Extensions across North Northamptonshire

The circulated report of the Executive Director for Place and Economy was received to provide an update on the progress of the planned sustainable urban extensions (SUEs) across North Northamptonshire to ensure that development was taking place in good time to ensure that a five-year housing land supply was available.

The committee had identified some concern relating to the progress of some of the development particularly where there may be detrimental impact on the land supply.

Mr Harbour, Assistant Director, Growth and Regeneration presented his report to committee and referenced the six SUE's and one Garden Village within North Northamptonshire's planning policy framework which are in total expected to deliver over 27,500 homes upon completion. Each SUE was at a different stage with some having planning permissions that are enabling development and housebuilding to proceed, whilst others were working through the planning process prior to any development on site.

The council had a healthy five-year housing land supply with a figure of 7.46 years (to end of March 22). During the year 2022/23 a total of 1,120 housing completions had taken place.

The report further detailed the current position, any obstacles to progress, planned mitigations, next steps and expected trajectory of future delivery, on each of the SUEs which included developments at:

Glenvale Park, Wellingborough
 Hanwood Park, Kettering
 High Hayden, Rushden
 North-East Corby (Priors Hall and Weldon Park)
 Stanton Cross, Wellingborough,
 West Corby and
 Tresham Garden Village

The report also detailed the number of completions on each site for 2022/23 and all sites apart from the three below had planning permission and were progressing.

High Hayden was currently going through the planning process.

Tresham Garden Village had seen little progress being made with lack of engagement by interested parties. Homes England had raised concern about the lack of progress with the promoter and had mooted that they may withdraw funding.

West Corby had outline planning permission approved in December 2019 for up to 4,500 dwellings. Work had been ongoing to resolve some site issues and then detailed planning permission would be applied for; it was considered that the first homes would be built in 2026.

The chair thanked Mr Harbour for his presentation and opened the item for debate and questions.

Members referred to their concerns in their own area, particularly around commitments regarding infrastructure and money for road improvements being south through section 106 funding and that there should be reviews on costs over the period of a phased development.

A question was asked about why a town council would have been made aware of an application before NNC. Mr Harbour said they would have been a consultee prior to the application coming before committee. This was normal practice. It was even possible to reconsult because of additional information. The application being referenced would probably come before committee in late Spring.

Regarding affordable housing on each site, this would determine at the developer contributions stage and agreed through the section 106 process. Often developers would argue over financial viability but NNC employed financial specialists who were independent, who would ascertain what was viable.

Comments were also made that it seemed to be increasingly popular for service charges to be levied for the upkeep of communal spaces. Mr Harbour confirmed that this was becoming more common and the local authority could not interfere with that decision.

The committee also asked that more consideration be given within the larger developments to educational needs for all levels, health and community land along with the importance of suitable highway infrastructure.

Resolved that:

- (i) The content of the report be noted for the purpose of scrutiny;
- (ii) That members be kept informed of developments through engagement and briefings.

25 Close of meeting

There being no further business the chair thanked all for their attendance and closed the meeting at 9.25pm.

Chair.....

Date.....