

**HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT SCRUTINY
 COMMITTEE
 4 MARCH 2024**

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR M BROOKES (CHAIRMAN)

Councillors A M Hall (Vice-Chairman), P Ashleigh-Morris, T R Ashton, K J Clarke, Mrs S Rawlins, A N Stokes, E W Strenziel, Mrs C L E Vernon and R A Wright

Councillor R Davies attended the meeting remotely as an observer

Officers in attendance:- Andrew Fletcher (Public Rights of Way & Access Manager), Chris Miller (Head of Environment), Jonathan Evans (Head of Highways Client and Contractual Management Services), Kiara Chatziioannou (Scrutiny Officer), Nicole Hilton (Assistant Director - Communities), Richard Fenwick (Head of Highways Asset and Local Management Services), Tim Smith (Business Change Manager), Sam Edwards (Head of Highways Infrastructure and Laboratory Services) and Thomas Crofts (Democratic Services Officer)

Karan Cassar (Assistant Director Highways) and Mike Reed (Head of Transport) attended the meeting remotely

33 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/REPLACEMENT MEMBERS

An apology for absence was received from Councillor R A Gibson.

34 DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest made at this point in proceedings.

35 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING OF THE HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 29 JANUARY 2024

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 29 January 2024 be agreed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

36 ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE CHAIRMAN, EXECUTIVE COUNCILLORS AND LEAD OFFICERS

Councillor R Davies, