

Scrutiny - Cooperative Scrutiny Reviews

Wednesday 2 September 2015

PRESENT:

Councillor Ricketts, in the Chair.
Councillors Deacon, Murphy and Storer.

Apologies for absence: Councillor Martin Leaves.

Also in attendance: Paul Anderson (Accounts Manager – Amey), Victoria Hutchins (Watchman in Chief – Amey), Gill Peele (Lead Officer), Helen Rickman (Democratic Support Officer), Daniel Sharpe (Planner – Amey) and Adrian Trim (Heads of Highways, Parking and Marine Services).

The meeting started at 1.30 pm and finished at 3.00 pm.

Note: At a future meeting, the Panel will consider the accuracy of these draft minutes, so they may be subject to change. Please check the minutes of that meeting to confirm whether these minutes have been amended.

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest in accordance with the code of conduct.

2. CHAIR'S URGENT BUSINESS

There were no items of Chair's Urgent Business.

3. CO-OPERATIVE SCRUTINY REVIEW - LIVING STREETS

(i) Background Information

Adrian Trim (Head of Highways, Parking and Marine Services), Daniel Sharpe (Planner - Amey), Victoria Hutchins (Watchman in Chief - Amey) and Paul Anderson (Accounts Manager – Amey) provided Members with a brief overview of the Living Streets Programme.

Members were advised that –

- (a) the Living Streets programme was started in 2013 as a pilot project to give Ward Councillors greater involvement in local highways improvements; funding relating to general neighbourhood schemes, safer school journeys and disabled driver parking spaces was previously managed by officers of the Council however it was considered that Members had a better awareness of work required relating to the schemes in their own wards. The budget was ring-fenced aimed at highways

work involving safety, sustainable travel and quality of life interventions;

- (b) the Living Streets budget was shared equally with each ward being allocated £4000; the safer school journeys funding was added to the Living Streets money and was allocated based on the size and number of schools in each ward;
- (c) it had previously been brought to the attention of Officers that there was a limited amount of funding for the Living Streets programme and as a result Officers introduced the ability to roll-over funding so that bigger projects, within the remit of the programme, could be undertaken;
- (d) lessons had been learned as a result of the Living Streets pilot whereby Officer engagement had increased along with an improved record of information sharing;
- (e) an update on Living Streets was provided to Members of the Working Plymouth scrutiny panel in July 2015; as a result of concerns raised by Members at the meeting, Officers had taken several steps to improve the process. Information provided to Ward Members would now be in an updated format whereby more information was detailed on specific projects including final costings, remaining balances and a financial summary. The process for undertaking estimates was also now the responsibility of the Operations Team other than the Commercial Team and the difference between original estimates and final costs seemed to have reduced as a result of this change;
- (f) Officers were aware of the financial pressures facing local authorities as well as the difficulty in justifying costs for projects within the Living Streets scheme to their constituents however confirmed that they were committed to value for money and the requirement to 'deliver more for less'.

In response to questions raised it was reported that –

- (g) the price of some of the Living Street's projects could initially seem to be costly however other factors needed to be considered with each project including the cost of materials, implementation, advertising (if required) and maintenance. With a particular focus upon the cost for installing a new grit bin estimated at £550, Members were advised that the cost linked to the price of the bin itself, for the bin to be filled three times, for seasonal checks and installation. Grit bins were reviewed on an annual basis and would be re-filled by the Council, as part of the highways maintenance budget, for as long as they were considered to serve a purpose;

