

## **EPHING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL COMMITTEE MINUTES**

**Committee:** Safer, Cleaner, Greener Scrutiny **Date:** Tuesday, 8 January 2013  
Standing Panel

**Place:** Committee Room 1, Civic Offices, **Time:** 7.30 - 9.56 pm  
High Street, Epping

**Members Present:** Mrs J Lea (Chairman), Mrs M Sartin (Vice-Chairman), Mrs H Brady, K Chana, Mrs T Cochrane, L Girling, G Mohindra, Mrs P Smith and P Spencer

**Other Councillors:**

**Apologies:** Ms Y Knight and S Murray

**Officers Present:** J Gilbert (Director of Environment and Street Scene), S Stranders (Drainage Manager), L Savill (Resident Engineer) and A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer)

**Also in attendance:** M Dickinson, P Volk, M Kumah and D Ridgers

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### **30. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)**

It was reported that Councillor K Chana was substituting for Councillor Y Knight.

### **31. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Sartin declared a non pecuniary interest in agenda item 5 on the Thames Water Utilities Presentation. She declared that she would remain in the meeting for the discussion of the item.

### **32. NOTES OF THE LAST MEETING**

The notes of the 30 October 2012 meeting were agreed as a correct record.

### **33. THAMES WATER UTILITIES PRESENTATION**

The Panel welcomed officers from Thames Water Utilities to give an overview of their work and responsibilities especially now that they have taken over responsibility for most private sector sewers.

The officers were Paul Volk the North London Waste Repair and Maintenance Manager, Don Ridgers their Senior Technical Lead, Mark Dickinson the Planning Manager for Thames Water and Monica Kumah their Local and Regional Government Liaison officer.

Sue Stranders, EFDC's Drainage Manager, in introducing Thames Water noted that in October 2011 most private sector sewers had transferred to Thames Water. Many of the sewers on the larger estates, built in the 1960s and 1970s, were constructed using pitch fibre pipe, which only had a life span of about 30 years. This had created problems that were previously dealt with by the Council's Drainage Team by the way

of the service statutory notices. Also, because of the recent wet weather there were also concerns about surface water flooding in our area. She also cited recent problems, since the transfer, with poor communication between EFDC and Thames Water. EFDC was looking for service delivery improvement; wanted to know how Thames Water operated on a daily basis; what their repair and replacement strategy was and what were their future plans.

Paul Volk noted that part of the problem was that Thames Water had a wide geographical remit in the South East. In order to improve communications they had appointed Nigel Fuller as a specific contact for this district. He admitted that for the last 3 to 6 months they had not been giving a full service, but they were keen to build a better working relationship with the district. They have a 24/7 helpline that primarily dealt with blockages and were dealing with about 80,000 calls per year. Quick action on their part usually resolved most issues raised and they always checked the state of the pipes when they unblocked them. Most blockages related to inappropriate items being put down the system. Their response time should be just a few hours. Sometimes they could not clear the blockage and would have to investigate further, using specialist cameras and other equipment. They can also reline sewers using a specialist lining material.

They have a special campaign "Bin it, don't block it" and distribute leaflets explaining the problems and what should not be put down the systems. This was a regular campaign.

As for the flooding of sewers, these incidents are recorded separately and has its own database. Again, they use CCTV and specialist vehicles to cope with this problem. They also have a risk register which was reviewed every few months to identify the 'hotspots'.

Asked about budget constraints Mr Volk replied that their budget was derived from our bills, which they used as best as they could. They have a five year plan to identify their spending needs and also a business plan and also use 'customer challenge focus groups'.

Mr Dickinson added that they keep an oversight of the areas that they deal with and are also responsible for waste water from properties, surface water, business waste and also take the lead as the local flood authority and the managing of local flood risk. They have relatively low level powers and to be effective have to liaise with local authorities.

As for the recent private drain transfer, they used to only be responsible for the main services but on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2011 they adopted all private sewers and drains on third party land. These must also drain into a public sewer. In all they had inherited about an extra 40,000 kilometres of sewers. They had circulated a leaflet recently to inform the public of the change. The Chairman, Councillor Lea, agreed with Councillor Chana's suggestion that they took advantage of local council's newsletters and used them to get their message across as people tended to ignore leaflets that were posted through their letter box, but, usually read the council's newsletters. Mr Dickinson agreed that this would be helpful to them in getting their message out.

Another part of the problems they face was that they did not have a register of all the private pumping stations which they will eventually have responsibility for. This has been deferred for 5 years (now to 2016) to enable Thames Water to find them. In 2016 they would then transfer to them whether they had found them or not.

They had held a seminar for local authorities, pre October 2011, to enable them to inform Thames Water of any problems that they would inherit when the transfer happened. They did not get much of a response.

Since the change over they have noticed a 50% increase in severe blockages with the new private sector systems. This was a lot lower that they had anticipated, leading them to think that not everyone knew of the transfer and were dealing with it themselves.

They have also had a 100% increase in reported sewer collapses since the change over, this was closer to what they had modelled.

Councillor Smith commented that she was pleased with the presentation, but understood that concerns had been raised by EFDC senior officers subsequent to the transfer of the private sewers. Ms Stranders said a lot of this was due to communication problems with Thames Water and on clearing blockages but not always going deeper into the problems that may have been the cause. Mr Volk replied that they had got better over the last 6 months but agreed that before that they were not as good as they should have been. They have now got Nigel Fuller in post to act as the liaison with the Council.

Councillor Smith then asked if the new Sustainable Drainage System (SuDS) would cause a lot of problems in the future for Local Authorities. As this would also affect the planning departments, what would be the effect between the two bodies? Mr Dickinson replied that they only saw applications where the developer proposed to make a connection to the public sewer system. They would always consult with the local authorities planning department when they needed to. If there were any particular problems they would be happy to meet with a representative from the planning department and discuss.

