

Traffic, Environment & Community Safety Scrutiny Panel.

MINUTES OF THE MEETING of the Traffic, Environment & Community Safety Scrutiny Panel held on 18 May 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

Jim Patey

Also present

Brian Hicks, Managing Director, Ensign.

Lloyd Allen, Business Manager, Colas.

Bill Murphy, Highways Manager.

Charles Stunell, Head of Transport and Street Management.

Jane Di Dino, Scrutiny Support Officer

15 Declarations of Interest (AI 1).

No interests were declared.

16 Apologies for Absence (AI 2).

Councillors Margaret Foster and Richard Jenson sent their apologies.

17 Minutes of Last Meeting (AI 3).

RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting held on 17 April 2009 be agreed as a correct record.

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

The Chair asked Mr Stunell and Mr Murphy to clarify two statements that they had made at the last meeting:

He [Mr Stunell] did not agree with Mr Thompson's assessment of this work. (Page 6)

Mr Stunell, Head of Transport and Street Management explained that he was referring to the work carried out by Colas on Waverly Road. One of his colleagues had attended the site inspections and had been satisfied with the quality of work.

The contract stipulates that all footways must be maintained so that they are fit for purpose. (Page 7)

Mr Stunell explained that footways must be safe and be of sufficient width to allow pedestrians, buggies etc to pass. The footways in Waverley Road comply with both these conditions. Mr Stunell explained that the PFI contract does not mention aesthetics.

Mr Murpy, Highways Manager explained that he had inspected the works carried out in Waverley Road and was satisfied with the finished product. There had been an 80% reduction in the number of reported accidents on footways since the PFI contract started. If the works are judged unsatisfactory, Colas would carry out the remedial works at its own expense.

Lloyd Allen Business Manager, Colas was invited to respond to the issues that had been raised at the previous meeting with particular regard to Allens Road and Waverley Road. He clarified the following issues:

The procedures they are working to were agreed 15-20 years ago and since then residents expect to be involved in decisions that affect the streets they live in. Colas has taken on board the lessons it learnt when it carried out the tree works in Allens Road and is currently rewriting the communications policy.

It is important that the appropriate tree be planted in the right location. It is not a question of Colas wanting to plant cheaper trees. Feedback from residents' surveys has indicated that people prefer a mixture of tree species in streets.

The Chair noted that she had already witnessed examples of improved consultation with residents.

Brian Hicks Managing Director, Ensign added that Colas had inherited the contract, which is the first of its kind in the world. Other local authorities are looking to Portsmouth to see how it is working. He also explained that the maintenance of trees would continue throughout the life of the contract.

Mr Murphy explained that the sycamore trees in Allens Road were planted 50 years ago and have grown very large. It would not be appropriate to plant such large trees again in an urban scene as these can cause damage to the foundation of houses and utility cables.

Inspections focus on the output specification, which is a modern way of working.

Mr Stunell informed the Panel that the Cabinet would consider a report on the tree replacement policy in Allens Road at its meeting on 8 June.

RESOLVED that a copy of the report sent to the Cabinet be sent to this Panel.

Councillor Blake commented that trees in his street had been removed without consultation with residents and had not yet been replaced.

Mr Allen stated that as far as he was aware Colas has replaced every tree that it has removed. He agreed to look into the situation in Councillor Blake's road.

The Chair informed the Panel that following a query from Mr Thompson (a witness at the previous meeting), Mr Murphy had given the following details of

Councillor Stagg's monthly meetings with Colas:

Councillor Stagg attends these meetings to keep her fully informed of the overall situation with Colas' work. Although some details of works are discussed it is only one of many wide-ranging aspects that are or can be discussed. Should the meeting be aware of sub-standard works then it will be discussed. These meetings are not held in public.

The Chair reminded the Panel that a best value review of the PFI contract would be conducted by the Government and Portsmouth City Council commencing during July 2009 and would take approximately six months to complete.

The Panel made the following comments:

- Could Colas make more use of the neighbourhood forum network to communicate with residents about planned work.
- Colas has a very good record of giving residents plenty of notice of planned road works.
- There have been several incidents where complaints regarding the repositioning of streetlights have been dealt with promptly and to residents' satisfaction.
- There are several incidents where manhole covers have not been replaced properly after road surfacing works.
- The roads in Portsmouth are recognised as being the best maintained in the country.

In response to a question from the Panel, Mr Allen explained that when road-surfacing works are carried out the manhole should be adjusted so that it is level with the road.

Mr Thompson asked the Panel to note that he was not concerned with aesthetics, but rather the specifications used whilst doing the work.

Mr Stunell asked the Panel to note the following observations:

- That the Council has spent approximately £100m over 4 years and that the works in Waverley Road represent only £10k.
- Although problems may be identified with the works in one part of the city, it does not necessarily follow that these are widespread throughout the city or that there are faults in the contract.
- Clarified that the PFI contract is based on an output specification where it is the end result that matters. The risks are with Ensign/ Colas to ensure good standards otherwise they will have to bear the cost of all remedial works.

19 Date of Next Meeting (AI 5).

Tuesday 23 June at 3pm.

The meeting ended at 4pm