

Lancashire County Council

Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the Meeting held on Friday, 10th February, 2012 at 10.00 am in Cabinet Room 'B' - County Hall, Preston

Present:

County Councillor John Shedwick (Chair)

County Councillors

Mrs R Blow	Mrs J Hanson
S Chapman	D O'Toole
Mrs F Craig-Wilson	Mrs L Oades
C Crompton	D Westley
M Devaney	B Winlow
K Ellard	

County Councillor R Blow replaced County Councillor P Malpas for this meeting only.

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillor V Taylor.

2. Disclosure of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

None were disclosed.

3. Minutes of the Meeting held on 20 January 2012

Resolved: That, the minutes of the meeting held on 20 January 2012 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

4. Presentation by United Utilities

The Chair welcomed representatives from United Utilities (UU) Mark Donaghy, Public Affairs Manager, and John Webb, Highways Coordination Manager, to the meeting.

Mark Donaghy thanked the Committee for their invitation and stated that the County Council was an important stakeholder for United Utilities. It was hoped that feedback regarding their role and performance from Councillors and their constituents received at the meeting would be beneficial for them.

John Webb gave a presentation to the Committee on UUs role and performance since their last visit to the Committee in February 2011. He explained that all utilities companies had since signed up to the Highway Authorities Utilities Committee (HAUC (UK)) code of conduct which was issued in 2011. The code of conduct recognised the need to promote self regulation and to actively work together representing street authorities, highways and road agencies, utilities, contractors and other key stakeholders to manage and reduce disruption that such works cause to road users, businesses and residents within the UK. The code of conduct also promoted the following matters:

- Active participation at coordination meetings;
- Accepting the principles of permit schemes;
- To encourage advance planning with councils and other utilities;
- The use of minimum dig technology;
- To work outside peak hours where possible;
- Consider communications strategies;
- Improve inspection and compliance processes;
- Promote first time reinstatements; and
- To share good practice

It was reported that improvements were being made by UU in relation to their role and performance. The Committee was informed that UU had recently appointed a new Streetworks Transformation Manager to oversee performance in relation to issues such as re-instatements. A new Streetworks Board had also been established to review policy and performance and any suggestions taken to it. The Committee was also informed that Governance was now in place via an increased auditing regime of streetworks including re-instatements. It was also reported that coordination had improved with UU giving 100% attendance at all coordination meetings with the County Council.

It was also explained that communications by UU had improved with the implementation of new signage containing the new branding of the company. Positive feedback had been received in particular relating to the work on the Preston Scheme and the exemplary level of communication carried out by UUs Preston Project Team. It was highlighted that the Preston Scheme was UUs flagship process for communicating to those people who are affected by works being carried out.

In response to a question asked regarding the position of UU on the possible introduction of a permit scheme the Committee was informed that there were no schemes in place in the North West at present. Only three schemes were currently in existence across the Country being; London, Kent and Northamptonshire. The first to be rolled out in the North West would be in St Helens on 2 April 2012. The Committee was also informed that UU welcomed the opportunity to work closely with the County Council on fulfilling the requirements of a permit scheme. It was hoped that the scheme for Lancashire would be rolled out in April 2013.

In response to a question regarding UUs views on the effectiveness of streetworks coordination and whether there was any room for improvement; the Committee was informed that UU felt that there was still room for improvement on coordination. UUs attendance at coordination meetings had increased to 100%. UU also recognised that the exchange of information regarding proposed works could be done sooner. Currently, UU sought to provide such information six months in advance. UUs aim was to extend this period of notice to 12 months with a view to extending to a further 18 months. It was hoped that extending the notice period would assist in improving coordination works.

UU provided a breakdown of summary data between April 2011 and the current date in response to questions relating to performance on re-instatements, signing, lighting and guiding. On safety performance (Category A – signing, lighting and guiding) UUs failure rate currently stood at an average of 11.2% which was beyond the trigger level of 10%. However, performance over the quarters had gone from 15% to 9% which meant that UU were improving their performance on these matters. The Committee was informed that failures relating to the total absence of signage and advance notices in Lancashire were rare.

On re-instatement performance (Category B) UUs failure rate stood at an average of 17.2% which was beyond the 10% tolerance. Quarterly performance figures for the current year ranged from 16% to 21% to 13%. UU recognised that there was a need for improvement on re-instatement works. The Committee was informed that UU would carry out further audits with contractors and their partners on compliance.

