

Traffic, Environment & Community Safety Scrutiny Panel.

MINUTES OF THE MEETING of the Traffic, Environment & Community Safety Scrutiny Panel held on 18 March 2009 at 3pm in the Guildhall.

(NB These minutes should be read in conjunction with the agenda for the meeting).

Present

Councillors Caroline Scott (Chair)
Mike Blake
Paula Riches
Les Stevens

Also present

Brian Hicks, Managing Director Ensign.
Bill Murphy, Highways Manager.
John Pike, Conservation and Design Team Leader.
Ray Privet, PFI Contract Manager.
Clive Rankin, Clean City Manager.
Charles Stunell, Head of Transport and Street Management.

Anthony Quinn, Senior Local Democracy Officer.
Jane Di Dino, Scrutiny Support Officer

5 Declarations of Interest (AI 1).

No interests were declared.

6 Apologies for Absence (AI 2).

Councillor David Fuller sent his apologies.

7 Minutes of Last Meeting (AI 3).

RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting held on 4 December 2008 be agreed as a correct record.

8 Review of the City Council's Contract with Colas (AI 4).

The Panel considered the project brief for the review of the City Council's Contract with Colas.

RESOLVED that the project brief be agreed.

The witnesses introduced themselves to the Panel:

Charles Stunell, Head of Transport & Street Management.

Brian Hicks – Managing Director of Ensign, which Colas set up in order to manage its contract with Portsmouth City Council.

Bill Murphy, Highways Manager is responsible for the day-to-day management of the PFI contract.

Clive Rankin, Clean City Manager is responsible for street cleansing and enforcement.

Ray Privett, Contracts Manager has been managing the highways for over 25 years.

Charles Stunell, Head of Transport and Street Management gave an overview of the City Council's contract with Colas. During the presentation, a copy of which is attached to these minutes as appendix one, the following points were clarified:

In 1997 Portsmouth City Council became a unitary authority and therefore took on responsibility for social services and education in the city. Some money was then transferred from highways to fund these new services. The resultant lack of funding for highways meant that the condition of the network deteriorated significantly.

PFI funding is recognised as not being the most efficient way of borrowing money, but it was the only option for the City Council in 2004.

The Panel was asked to note that the contract only places a duty on Colas to bring and maintain the roads to an acceptable standard not an excellent standard.

The contract was signed on 30 July 2004 with service commencement on 31 January 2005 and therefore the 5-year Core Investment Period will finish at the end of July 2009. During this period, Colas will bring the roads and footways up to an acceptable standard and 10,500 (80%) street light columns will be replaced.

Injury accident claims caused by the unsatisfactory condition of roads and pavements have reduced by 80% over the last 5 years.

Colas recognises has been involved in many activities in the local community and therefore is living up to the spirit of partnership.

Colas recognises that it needs to review its communication process. One of the reasons for this is that generally, residents expect to be consulted with about their road more than has been in the case in the past. The City Council has also increased its communication programmes accordingly.

Mr Stunell also noted that engineers tend to consider only the functionality of the street scene and this is reflected in the provisions of the contract whereas residents may be just as concerned with appearance. This has led to tension in the past.

The contract provides for maintenance of the highway network. However, the network is changing regularly with new developments, new technology being used, more crossings and more traffic lights being installed. Each time the network is amended, Colas gives the Council revised maintenance costs.

It is important that the City Council review the rates to ensure that it is still getting the best value.

Brian Hicks, Director of Ensign explained that Colas has an annual turnover of approximately 12.8b Euros, operates in 60 countries and employs over 60,000 staff. It maintains a third of motorways in the UK. Ensign was created by Colas specifically to manage the PFI contract with Portsmouth City Council.

Mr Hicks then gave the following responses to a series of both pre-set questions and questions from the Panel arising at this meeting:

Road and footway assessments.

Each footway and carriageway section is assessed at least once a year by an independent company following the United Kingdom Pavement Management System (KPMS) method. Any defects noted are transformed into quality indexes through a mechanism described in the contract. The contract stipulates three minimum thresholds to reach for carriageways depending on the type of network (primary, secondary, tertiary) and one threshold throughout the city for footways. Once the sections at risks are identified, further investigations are made to determine the most appropriate technical treatment. At contract commencement, the network scored 12 out of a possible 30 on the Network Condition Indices (NCI), which is considered poor to critical. A recent survey scored the network just below 12. At the end of the Core Investment Works the NCI needs to exceed 18.6, average to good. Colas is on target to achieve this figure.

Colas Inspectors also visit the network regularly and report on the road condition.

Tree replacement.

Colas replaces trees like for like, except for fruit trees which are replaced with non fruit trees in order to prevent slips from fallen fruit. Colas is required to maintain the same total number of trees throughout the contract: 8,500.

The Panel expressed concern about a lack of consultation regarding recent tree felling in several roads in Southsea. In response, Mr Hicks recognised that mistakes had been made and that as a result the consultation process is being reviewed with ward councillors being informed at the same time as residents. However, he asked the Panel to note that Colas has a duty of care to the public and that it was not possible to replace felled trees in some roads as the pavements were too narrow to contain trees and at the same time to allow adequate space for pedestrians to pass. This problem could possibly be resolved by the introduction of a one-way system, as this would give room for the pavement to be expanded.

Colas consults a very good arboriculturist to assess the health of trees along pavements.

Some trees that are already in place in residential streets may not be suitable as their large size could mean that their root system is a risk to the foundations of nearby houses.

It is possible for new developments to plant trees in their streets as long as the services are safely contained.

In some streets it may be possible to have a phased approach to tree removal to lessen the immediate impact.

Mr Stunell asked the Panel to note that Colas had no plans to use micro asphalt this year. Councillor Stagg, the Cabinet Member for Traffic and Transportation is satisfied in principle that the use of micro asphalt is acceptable but is concerned about workmanship in some areas.

Manhole covers

In response to a question from the Panel, Mr Hicks explained that if a manhole cover drops following a road resurfacing, then Colas is responsible for the subsequent repairs. However, if the drop is not due to a resurfacing of the road, Southern Water is responsible.

From time to time, the City Council's contract with Colas needs to be amended to take into account changes to the network. A Deed of Variation is then drawn up and signed by both parties.

A member of the Panel expressed concern over the removal of rumble strips that was removed from the lower part of Castle Road. Mr Stunell explained that he had taken the decision not to replace them as he deemed that speed-calming measure was no longer necessary since the introduction of the 20mph speed limit and the increase in parking in that street. He has had no reports of any complaints in that street regarding speeding traffic but would consider reviewing the road and to discuss this issue further with any member.

The Chair thanked everyone for their interesting and productive contributions to this review.

- 4 Date of Next Meeting (AI 5).**
Friday 17 April at 3pm.

The meeting ended at 5pm.