
**EXCERPT FROM THE MINUTES OF THE
INFRASTRUCTURE OVERVIEW AND
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON 31 JULY 2003**

IOS.65/03 SUBJECT REVIEW – STREETWORKS

Pursuant to Minute IOS.49.03, the Overview and Scrutiny Support Officer presented interim report of the Infrastructure Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OS.05/03) concerning the review into Streetworks commenced in August 2002.

Dr Taylor outlined the content of the report, together with the following suggested outcomes:

- The Committee was disappointed with the lack of co-operation from Cumbria County Council in helping them with that Inquiry, and urged the Executive to resolve the issue of scrutiny co-operation with the County Council as soon as possible. The Review would be concluded in the future if sufficient co-operation could be forged.
- In general, the mechanisms available for the public to get hold of or pass on information about road works appeared inadequate. A single point of contact for road maintenance queries in the Carlisle area appeared to be an obvious and necessary improvement to the current arrangements. The Committee believed that a single telephone number should be possible through co-operative arrangements between the City and County Councils and Capita dbs. The Committee urged the Executive to pursue such an approach.
- Further, the level and quality of information available on the issue on the websites of the two authorities was disappointing. A Member of the public with a query or concern about a streetworks matter would struggle to find the information or point of contact they were seeking. Again, the Committee recommended that both authorities and Capita dbs examine carefully the information they make available and look to improve the public accessibility of that service.

The Chairman stressed that there needed to be a point of contact, providing clear information and access to an Officer with technical knowledge, together with an assurance that someone would get back to the caller. Information on forthcoming road works should also be made available.

She added that the Carlisle Area Transport Advisory Group did not meet regularly and, when meetings were arranged, these were often cancelled by the County Council. This was most unsatisfactory bearing in mind that it was the sole means of communication between local authorities in Carlisle and should be raised by the Executive.

RESOLVED – (1) That the report be received and agreed, with the outcomes forming the basis of a Press Release.

(2) That the report and its recommendations be referred to the Executive for their consideration.



A Report from the
Overview and Scrutiny Manager

**Streetworks:
An Interim Report of the Infrastructure
Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

Report Reference: OS 05/03

July 2003

1. Introduction

The Committee set out to conduct a review into 'streetworks' in August 2002. The choice of subject reflected the concern of Members and the public about various aspects of streetworks including the role of the utility companies, the standard of repair and the level of co-operation and co-ordination between the different bodies involved.

We held one session in which the matter was discussed with the Service Development Manager from Carlisle City Council. It became clear that the next step in the inquiry would be to talk to officers from Cumbria County Council and Capita *db*s (who carry out the work for the County Council. See Appendix 1 for background information on the review).

Unfortunately, Cumbria County Council is undertaking a review of the level of co-operation which they offer to District Council scrutiny inquiries. As such, they were unable to provide an officer to answer the Committee's questions. On this basis, we have decided to issue an interim report.

We were disappointed with the lack of co-operation from Cumbria County Council in helping us with this inquiry. We urge the Executive to resolve the issue of scrutiny co-operation with the County Council as soon as possible. We will conclude this review in the future if sufficient co-operation can be forged.

2. Responsibility for Streetworks

The County Council is responsible for the traffic management issues of all roads in the Carlisle City Council area.

The day-to-day responsibilities for road maintenance are rather more complicated:

- Cumbria County Council (Capita*db*s) is directly responsible for all 'classified' roads i.e. those which have been designated with a letter (A, B or C) and number e.g. A66. This work is actually carried out by a range of contractors.
- Carlisle City Council has 'claimed highway rights' which means that it is responsible for the maintenance of all unclassified roads within its area. In practical terms, this means all roads with a speed limit of 30mph or less in

both the urban and rural areas. This work is physically carried out by Commercial and Technical Services but with funding provided through the County Council.

There are inevitably situations where it is a matter of debate as to which authority is responsible for a given matter.

3. Access to Information

One issue which did become clear to us was that the flow of information between the public and the authorities about streetworks is less than satisfactory.

It is widely accepted that there is little clarity in the public's mind as to the respective duties and roles of City and County Councils. In considering this subject of streetworks, we found it confusing (and were, to some extent, confused) as to which authority is responsible for particular matters and we are concerned that this situation is contributing to inefficiency.

Road maintenance matters are a popular topic of concern for the public – they cause much frustration and generate many queries. Clearly, the administrative divisions and arrangements for maintenance of the different roads in Carlisle are of little interest to the general public. The fact that lighting, maintenance and other aspects may be the responsibility of the City or County Council is immaterial as far as they are concerned. Although there is a phone number for queries on Cumbria County Council roads, the division of responsibility within the Carlisle District rather limits the value of this for residents. Informal arrangements also exist for the forwarding of queries from one authority to the other, but we do not consider this to be adequate in the longer term. Indeed, anecdotal experience from Members' efforts to communicate about road maintenance issues has been less than satisfactory, with phone-calls sometimes not returned and query forms unanswered.