- (h) Amey was a large company and had the ability of economy of scale on purchases however did not cost compare contracts as it was considered that best value was achieved;
- (i) the change of procedure for estimating Living Street project costs being undertaken by Amey's Operations Team other than the Commercial Team was realised as a result of concerns raised by Members at the Working Plymouth scrutiny panel in July 2015. It was highlighted that estimates originally provided to Members were significantly different than the actual cost of the project and this made it difficult for Members to plan future projects as it was not known how much funding was available. Costings were now considered to be more accurate and the Operations Team were more empowered because of the responsibility involved. It was now the role of the Supervisor to assess the work to be undertaken, plan how many operatives would be required, to ensure the correct materials were available and to meet with local residents and Ward Councillors to discuss requirements;
- (j) when undertaking projects Amey worked hard to reduce the amount of disruption to local residents by working more considerately; Amey undertake 'wet-cuts' to reduce the built up of dust and residue and always undertake a desk-study to check for service cables/ pipes within the area they are working. Amey also worked to reduce costs by trying to fit work in when convenient however understood that this may have an effect upon timescales;
- (k) the information provided to Members in the costings chart would be colour coded to enable Councillors to easily identify estimated costs, timescales, final costs, the start and completion dates and remaining funding available;
- (l) Amey valued regular meetings with Ward Councillors to go through projects related to their ward and discuss new requests and budgets; an email would be sent out to all Councillors requesting that they contact Amey to arrange monthly ward meetings to discuss the Living Streets project list;
- (m) it was expected that the funding available to Councillors for the Living Streets programme would continue next year however this was dependent upon support for the scheme;
- (n) the list provided to Members for Living Streets was 'historical' and contained some projects which would instead be supported by the Highways budget including the painting of double yellow lines to allow refuse vehicle access; all Ward Councillors would receive an updated list;

- (o) Officers Living Streets weekly review meetings had taken place since the beginning of the financial year in which a variety of people from Amey and Plymouth City Council would attend the discuss issues, costs and priorities;
- (p) it was expected that the process for requesting, advertising and implementing a TRO (Traffic Regulation Order) was approximately 4-6 months from start to finish; this timescale included the statutory requirement to advertise the TRO twice for a specific number of days and get the decision signed by the appropriate Cabinet Member and sealed by the Council. Advertising TROs was a costly requirement with a single advert in the local paper expecting to cost £500; Amey tried to batch TROs together to reduce advertising costs however this delayed the implementation of schemes;
- (q) the further £500 charged by Amey for TROs included the cost for operatives to go out and measure the site, draw up plans, to write the TRO, manage the advertisement process, write the report on consultation, for an executive decision to be written for the appropriate Cabinet Member, to undertake meetings with Ward Councillors, for the TRO decision to be sealed by the Council and then for the TRO to be installed;
- (r) Officers were unaware of the specific issues, raised at the meeting, that Councillors had with TROs in their respective wards however accepted that cost and time were the two main areas of concern. This was attributed to the costs associated with advertising and the influx of Living Street project applications received nearing the end of the financial year;
- (s) Officers were unaware of double yellow lines being painted in the incorrect street in the Efford and Lipson ward and advised Members that the delay in painting the lines in the correct street was due to the TRO being incorrectly advertised; a new TRO would need to be raised;
- (t) with regards to the problems associated with the TRO in the Drake ward, Officers were unaware that yellow lines had been incorrectly painted;
- (u) Officers had previously supported a proposal to eradicate the necessity of publishing TROs in the local newspaper however this was not supported by the Department for Transport therefore the requirement remained. Officers had previously negotiated costs with the local newspaper however were in a difficult position as there was only one local newspaper reducing the competition. Officers had also undertaken a

benchmarking exercise to establish costs for advertising TROs and Plymouth was considered mid-range. It was agreed that Officers would review the TRO process to try to streamline the process and start cost re-negotiations;

- (v) TROs were only required to be re-advertised if a change increasing restrictions to the highway was received after the original advert had been placed; this would incur further costs to re-advertise. In the Honicknowle ward Amey negotiated with residents and Councillors to plant shrubs instead of introducing bollards to act as a physical barrier. This was a much cheaper solution, was more aesthetically pleasing and avoided any possible problems with service cables installed under where the bollards were initially required;
- (w) Officers would provide Members with numerous examples of when a job had been delivered for less than originally costed;
- (x) a further column would be added to the Councillors Ward Pack Living Streets Information Sheet detailing the final outturn cost of each project completed;
- (y) the Safer School Journeys funding allocation was reviewed every three years to account for new schools being added to the system; a review was due to be undertaken this year.

