

SCRUTINY COMMISSION – 9 NOVEMBER 2011

**FINAL REPORT OF THE LIGHT TOUCH REVIEW PANEL ON
COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN MEMBERS AND OFFICERS
REGARDING SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE ENVIRONMENT AND
TRANSPORT DEPARTMENT**

REPORT OF THE REVIEW PANEL

Introduction

1. This report sets out the conclusions and findings of the light touch review of how members can raise concerns regarding services provided by the Environment and Transport Department, how these concerns are responded to and how, at a time of reduced resources, do we manage expectations.

Scope and rationale for the Review

2. The Scrutiny Commission on 20 April 2011 agreed to a light touch review being undertaken. Public concern about traffic and other highway maintenance issues comprise a significant proportion of complaints made to elected members. The changes in the structure of the Department and the significant reduction in resources pointed to the need to revisit the way in which members and officers of the Environment and Transport Department communicated and dealt with concerns raised by the public.

Membership of the Panel

3. Mr Kershaw and Mr Bray were appointed by the Scrutiny Commission to undertake this light touch review.

Findings of the Review

General Principles

4. Members and officers need to be mindful of the Protocol on Member and Officer relations which contains helpful advice and guidance to both. The Protocol can be found in Part 5 C of the Constitution. That said the Panel recommends the following key principles should be emphasised as being an essential basis for member/officer communications:-

- a) Members of the County Council are central to the functioning of a democratically accountable public body. It is essential that staff communicate with them in a clear, responsive and informative manner. At no point should a County Council Member find themselves in a position where they are not informed about events or proposals in their electoral division that might give rise to public interest. Members should expect a high standard of communication. This is in line with the requirements of the Local Issues Alert Procedure currently in place.
- b) Staff are required to deliver County Council policy. On occasion, individual Members may seek actions that go against policy. In these cases, staff should explain fully why they are applying the policy and cannot therefore accede to the request. Members need to recognise that officers can only act within the parameters set out in the Council policy and that any action which falls outside policy will require member approval – i.e. a policy change.
- c) On occasions, information is supplied to Members in confidence, either because of commercial considerations or because ideas are being tested that may not proceed in the form presented. Where this is the case, it will be made clear to the Member concerned. Members should not disclose information provided in confidence.

Timeliness of responses

- 5. Members can expect an acknowledgement of their query within three working days for e-mail and five working days for postal enquiries. Staff will answer in full if they have the information to hand; if not, a clear indication will be given of when a full reply can be expected. No enquiry will be left without communication for more than one month. If a full answer cannot be given, the Member will be informed as to why and when a full answer might be expected. Where a Member makes a request for a service that cannot be fulfilled, either for policy or financial reasons, a full explanation will be supplied.
- 6. Members are encouraged to visit the Environment & Transport pages of the County Council website on a regular basis. Information posted on the site will be refreshed regularly and kept up to date. In addition, members are encouraged to attend their local highways forum where local issues/concerns are normally raised. These Forums are attended by Environment and Transport staff who are available to members both before and after the meeting.

Departmental contacts for specific functions

- 7. The Environment & Transport Department deals with a range of matters relating to highways, transport, waste and the environment. There are a range of communications channels and this protocol sets out how they should be used. Some of the information set out below will need to be updated to reflect changes currently underway.

a) *Customer Service Centre*

The Customer Service Centre (CSC) has been set up to ensure that a responsive service is given to members of the public in respect of a wide range of County Council services. Although it is not intended as the principal means of communication for Members, this is the best way for Members to report routine matters, such as potholes, overgrown hedges, failed street lights etc. The CSC's service standards will ensure that Members are kept up-to-date with progress on their service request.

b) *Planning and Development Control*

Members will be informed of all planning applications being handled by the highways development control team. Formal observations to local planning authorities (the District and Borough Councils) will be copied to local members. In addition any pre-application observations will be copied to local Members but these are supplied on a confidential basis and should not be placed in the public domain. Members should normally deal with the case officer for each planning application, however more complex matters may be taken up with the team manager, Kingsley Cook (kingsley.cook@leics.gov.uk; ext 56782)

c) *General matters relating to management of local highway networks*

The Highways service has been reorganised from two groups, Northern and Southern, into a county-wide service that will be operated from County Hall. There will be an area manager for discrete parts of the county and these should be Members' first point of contact on highways matters. At present, these are;

- North-west, Andrew Lorimer (andrew.lorimer@leics.gov.uk; ext 52102)
- North-east, Mike Sheldrake (mike.sheldrake@leics.gov.uk; ext 52089)
- South-west, Ian Grierson (ian.grierson@leics.gov.uk; ext 52313)
- South-east, Clive Howe (clive.howe@leics.gov.uk; ext 52205)

Winter service is presently covered by Mark Stevens, Assistant Director, Highways, pending the appointment of a Group Manager for the Highways service.

However this service area is subject to review and updated information will be supplied to Members at a later date.

d) *Traffic and road safety*

Traffic management and road safety matters have been organised into one specialist group covering the whole County and based at County Hall.

