

Minutes

PROPERTY, HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT SELECT COMMITTEE

11 January 2023



Meeting held at Committee Room 5 - Civic Centre

	<p>Committee Members Present: Councillors Keith Burrows (Chairman) Alan Chapman (Vice Chairman) Shehryar Ahmad-Wallana Adam Bennett Elizabeth Garelick Kamal Preet Kaur Peter Money (Opposition Lead)</p> <p>LBH Officers and Witnesses Present: Councillor Jonathan Bianco – Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Property, Highways and Transport Christopher O’Hara – Director of O’Hara Bros. Surfacing Ltd Wayne Greenshield – Network Operations Manager for Highways Iain Watters, Head of Strategic and Operational Finance Steve Clarke, Democratic Services Officer</p>
35.	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TO REPORT THE PRESENCE OF ANY SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (<i>Agenda Item 1</i>)</p> <p>There were no apologies for absence.</p>
36.	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN MATTERS COMING BEFORE THIS MEETING (<i>Agenda Item 2</i>)</p> <p>Councillor Kaur declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item five in that their brother had previously worked for O’Hara Bros Surfacing Ltd. Councillor Kaur remained in the room and took part in the discussion for the duration of the item.</p>
37.	<p>TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (<i>Agenda Item 3</i>)</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting dated 18 October 2022 be approved as a correct record.</p>
38.	<p>TO CONFIRM THAT THE ITEMS OF BUSINESS MARKED AS PART 1 WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PUBLIC AND THAT THE ITEMS MARKED PART 2 WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PRIVATE (<i>Agenda Item 4</i>)</p> <p>It was confirmed that all items were marked Part 1 and would therefore be considered in public.</p>
39.	<p>SELECT COMMITTEE REVIEW - ATTAINING BEST PRACTICE AND VALUE FOR THE COUNCIL'S HIGHWAYS RESURFACING PROGRAMME (<i>Agenda Item 5</i>)</p>

The Chairman welcomed the witnesses present to the meeting and asked each of them to introduce themselves to the Committee. There were three witnesses present, the Cabinet Member for Property, Highways & Transport, Councillor Jonathan Bianco, who was the relevant Cabinet Member responsible for the oversight of the Council's highways maintenance responsibilities; Wayne Greenshield, the Council's Network Operations Manager for Highways; and Christopher O'Hara, the Director of O'Hara Bros. Surfacing Ltd, the Council's contractor for specialist highway maintenance solutions.

The Cabinet Member noted that they appreciated the Select Committee undertaking their major review into highways resurfacing and highlighted how highways maintenance was a constantly generating area of work due to the expected degradation of the Council's highways network as a result of regular heavy usage, usual and extreme weather impacts, and regular maintenance and utility works. The Council's current approach to this work area was a 'worst first' approach, with a degree of prioritisation based on factors such as volume of use. It was noted that, with regard to footways, the Council had previously operated on a 'like for like' basis by which if a slabbed footway required resurfacing, it would be repaved with slabs similar to that of the original condition, however, the Council had recently moved away from this approach, to a more cost effective, blanket method of repaving footways using tarmac regardless of the original type of surfacing on the footway. Where there were exceptional considerations, such as the works being undertaken in an area of special local character, officers would investigate whether 'like for like' was the best approach.

Christopher O'Hara introduced himself as a representative of O'Hara Bros. Surfacing Ltd, who carry out highways maintenance work on behalf of the Council ranging from reactive maintenance of potholes up to town centre regeneration such as the works undertaken in Hayes town centre over recent years. Other works undertaken for the Council included gully cleansing, vehicle crossovers and machine surfacing. Further detail was given to the Committee with regard to the warm mix asphalt material produced by a number of asphalt suppliers, including Hanson Asphalt, based in West Drayton; the product was called Era 140 which was a warm mix asphalt produced at 40 degrees Celsius lower than traditional mix asphalt, this equated to a 15% saving in greenhouse gas emissions associated with production; it was noted that the material performed in the same way and still met BBA (British Board of Agrément) standards and was fully recyclable. Another product, which had been created in-house by O'Hara Bros and was in its infancy, was an aggregate underlayer sub base for footways; the substance had been trialled recently in a number of London Boroughs, including a small section of Hayes, however the Covid-19 pandemic had halted the testing of the substance which was conducted by an external consultant, testing was expected to resume in February 2023 and it was hoped that this would lead to a reduced environmental impact and carbon footprint in addition to increased cost savings. The Committee commented that there were exciting developments within the field and the industry had a lot coming forward, particularly in terms of a reduction in carbon emissions; Members were informed that the new aggregate material currently being trialled was believed to be a stronger, more robust product that would result in lower carbon emissions. The potential cost savings that the Council could see would be led by uptake of the new product, it was noted that small batches were more expensive therefore as more highways authorities bought into the new materials, the more promising that the product would be in terms of delivering cost savings.

