
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 27 February 2019 from 7.00 - 8.59 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Lloyd Bowen (Chairman), Roger Clark, Derek Conway, Mike Dendor (Vice-Chairman), Mike Henderson and Lynd Taylor.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Jo Millard and Bob Pullen.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor James Hunt and Steve Whitlock (SGN).

APOLOGIES: Councillors Ken Ingleton and George Samuel.

519 **EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE**

The Chairman drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

520 **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 23 January 2019 (Minute Nos. 455 – 459) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

521 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No interests were declared.

522 **INVITATION TO UTILITY COMPANIES**

The Chairman welcomed Mr Steve Whitlock, Asset Engineering Manager (SGN) to the meeting.

Mr Whitlock gave a presentation to Members which included technical information on gas processes, planning for future development and the future of gas. He also advised that a new bio methane gas plant commenced operation on the Kemsley Paper Mill site in November 2018, and that plans were in place to replace the gas main within the structure of the Kingsferry Bridge on the Isle of Sheppey.

A Member sought clarification of SGN's status and role in the industry. Mr Whitlock explained that SGN were a limited company, whose role was to manage the gas distribution network in areas of the South of England, and in Scotland. He advised that SGN were a statutory undertaker, regulated by Ofgem. He agreed to provide a schematic map of Kent for Members.

In response to a question on data sharing and the cumulative affect new development may have on the gas supply to neighbouring authorities, Mr Whitlock confirmed that this was considered.

There was a discussion on fracking, and Steve Whitlock advised that, to his knowledge, there were no plans for SGN to become involved in this.

There was a discussion around the impact that development such as extensions and the formation of concrete parking areas in gardens had on gas pipes, and Mr Whitlock explained that there were periodic surveys and annual inspections of key areas where there might be risk of damage to mains as a result of development. He drew attention to the 'Dial before you dig' service which gave advice on how to protect apparatus in advance of any work.

A Member sought more detail on the proposed work to the gas main at Kingsferry Bridge. In response, Mr Whitlock explained that there had previously been a negligible leak that was quickly identified and made safe, but additional minor leaks further up Ferry Road were then diagnosed. He advised that construction work was programmed for 2020/21.

In response to a Member's question, Mr Whitlock explained that when leaks were reported, the history of reported leaks in an area were considered when repairs were scheduled, and this might lead to a larger area of replacement pipework and a bigger and more lengthy project than planned.

In response to a question, Mr Whitlock confirmed that imported gas was subject to the same rules and regulations as that sourced from the North Sea.

A Member highlighted the slow growth in supplying homes with green gas. Mr Whitlock explained the complicated process involved and advised that economies of scale influenced the rate of growth.

Members discussed the impact that Brexit might have on importing gas from outside the UK. Mr Whitlock explained the robust distribution network and investment in the service and said he was confident of the long term future of gas services.

The Chairman thanked Mr Whitlock for his attendance and Members applauded.

Members agreed that an update from Mr Whitlock at a future Scrutiny Committee Meeting would be very welcome and that invitations to other utilities to attend a future Scrutiny Committee Meeting would be followed up.

523 RECORD OF THANKS

The Chairman thanked all Committee Members for their input over the past year, in particular Councillors Conway, Samuel and Stokes who were standing down. The Chairman also gave thanks to the Policy and Performance Officer and Democratic Services for their work throughout the year.

524 ADJOURNMENT

The Chairman called an adjournment from 8.46pm to 8.50pm.

Chairman

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All Minutes are draft until agreed at the next meeting of the Committee/Panel