

minutes



Meeting STREET LIGHTING REPAIR SELECT COMMITTEE

Date Monday, 23 April 2007 (commencing at 1.30 pm)

Membership

Persons absent are marked with 'A'

COUNCILLORS

	Jen Cole	Philip Owen
	Vince Dobson	A David Shaw
	Helen Holt	Andy Stewart
A	Jim Napier	The Hon Joan Taylor
		A J Zadrozny

APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR AND VICE CHAIRS

The appointment of Councillor The Hon Joan Taylor as Chair and Councillor Andy Stewart as Vice Chair of the Select Committee was noted.

MEMBERSHIP

The membership of the Select Committee, as set out above, was noted.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no declarations of interest.

SCOPE AND WORK PROGRAMME

Councillor Joan Taylor explained that the Select Committee had been commissioned by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, to examine the performance of E-On in relation to street lighting repair, following a recommendation from the Highways Select Committee. This was the first of two meetings arranged to look into the matter with a view to drawing up recommendations on how performance might be improved.

The Select Committee noted the work programme to receive a briefing from representatives from the Communities Department, take evidence from E-On and initiate lines of questioning as necessary.

STREET LIGHTING REPAIRS – REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR (HIGHWAYS)

Councillor Taylor welcomed Richard Jackson and Steve Owen from E-On and Dave Beniston and Gary Wood, Communities Department who had been invited to give evidence to the Select Committee.

Mr Wood, Team Manager, Highways (Traffic Services) briefed the Select Committee on the current legal framework in relation to street lighting fault repair and the recent history of performance of Central Networks (E-On). It was explained that Central Networks (formally East Midlands Electricity – EME) were the Distribution Network Operator (DNO) responsible for the electricity supply to 97% of Nottinghamshire's street lights. Any faults that occurred on the electricity supply had to be repaired by the DNO, whose performance was a critical factor in ensuring that street lighting repairs were carried out efficiently.

Mr Wood pointed out that cable repair work on Central Network's mains was non-competitive under primary legislation and was overseen by the regulator, OFGEM (The Office of Gas and Electricity Markets). Mr Wood referred to OFGEM's introduction in 2005 of a trial National Service Level Agreement (NSLA) for all Distribution Network Operators to report their performance on street lighting work in a consistent format. He explained about the new standards which the County Council had agreed to monitor Central Networks performance against and submit to OFGEM.

It had emerged that out of 14 areas in the country, Central Networks East was the worst performing DNO, in respect of single unit and multiple unit fault repairs for 2005/06. Data for 2006/07 was not available from OFGEM.

Mr Wood also drew the Select Committee's attention to Central Government's introduction of a Best Value Performance Indicator in April 2005 (BV215b) that measured the average time to repair a street lighting fault under the control of the DNO. This was a concern at a national level since it was an indicator which Councils had to report on and had very little influence over. Data produced in relation to the indicator for 2005/06, showed Central Network's performance to be significantly outside the target of 15 days. This problem appeared to be widespread within the Central Networks Eastern area.

In terms of the status of the NSLA, Mr Wood reported that in February 2007 OFGEM had consulted on an extension of the trial for a further year. The County Council's response had included a recommendation that the NSLA be placed on a formal footing with agreed targets and penalties payable for non performance. A copy of the County Council's full response was attached as an appendix to the report.

In response to a question from Councillor Owen, Mr Wood pointed out that the only recourse the County Council had was to Energy Watch, who would then refer any matters on to OFGEM. He said that the County Council was concerned that despite having worked closely with Central Networks, improvements had only been short term and that Central Networks was a monopoly supplier, who could dictate the service standards it wished to apply.

Richard Jackson and Steve Owen from E-On Central Networks gave a presentation to the Select Committee that provided Members with background information to the organisational structure of the business. During his presentation he drew particular attention to the business of the street lighting faults activity and process that came under the Energy Services section of the business. To date, Mr Jackson explained that the volume of faults was managed by the Bilborough depot with 16 street lighting faults in Nottinghamshire outstanding to date. 35 – 40 % of the faults were repaired within the 15 day standard. He said that the business had undergone re-organisation and was working hard at bringing it all together.

The Select Committee heard about the three main elements to the fault process and some of the problems found following a review. In terms of receipt and dispatch there were inconsistencies in the detail provided by the PLA (Public Lighting Authority) and faults being dispatched to NRSWA by courier. These were being addressed through the re-issuing of reporting forms and the electronic dispatch of faults. The scheduled and repaired element of the process had seen an increase in its level of resources and introduction of an action plan to clear the backlog of faults within timescales. A new reporting system was currently being tested in notifying the PLA as well as improvements in reporting capability. The Select Committee also learnt of the proposed fault report standards for 2007 and that E-on was committed to improving performance against standards. Mr Jackson said that improvements would be delivered via an action plan which was currently being worked on, which he was happy for the Select Committee to see.

Councillor Cole wondered how the fault repair work was prioritised. It was explained that the PLA usually did this and said that if there was a concern from a road or community safety point of view then that would be constituted as a high priority. Councillor Owen commented on that E-On's poor performance. Steve Owen referred to the backlog of faults in 2005 and explained that there had not been sufficient resources at that time to meet the demand. This was no longer a problem since the appointment of a number of new posts.

In terms of electronic notification of faults Mr Beniston from the Department said that although there was a lot of development taking place in this area it required investment and the County Council to drive it forward. He also pointed out that previous high staff turnover had led to communication breakdown. This had improved and communication was good at present. Despite this the Department was extremely frustrated at the continuing poor performance and felt that the national framework was not helping matters.

Councillor Taylor felt that she had heard what she had been told before and commented that the graphs presented were unreliable. She had no confidence that an improvement would be made. Mr Jackson stressed that an improvement in performance was now high profile within the business and that they were keen to work with the County Council. If they did not improve they risked losing the business.

The Select Committee were particularly concerned by the performance indicators not being met and the fact that this reflected badly on the Authority.

Following discussion it was agreed that Mr Wood would bring the final quarter's performance indicators for 2006/07 to the next meeting and provide the Select Committee with a backlog of repair works.

The Chair also asked that OFGEM be approached to see if a representative would attend the next meeting to be held on 14th May 2007, for the Select Committee to ask questions on issues relating to National Service Level Agreements. The Select Committee also felt strongly that the County Council should continue to receive quarterly monitoring of E-On's performance with up to date data.

Councillor Taylor thanked the officers for attending the meeting.

The meeting closed at 3.10pm.

CHAIR

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