

Notes of the meeting of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Highways, held in Dining Room A of the House of Commons on Tuesday 21st November 2017 at 1300.

Present:

Parliamentarians:

Chris Chope MP	Chairman
Heather Wheeler MP	Treasurer
Sir Greg Knight MP	
Craig Mackinlay MP	
Jack Brereton MP	

Industry:

David Foster (Eurobitume UK)
Rick Ashton (Eurobitume UK)
Tony Kirby (IHE)
Jonathan Pearson (IHE)
Stephen Webb (IHE)
Rick Green (AIA)
Malcolm Simms (AIA)
Samantha Stagg (James Reed PR/AIA)
Dr Emily Andrews (Institute for Government - Speaker)
Simon van der Byl (MPA - Secretariat)

1. Introduction.

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked Dr Andrews to make her presentation.

2. Presentation.

Emily Andrews explained what the Institute for Government was and how it was funded before going on to identify what the key areas of work at present were: clearly, BREXIT was a major topic, but infrastructure was also a key issue. She introduced the two important pieces of work published recently, of which the newest, some two weeks ago, was on the effectiveness of public services. This report has a chapter on local neighbourhood services, of which road maintenance was an important element. The findings indicate that, despite reduced revenue budgets, efficiencies have been found with the resilience of the network generally holding up. . She went on to explain some of the difficulties in obtaining proper and reliable evidence, citing things like drain clearance as a point in question, suggesting that the data might not be readily accessible. Against a backdrop of low public satisfaction levels and continued pressure on revenue budgets, her main question to those present was, to use a mining analogy, what was the canary in the coal mine ? Will they be a tipping point ahead as experienced in other public services, e.g. prisons? It was suggested that a more consistent approach to funding, rather than large rises when services start to fail, would be more effective.

A copy of the relevant section of the report is attached to these notes for ease of reference.

3. Discussion.

A very wide ranging discussion followed which covered some key questions:

- Why is the data so inconsistent? Is it lack of identification of the key indicators? Technology probably available now to ensure that this can be accurately collected and analysed.
- Comparisons between LAs used to be possible: does the Institute for Government have any questions for LAs that would facilitate this information gathering?
- Was there any evidence to support the hypothesis that complaints from residents in an Authority on a particular issue put pressure on those LAs to take some action?
- Has the recent report had any effect on Government and made a difference?
- (Malcolm: I need your input here, as I missed some of what you were saying and the concomitant responses from around the table)

4. Thoughts for the future.

The Chairman said that he had tried to get the Minister, John Hayes, to come to speak to the Group, but John had moved and had been replaced by Jesse Norman. A call to him had also fallen on stony ground, but he will try again for the next meeting in the New Year.

In that context, the secretary suggested that, with numbers fairly stable at around 16-18, it would be better to reserve Dining Room B, which was more appropriate for that number. It was agreed, however, that the routine of one meeting per Parliamentary term was about right and dates for 2018 would be sought before Christmas this year.

The Chairman also suggested that the Group had become quiet on the business of asking Parliamentary Questions and recommended that this should be resurrected.

Simon van der Byl
21 November 2018