John Gilbert, Director of Environment and Street Scene asked if they had any targets for response times or job completion times. Mr Volk said that they were looking for a reasonable response time but could not give a definitive time for this. They were looking to about four hours but they have to be prioritised in order of seriousness. They have also set targets for their contractors, but completion times also depended on access and permissions etc.

Councillor Sartin asked about new sewers to be put in and with existing houses with existing problems, how did they cope with this. Mr Dickinson replied that it was difficult to predict where they would need to put their resources. Developers tend to put in minimum resources to their developments; they should carry out adequate research and make appropriate plans.

Councillor Girling had some problems reported to him by some of his residents; in reporting the same problem to Thames Water they received different incident numbers and had various workmen visiting the site, apparently unaware of the other workmen who had also visited. It all got very muddled. Mr Volk replied that that they had to research an incident before they handed it to their contractors. They were now doing this from a central control room in Reading. However, he accepted that they did need to communicate what they were doing with their customers, and that would be where Nigel Fuller would come in. They could now search their database by geographical area or post code and not just by incident number or customer name. With internal or external flooding incidents it should be noted that they have to be individually notified by each household affected, due mainly to data protection issues.

Councillor Chana said that Thames Water should be consulted when contractors had to build over sewers and mains. He knew of cases where fees had been paid but the work had not been carried out. Mr Dickinson said that they did not normally agree to building over water mains/sewers and avoid it all costs. For minor sewers they charged about £300 for a consultation and noted that duty lay with the building control officers to ensure that the pipes were being fully protected. There was a national initiative underway concerning building over sewers, the applicant had to map this on their plans now and it was intended to simplify the process.

Councillor Mohindra wanted to know where Nigel Fuller was to be based and was told he would be based locally, but that he was due to retire soon.

Councillor Mohindra then asked about potential problems with basement flooding. He was told that they sometimes looked at planning applications with this potential problem and asked for a pumped solution to be put in to protect the property.

Councillor Lea asked about particular problems with hard clay ground and the problems it causes by eroding or cracking pipes. Could this be solved with any new technology available? She was told that modern pipes were flexible and could cope with ground movement.

Councillor Lea then asked if they had any plans for new sewers or reservoirs for areas such as her local area, Waltham Abbey, which had increased its population over the last few years. She was told that they had improved the equipment used and this had increased capacity and improved the sewage network etc.

Councillor Lea thanked the officers from Thames Water for a very interesting and informative presentation.

#### **34. GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION ON ALCOHOL STRATEGY**

The Panel considered the Home Office's consultation document on the Government's policies to cut alcohol fuelled crime and anti-social behaviour. The Panel noted that the paper was very subjective in the way it was written, reflecting government's concerns on alcohol and anti-social behaviour. They agreed that the consultation was confusing, muddled and not properly thought through. There was a need to ask the Home Office to re-consider the document and make it more logical.

##### **RESOLVED:**

That officers reply to the consultation by saying that it had been considered but it was considered to be too disjointed and should be re-considered.

#### **35. CCTV 5 YEAR ACTION PLAN - UPDATE**

The Panel considered the CCTV five year action plan. They would like the 'when' column to be more helpful and have more meaningful dates included as it was unclear when the dates started from and hence when they would end.

Councillor Smith expressed her concern that the CCTV resources would be preserved in the current budget round as it was a valuable resource.

##### **RESOLVED:**

That the progress on the CCTV 5 year service plan be noted.

**36. MINUTES OF THE GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE MEETING**

The Panel noted the minutes of the Green Infrastructure meeting dated 21 June 2012. They expressed concern that other meetings of the panel had been held since June but the minutes had not come to this meeting. They would like more up to date minutes brought to their meetings so that they were kept abreast of the group's progress.

**37. TERMS OF REFERENCE AND WORK PROGRAMME****Terms of Reference:**

It was noted that item 4 of the Panel's Terms of Reference still used the outdated term 'Nottingham Declaration' this should now be altered to read 'Climate Local Agreement' which had replaced it.

**Work Programme:**

Item 5 – *SCG Strategy Action Plan* - now to be considered in April 2013.

Item 9 – *Appointment of PCC* – the PCC to address the February meeting. Town and Parish Councils are to be invited to participate in the meeting. It will also be webcast. An item to this effect is to be put in the Members Bulletin.

Item 11 – *to receive notes of the Waste IAA member meetings* – noted that they had not met as yet.

Item 12 – *notes of the Waste Management Partnership Board* – noted that they were to meet within the week.

Items 15 and 16 – *progress against Climate Local Agreement and progress against carbon reduction strategy* – this was for planning to take forward and bring to the April meeting.

Item 20 – *review of EA flooding management of River Roding* – officers were still hoping to have the EA at the April meeting.

Item 21 – *review of waste contract ahead of next procurement* – officers were still working on this. The next waste contract commences in November 2014 and it would be a 7 to 10 year contract. Officers were currently looking at what procurement method they should use.

Item 22 – *fire and rescue services* – this was still to be calendared into the meeting schedule.

Item 26 – *highway accident statistics* – hopefully this would be ready for the April meeting.

Councillor Girling asked that the minutes of the Highway Panel be brought to this meeting as soon as available.

**38. REPORTS TO BE MADE TO THE NEXT MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

It should be reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee that the Panel had received a presentation from Thames Water Utilities at this meeting and that at their

February meeting the new PCC would be giving a presentation and that the meeting would be open to all.

**39. FUTURE MEETINGS**

The dates of future meetings of the Panel were noted.