Wayne Greenshield was present as the Council's Network Operations Manager for

Highways, he informed the Committee about his role managing highways maintenance, the winter service maintenance, and liaising with utility companies and statutory undertakers regarding their work. There was a dedicated team at Harlington Road Depot of ten operatives who carried out immediate repairs to footways that were considered dangerous within the parameters set by the Council's Highways Inspection Policy; there was also a dedicated team that carried out daily inspections and coordinated all streetworks, this team was highlighted as being extremely busy currently receiving in excess of 300 permit and permit amendment requests per day from statutory undertakers to carry out works on the Council's highways network, they also ensured the safety aspect of works undertaken within the Borough, the difficulty of this work was highlighted specifically with regard to emergency works carried out by utility companies and statutory undertakers where they do not require the Council's permission, as the local highway authority, to undertake those works. Officers met with the statutory undertakers every three months whereby officers would coordinate with them regarding planned works from the Council and planned works from the statutory undertakers, this was in an effort to align works to cause the least disruption possible. It was also noted that if works were carried out by statutory undertakers on a newly resurfaced roadway or footway, it would be agreed with the statutory undertaker that they must resurface and make good the area of works. The Committee commended officers on their work highlighting the fact that utility companies could commence emergency works involving the dismantling of the Council's roadways and footways without express permission from the Council. It was highlighted that there were a significant number of emergency works taking place at any given time in the Borough and that this varied depending on the time of year, for example where a cold bout of weather had impacted the aging drainage mains infrastructure which was often from the Victorian era and made from cast iron which would expand and retract.

Members sought to understand the length of contract that the Council held with O'Hara Bros. Surfacing Ltd as the primary highways maintenance contractor; it was stated that the contract was reviewed every five years with a facility to extend the contract by a further two years, officers stated that the current contract with O'Hara Bros Surfacing Ltd was due to expire on 31 March 2024. Officers noted that roughly 85% of regular highway maintenance works were carried out in-house by the Council's operatives and around 15% of the work was issued to O'Hara Bros Surfacing Ltd as the contractor; the larger scales maintenance works were issued to the contractor.

On matters of the contractor's level of work and communication with the Council, it was stated that it varied based on the work being issued by the Council, there were regularly two to three reactive maintenance gangs present in the Borough throughout the year, additionally there was typically a machine gang of up to 11 operatives carrying out main carriageway works in Hillingdon for seven or eight months of the year, there were around four civil element/footways teams of up to six operatives working within the Borough at any one time, and there were also two gully cleanser machines operating in the Borough year round. It was noted that when the budgets were released, Council officers and the contractor could plan and programme works; works would tail off slightly towards the end of the financial year as the annual budget gets spent; it was noted that this was the way in which the contractor worked with all local highways authorities. The Cabinet Member highlighted the important partnership that was maintained between the Council and the contractor for the benefit of the service provided to Hillingdon's residents. It was also noted that within the contract with O'Hara Bros Surfacing Ltd, there was a mechanism for early ordering and volume of works discounts where works were procured ahead of time as it helped the contractor forward plan their scheduling and resources. The Committee were encouraged by this

and sought to ensure that the Council pursued these discounts where possible to deliver value for residents.

The Contractor confirmed that appropriate checks were carried out following any works that were carried out including a walk and snagging of the works, ensuring any ironworks were raised and gullies were cleaned; the Council were then asked to come out and inspect the works to then be signed off following review. Contractually, all works were guaranteed for 12 months. The Committee queried the length of the guarantee and expressed that they would hope to see works last well beyond 12 months; it was highlighted that it would be incredibly rare to see surfaces failing shortly after the guarantee period, the contractor noted that works tended to last a lot longer than the guarantee period and it would only be under very exceptional circumstances, for example when the underlying earth had slipped, where surfaces would fail within even three years of the works. It was noted that the earth underneath a roadway was a significant factor in the lifespan of the roadworks above it, London clay was endemic to the north of the Borough which had an impact on the lifespan of roads in that area where some roadworks had not lasted as long as initially hoped due to water build up in the clay beneath degrading the road at a faster rate. It was also noted that, although the contractor worked with a number of local highways authorities, where materials had been reclaimed from Hillingdon roads to be recycled, the material would primarily be kept within the Borough, this was to ensure that any material was not necessarily transported causing further costs and carbon emissions. The Committee were informed that some schemes, where works were carried out at a shallower depth due to factors such as design, the road surface, limitations, and finances, may not last as long as deeper treatments.

The Committee raised a point regarding the way in which Members' Enquiries and service requests for highways resurfacing were dealt with, particularly where the roads in question were of a lower priority on the highways network, for example quieter residential roads with less footfall and traffic. Members sought to have a system in place whereby a steer could be given from officers as to roughly when the surfaces would be due for resurfacing or due for a condition survey to help inform residents and give them a loose timescale. It was noted that all of the Council's highways network was inspected at least once per year and there was a team of inspectors out 'walking' the Borough each day. The Cabinet Member noted that there was an issue with promising that works would be carried out within a certain timescale in that, it was not known which emerging highways maintenance issues would occur around the Borough in that time period, making it incredibly difficult to plan far ahead in terms of which specific roads would receive works. In response, the Committee were minded to increase the transparency of the way in which Members' Enquiries and service requests were responded to, potentially through a standardised response template, which would improve the way in which Members and residents were communicated with regarding the reasoning behind the scheduling of works.