This Group is managed by Greg Payne (greg.payne@leics.gov.uk; ext 57073) who should be the first point of contact. Greg is supported by:-

- David Wright (david.wright@leics.gov.uk; ext 55080) on Traffic Management,
- Steve Karkowski (steve.karkowski@leics.gov.uk; ext 57097) on road safety engineering and schemes and
- Nigel Horsley (nigel.horsley@leics.gov.uk; ext 57227) on road safety education and the school crossing patrol service.

e) *Waste*

The County Council is responsible for waste disposal and treatment and operates 14 Recycling and Household Waste Sites (RHWS) across the county. General information is available on the County Council website and routine queries, such as opening times, should be directed to the CSC. Specific issues relating to waste disposal, waste treatment and the RHWS should be directed to Harold Yates. (Harold.yates@leics.gov.uk; ext 58387)

f) *Waste Policy and Strategy*

Waste performance information, recycling credits, waste educational and volunteer schemes, and waste strategy are the remit of the Waste Policy and Strategy Group, led by Joanna Guyll (joanna.guyll@leics.gov.uk; ext 57079).

Enquiries relating to waste strategy, performance and recycling credits should be directed to Vicky Cormie (vicky.cormie@leics.gov.uk; ext 57291). Matters concerning waste education, volunteer schemes and other recycling and waste prevention initiatives (including, for example, home composting, real nappies and food waste digesters) should be referred to Anna Low (anna.low@leics.gov.uk; ext 58127) or Linda Wilson (linda.wilson@leics.gov.uk; ext 55587).

Enquiries relating to waste communication campaigns should be directed to Joanna Morrison (joanna.morrison@leics.gov.uk; ext 55850) in the central communications team.

The Leicestershire Waste Partnership is based at County Hall within the Waste Policy and Strategy Group. Enquiries relating to the Partnership should be directed to Andrew Harper, the Waste Partnership Manager (andrew.harper@leics.gov.uk; ext 58384).

g) *Passenger Transport*

The County Council provides a supported bus network, together with Demand Responsive Transport in more remote areas. The great bulk

of the bus network is provided by commercial operators, who are not directly answerable to the County Council. Concerns about bus services should be directed to the Sustainable Travel Group, managed by Tony Kirk (tony.kirk@leics.gov.uk; ext 56270). Tony is supported by Bidly Small in relation to bus service policy and bus stops (bidly.small@leics.gov.uk; ext 57311), Dave Smith in regard to complaints about any bus service operation including school buses (dave.smith@leics.gov.uk; ext 57245) and Phil Brecknell in relation to Blue Badges and Concessionary Travel (phil.brecknell@leics.gov.uk; ext 57249). Matters concerning operational school transport and the assessment of walking routes to school should also be directed to Tony Kirk.

h) Rights of Way, walking and cycling

Rights of Way, walking and cycling are the remit of the Travel Choice & Awareness team, led by Ian Vears (ian.vears@leics.gov.uk; ext 57215) who is part of the Sustainable Travel Group. Matters concerning Rights of Way should be directed to Edwin McWilliam (edwin.mcwilliam@leics.gov.uk; ext 57086), however Rights of Way maintenance issues should be referred to the CSC. Cycling and sustainable travel queries will be handled by Ian Vears or Charlie Sampson (charles.sampson@leics.gov.uk; ext 57098).

i) Environmental Management

The Environmental Management group is responsible for initiatives around Climate Change mitigation and adaptation, Green Infrastructure, Landscape, Tree Preservation Orders and restoration of the Ashby Canal.

The Group is managed by Peter Williams (peter.williams@leics.gov.uk; ext 57080). Specific inquiries should be directed as follows:

Climate Action – Oliver Savage (oliver.savage@leics.gov.uk; ext 55295)

Green Infrastructure/ Landscape /Charnwood Forest – Tony Lockley (tony.lockley@leics.gov.uk; ext 57057)

Ashby Canal Geoff Pursglove (geoff.pursglove@leics.gov.uk; 01530 273956)

Stepping Stones Project Sam Forster (sam.forster@leics.gov.uk; ext 57264) or Andy Jackson (andy.jackson@leics.gov.uk; ext 57221)

Farming and Water for the Future Andy Jackson

Tree Preservation Orders Andrew Shaw (andrew.shaw@leics.gov.uk; ext 57061)

j) Departmental Management Contacts

In all cases, if Members remain concerned they should feel free to contact Assistant Directors listed below:-

- Holly Field (Environment) (holly.field@leics.gov.uk; ext 58101)
- Ian Drummond (Transportation) ian.drummond@leics.gov.uk; ext 55990
- Mark Stevens (Highways) (mark.stevens@leics.gov.uk; ext 57966)

Recommendations

8. The Scrutiny Commission is asked to note the findings of the Panel and agree:-
 - a) that the findings of the review be circulated to all members of the County Council as a Members Information Item and that the contact information be updated on a regular basis and be brought to members attention;
 - b) that findings be included in the induction briefing pack for newly elected members.

Mr Kershaw CC

Mr Bray CC

Background Papers

Report to the Scrutiny Commission on 20 April 2011

Protocol on Member and Officer Relations - Part 5 C of the Constitution.