

## **REGENERATION, COMMUNITY AND CULTURE OVERVIEW OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**2 OCTOBER 2014**

### **MEMBER'S ITEM: PROTOCOL FOR COMMUNICATION/ ENGAGEMENT WITH ELECTED MEMBERS ON MAJOR TRANSPORT PROJECTS**

Report from: Julie Keith, Head of Democratic Services

Author: Ellen Wright, Democratic Services Officer

#### **Summary**

This report sets out issue, raised by Councillor Hubbard on 24 September 2014 relating to a protocol for communication/engagement with elected members on major transport projects. The Director's response will be reported at the meeting.

#### **1. Budget and Policy Framework**

1.1 Under Medway Constitution Overview and Scrutiny rules (Chapter 4, Part 5, Paragraph 9.1) Councillor Hubbard has requested that an item on this matter is included on the agenda for this meeting.

#### **2. The Issue**

2.1. Councillor Hubbard has requested that this item be placed on the agenda. The basis of Councillor Hubbard's request is set out below:

2.2 There is an urgent need to establish a robust protocol for the communication/engagement with Ward Councillors and shadow portfolio holders on proposed programmes for major transport projects. Ward Councillors to be defined as Members, irrespective of political group, from those Wards directly affected by the proposed project, not just the Ward where the project is located.

- 2.3 The issuing of the Medway weekly major roadwork list is simply not fit for purpose.
- 2.4 At the 21 August meeting of the Regeneration, Community and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee I raised with the Portfolio Holder for Front Line Services the serious concerns I had about the proposed programme of highway works at Darnley Arch, Strood. I requested that the work be delayed and that the works be carried out overnight. After the meeting those requests were politely considered and then dismissed. The works at Darnley Arch started on 1 September, as did my prediction of traffic chaos and the resultant downturn in business activity for Strood Traders. A prediction based on the knowledge of the week long closure of the Arch back in 2012.
- 2.5 Despite my well known long term interest, as a Ward Councillor I was only made aware of 6 week closure of the A228 at Darnley Arch in an e-mail dated 13 August. I read the e-mail on my return from holiday on 19 August, but by then I had seen the highway signs dotted around Strood. In that e-mail the junior officer referred to attending a meeting with Conservative Councillors and the Director, Robin Cooper. It was the junior officer's belief that Frontline Services had fully engaged with Ward Councillors and, at that meeting he had been given full member support on the agreed programme of works at Darnley Arch. In fact no Labour Councillor or shadow portfolio holder had been informed of the proposed road closure and Front Line Services had not sought their views.
- 2.6 In mid- September, the Medway Messenger newspaper launched its Get Medway Moving campaign, measures to ease the rush hour traffic nightmare that is inflicted on drivers and vehicles trying to exit Medway City Estate. During the month of September the traffic chaos was worsened as drivers sought alternative routes around Medway and Strood as the result of the A228 being closed at Darnley Arch and the continuing gas mains replacement works in Strood.
- 2.7 Within the Council's Front Lines Services department there is a disconnect between identifying major transport problems, forming policies to tackle them, explaining the policy to others and the effective delivery of the final project. For example we only have to look at a report on the last Regeneration, Community and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee agenda. That report was provided jointly by Portfolio Holder for Front Line Services and the Director of Regeneration, Community & Culture.
- 2.8 In the reporting of the successful Local Enterprises Partnership Funding (LEP) bid there was just a single line in the report saying "Medway City Estate Connectively Improvement Measures". That was a lost opportunity to briefly explain to the committee and the local press what the project would entail. This failure resulted in the embarrassing Get Medway Moving three page spread in September 19 edition of the Medway Messenger when the impression was given that the Council was reacting to pressure rather than being proactive.

2.9 Another LEP single line from the report stated “Strood Town Centre Journey Time and Accessibility Enhancements”. This proposed highway policy is a full on policy disconnect when Front Line Services conceived and implemented the daytime closure of the A228 at Darnley Arch. And the warning signs were there. Did no one in Front Lines Services recall the one week closure in late December 2012 and resultant traffic chaos and angry Strood traders reporting the loss of business.

### **3 Director’s comments**

3.1 As the Member’s item was received on 24 September 2014, there is insufficient time to include an officer response in this written item as the agenda is due for despatch on 24 September. An officer response will therefore follow.

### **4. Risk Management**

4.1 There are no specific risks identified at this point

### **5. Financial and Legal Implications**

5.1 There are no specific financial and legal implications identified at this point.

### **6. Recommendation**

6.1 The Committee is requested to consider the Member’s Item and the Director’s response which will be provided at the meeting.

#### **Lead contact:**

Name: Ellen Wright

Tel. No: 01634 332012 Email: ellen.wright@medway.gov.uk

#### **Background Papers**

None