The Chairman thanked the witnesses present for attending and giving their input into the Committee's review. The Committee commended the condition of roads within Hillingdon and highlighted that it was often evidenced when driving outside of the Borough boundary by a poorer road surface. There was also an understanding that local authority budgets were currently squeezed in all parts of the country and the Cabinet Member noted that there was the intention of increasing the amount of resurfacing and repair work conducted on Hillingdon's highway network in future.

RESOLVED: That the Property, Highways & Transport Select Committee used the

second witness session of the review to broaden understanding of the Council's practical and strategic approach to highways resurfacing.

40. 2023/24 BUDGET PROPOSALS FOR SERVICES WITHIN THE REMIT OF THE PROPERTY, HIGHWAYS & TRANSPORT SELECT COMMITTEE (Agenda Item 6)

The Chairman briefly introduced the item noting that the Committee's comments should remain within the remit of the Property, Highways and Transport Cabinet Portfolio. Iain Watters, Head of Strategic and Operational Finance, was in attendance to present the report to the Committee. It was noted that the primary factors negatively impacting on the budget setting process were the very challenging economic times currently being experienced, with inflation above 10%, and the legacy impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. It was highlighted that high inflation levels drove up the cost of Council services in addition to impacting residents through an increased cost of living, which in turn drove up demand for some of the Council's services. Officers also highlighted that within the remit of the Property, Highways and Transport Select Committee, the single biggest factor effecting the budget proposals was the fall in the funding settlement from Transport for London (TfL).

Members noted that the exceptional rates of inflation above 10% had not been seen for decades and the issues seen as a result of this were not unique to Hillingdon as a local authority. The Committee commended the balanced budget proposals in continuing to provide excellent services to residents under the Property, Highways and Transport portfolio and in finding savings whilst still investing in services for residents, notably through the Capital Programme and projects such as the West Drayton Leisure Centre.

The Committee were informed that inflation on the circa £11m operating budget for services within the remit of the Committee would result in an additional £1.5m in inflationary pressures in a year's time. This demonstrated the scale of the impact that inflation rates were having on budgets. It was highlighted that there were savings proposals totalling £1.7m to mitigate the impact and that these savings were achieved through efficiencies and not through a reduction in the service offer for residents. The Committee sought to expand on the fees and charges element of the £1.7m in savings proposals, it was noted that these savings primarily related to the general increase to fees and charges of 30%, the amount that could be recovered from the highway network operators when roads require reinstating, and that the Council had an extensive portfolio of garage sites across the Borough which were let out to residents that afforded scope to make savings as across the board, revenue from fees and charges was close to half that of neighbouring boroughs. Members were encouraged by the fact that Hillingdon's fees and charges remained cheaper for residents than in the surrounding boroughs. By way of reassurance, officers noted that increases in fees and charges were not targeted at services offered to vulnerable residents and were instead directed at more optional services.

The Committee discussed the uplift in fees and charges and noted that, whilst it was not ideal, it was necessary to catch up on what had been historically low fees and charges in Hillingdon whilst still offering value to residents, specifically when compared to neighbouring authorities in West London who were generating almost double the amount per resident in fees and charges. Members thanked officers for their hard work in bringing balanced budget proposals to the Select Committee in what were challenging times. The Committee delegated the drafting of the comments that would be submitted to Cabinet to the Democratic Services Officer in conjunction with the Chairman, and in consultation with the Labour Lead.

	<p>RESOLVED: That the Property, Highways & Transport Select Committee noted the budget projections contained in the report and delegated the Committee's comments on the combined budget proposals to be drafted by the Democratic Services Officer in conjunction with the Chairman, and in consultation with the Opposition Lead.</p>
41.	<p>CABINET FORWARD PLAN (<i>Agenda Item 7</i>)</p> <p>The Chairman introduced the item and requested sight of the Battle of Britain Bunker Phase 2 – Water Ingress item that was due to go to Cabinet on 16 February 2023. It was confirmed that a request for the Committee to see the report would be made to the Cabinet Member at the earliest convenience.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Property, Highways and Transport Select Committee noted the Cabinet Forward Plan.</p>
42.	<p>WORK PROGRAMME (<i>Agenda Item 8</i>)</p> <p>The Committee noted the work programme, and it was confirmed that officers were working on organising a site visit for the Committee to attend and observe highways resurfacing works as part of the Committee's major review.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Property, Highways and Transport Select Committee noted the Committee's work programme.</p>
	<p>The meeting, which commenced at 7.00 pm, closed at 8.19 pm.</p>

These are the minutes of the above meeting. For more information on any of the resolutions please contact Democratic Services on 01895 250636. Circulation of these minutes is to Councillors, Officers, the Press and Members of the Public.