Councillors were invited to ask questions and raise any comments in respect of UUs role and performance. A summary of which is provided below:

- On road works and road closures a comment was made in relation to the Preston Scheme and the lack of perceived visible activity on site. It was reported that most of the work carried out in relation to that Scheme was being done underground.
- With regard to failure rates of re-instatement works it was suggested that the figures reported by UU didn't represent the matter fully as a number of failing works wouldn't have been reported. Councillors also felt strongly about the lack of post-inspection of re-instatement works. The Committee was informed that whilst UU did inspect works carried out both during and on completion it would be impossible to audit all of the work done. The figures quoted at the meeting had come from random sample inspections by LCC based on 30% of works carried out by UU.
- Another Councillor commented that UU should be analysing why certain works had failed and asked whether improvements would be made over the next 12 months. The Committee was informed that UU did not know the reasons why re-instatements in particular for the period July to September 2011 had dipped.
- One Councillor raised the issue of varying standards of communication from UU regarding intended works. It was explained that this was not the

image UU wanted to project and reassured the Committee that they would seek to improve communications.

- With regard to the Preston Scheme, one Councillor praised the communication and the work carried out by UU stating that it was an excellent model which had been beneficial for them in their role as a Councillor and their constituents.
- One Councillor raised the issue of many pavement re-instatements being unsatisfactory and unpleasing to the eye and whether it would instead be better for UU to re-instate an entire stretch of pavement. It was reported that UU would occasionally re-instate more pavement than it would need to do but could only do so in accordance with regulations. If streetworks were significant, UU would work with the County Council on re-instatement.
- In relation to communicating with councillors, UU stated that they do issue press releases when opportunities are available. However, it was not practical to do so when emergency works are carried out.
- Councillors recognised that it was the Sub-Contractors who carried out re-instatement work on behalf of UU. Councillors felt that the failure rates and the trigger points were high and asked how UU dealt with such matters in relation to the performance of its Sub-Contractors. It was reported that UU had addressed failing works with its Sub-Contractors and that improvements in the standard of work had been made as a result. However, it wasn't clear as to why 'dips' in failure rates had occurred and it was suggested that factors such as the weather and time constraints could have had an impact. The trigger of 10% was a statutory figure set out in legislation. UU's aim was to attain 100% compliance. Councillors encouraged UU to improve its failure rates with its Sub-Contractors.
- With regard to the recent mild-winter conditions experienced in the County, concern was expressed that failure rates could be further affected if the County experienced adverse weather conditions. It was suggested that UU reports back to the Committee on re-instatement performance with year-end results.
- Concern was raised by Councillors over the re-instatement of York Stone pavements. It was reported that in some cases work carried out involving such materials had not been completed to a satisfactory standard.
- In relation to Sub-Contractors, Councillors asked a number of questions including; how many sub-contractors were contracted to work for UU, what length contracts were for, and whether there was an opportunity to improve quality of work carried out by going to tender. The Committee was informed that contracts had been awarded to different companies according to the nature of work to be carried out and that the contracts were on a five year term currently 2010-2015. All Sub-Contractors were bound to the New Roads and Streetworks Act 1991.
- One Councillor asked what responsibility UU had in relation to the provision and maintenance of fire hydrants. It was reported that legally all fire hydrants belonged to the Fire Service. Whilst minor works were carried out by the Fire Service, UU carried out any major works required at a cost.

- On emergency closures, one Councillor asked how long it was before instructions to proceed with repair were given. It was reported that UUs reactive network partners would respond to emergencies and contact UU staff to decide on extent of work required and other issues such as the severity of the road closure.
- One Councillor highlighted the issue of temporary traffic lights breaking down at weekends and whether UU had tightened up on its provision of emergency telephone numbers on such sites. The Committee as informed that the permit scheme coming forward would require UU to provide 24hour contact numbers in all instances. The Committee noted that apology boards should be present at every works site. The telephone number displayed would take callers to UUs 24 hour Call-Centre in Warrington.
- Councillors asked whether there were any good examples of working practices outside of Lancashire. It was reported that best practice was shared at board meetings. Two examples were mentioned being the use of new innovative patch repair systems and the trialling of new man-hole covers made from composite recycled plastic in Cumbria.

Resolved: That;

- i. United Utilities provide an update report on reinstatement performance to the Committee meeting to be held on 11 May 2012; and
- ii. United Utilities be invited to a future meeting of the Committee.

5. Task Group Updates

The Committee received an update on current task groups and their proposed completion dates.

Resolved: That, the update on existing task groups be noted.

6. Recent and Forthcoming Decisions

The committee had been given the opportunity to view and consider recent relevant decisions made and also forthcoming decisions including those set out in the current Forward Plan.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

7. Workplan 2010/11

The workplan for the committee was presented for noting and comments. The Chair gave an outline of the work to be carried out by the Committee over the coming months including the additional work agreed earlier in the meeting.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

8. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee will be held on 9 March 2012 at 10:00am at County Hall, Preston.

I M Fisher
County Secretary and Solicitor

County Hall
Preston