Members raised the following concerns with the Living Streets programme:

- (z) that the cost of projects, specifically including TROs, was expensive and difficult to justify to members of the public;
- (aa) the time it takes to request, advertise and implement TROs was too lengthy;
- (bb) mistakes had been made by Amey however it was hoped that the monthly ward councillor meetings would help with this issue; it was not known who would pay for mistakes, Amey or Ward Councillors out of the Living Streets budget?
- (cc) the cost of advertising TROs, which was a statutory process, was expensive and more negotiations needed to be undertaken;
- (dd) processes for administering Living Streets initially lacked detail however information packs were being amended to include relevant information regarding cost, timescales and progress.

The Chair thanked Officers for their attendance at the meeting.

- (ii) Co-operative Review Request Form

Members noted the Co-operative Review Request Form.

4. **Summary and Review**

At the Working Plymouth business meeting on 8 July 2015, the panel raised a number of concerns about the current process and performance of the Living Streets Scheme. Members requested improvements be made in the visibility of costs and timings of works and with Members having ownership and control over the residents requests.

A Co-operative Review was requested and agreed.

The Review panel were pleased to hear that the previous scrutiny meeting had already started to have an impact on the process, with the following improvements in place;

- (a) cultural shift. An acknowledgement that the costing estimates undertaken by Amey's Commercial team(quantity surveyors) were resulting in higher than necessary figures. These will now be undertaken by Amey's Operations team, with site visits with supervisors;
- (b) all new requests from residents will be discussed with Members first before any response (other than a holding response) is sent;
- (c) Ward Packs have been amended to include more detail;

Although the panel welcomed the measures taken to date, after considerable scrutiny at the review meeting, Members recommend that a package of further improvements and actions be put forward to the Co-operative Scrutiny Board.

Communications with Members:

- (d) Officers to send updated Ward Packs to Members and arrange a Ward meeting as soon as possible to go through the historical requests on the spreadsheet;
- (e) Officers to ensure more proactive contact with Members and arrange for monthly on site meetings;
- (f) Officers to work with Members to explain what is regarded as in scope for Living Streets rather than classified as day to day highways maintenance;

Cost of Schemes

- (g) Officers to provide some examples of the impact of the costing regime from Commercial team to Operations team, comparing some past and present estimates;
- (h) Officers to ensure that the actual end cost of works is notified to them and

added to the Ward Pack spreadsheet;

- (i) Officers to ensure that at site meetings, options are considered to reduce costs and achieve greater value for money e.g. shrubs instead of bollards to prevent pavement and verge parking;

Traffic Regulation Orders

- (j) Officers to challenge the media advertising rates to ensure that they are getting the best deal possible as it is difficult to defend the costs of a scheme to residents;
- (k) Officers to investigate reasons for delays and implement continuous improvement through lessons learned;

Reporting and Accountability

- (l) all ward Councillors to receive their updated ward pack and arrange to meet to go through the historical requests at the next meeting;
- (m) the Ward pack to be amended to include columns for actual costs, actual approval dates, target completion dates and actual completion dates;
- (n) Amey's Ward Pack to give explanation for approved schemes not being completed by target dates with follow up discussion with PCC Officers around accountability;
- (o) if Amey made any mistakes during the Living Streets process they would be rectified by them at no cost to PCC;
- (p) a penalty charge would be incurred if Amey did not complete approved schemes by the completion date agreed with Ward Councillors and Officers;
- (q) a progress report be reviewed by Working Plymouth at its March 2016 meeting to track progress made against all these recommendations and actions.

5. EXEMPT BUSINESS

There were no items of exempt business.