In general, the mechanisms available for the public to get hold of or pass on information about roadworks appear to be inadequate. A single point of contact for road maintenance queries in the Carlisle area appears to be an obvious and necessary improvement to the current arrangements. We believe that a single telephone number should be possible through co-operative arrangements between the City and

County Councils and Capita *db*s. We urge the Executive of Carlisle City Council to pursue such an approach.

Further, the level and quality of information available on this issue on the websites of the two authorities is disappointing. A member of the public with a query or concern about a streetworks matter would struggle to find the information or point of contact they were seeking. Again, we recommend that both local authorities and Capita *db*s examine carefully the information they make available and look to improve the public accessibility of this service.

Appendix 1

This Appendix contains the text of the background report submitted to the Committee in September 2002.

1. Background: The Roles of Cumbria County Council and Carlisle City Council

1.1 The Highways Authority

Cumbria County Council is the Highways Authority for Carlisle. This means that it is the County Council which is ultimately responsible for traffic management issues and road maintenance matters on the streets of Carlisle. *Capita* carries out the duties which were previously the responsibility of Cumbria County Council's Design and Business Services Directorate (they were externalised to form *Capita* in January 2001).

1.2 Traffic Management, Road Maintenance and Utility Works

The County Council is responsible for the traffic management issues of all roads in the Carlisle City Council area.

The day-to-day responsibilities for road maintenance are rather more complicated:

- Cumbria County Council (*Capita*) is directly responsible for all 'classified' roads i.e. those which have been designated with a letter (A, B or C) and number e.g. A66. This work is actually carried out by a range of contractors.
- Carlisle City Council has 'claimed highway rights' which means that it is responsible for the maintenance of all unclassified roads within its area. In practical terms, this means all roads with a speed limit of 30mph or less in both the urban and rural areas. This work is physically carried out by Carlisle Works but with funding provided through the County Council.

Although Carlisle City Council is responsible for the road maintenance of unclassified roads in the District, it is the County Council (*Capita*) which remains responsible for the co-ordination of streetworks on all roads. For example, if United Utilities wish to carry out some work on an unclassified road in Carlisle, they inform Cumbria County Council (*Capita*). This is

because Cumbria County Council is the Highways Authority for the area and has a responsibility under the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991 to co-ordinate street works.

1.3 Other Background Information

The New Roads and Street Works Act (NRSWA) 1991 provides the legislative framework to detail much of street work activity and places a duty upon both undertakers and the authorities to work to co-ordinate streetworks. Beyond this, in 2001 the government published *Best Practice in street works and highway works* to try and encourage greater co-ordination of street works and generally, better practice for undertakers (those carrying out the work) and the Highway Authority (which permits and co-ordinates the work). It is also worth noting that Cumbria County Council carried out a Best Value Review of Highway Maintenance, which was completed in October 2001.

It is clear from the division of responsibility in this area that any inquiry is likely to result in comment on the works of Capita^{adbs} and, as such, any review of this area will require the co-operation of Capita^{adbs} and Cumbria County Council.

2. Possible Elements of the Review

The review could focus on a number of aspects of streetworks. Care should be taken in selecting components to include in the review so that the overall subject remains well defined and coherent. The following questions are intended to draw out Members' wishes:

- Are you interested in (a) work carried out by utility companies and/or (b) road maintenance work?
- What specific aspects of 'streetworks' are you concerned about?
 - Public dissatisfaction with the disruption caused to road users;
 - The level of co-ordination of streetworks;
 - The standard of repair;
 - The information made available about when and where works will be taking place;
 - The consideration shown to particular users whilst work is being carried out (e.g. disabled people, pedestrians).
- Do you want to look at the level of co-operation between Capita^{adbs}, Cumbria County Council and Carlisle City Council on these matters?

- Do you want to examine developing best practice in the arrangement and carrying out of streetworks?
- Do you want to look at the issue of 'lane rental' by utility firms?

Other matters which are of concern to Members but may best be reserved for subject reviews next year include broader transport matters, including facilities for particular road users, cyclists, pedestrians etc.

3. Next Steps

Depending on Members' decisions about the scope of the review, the next steps could be:

- Request a more detailed background report providing information on the different elements of the review;
- Arrange for Carlisle City Council's Head of Design to talk through the issues with Members at the next Committee meeting;
- Arrange a question and answer session with a representative from *Capita* *adbs*.

4. Recommendations:

4.1 Members note the information, give their views on the issues and agree the next steps.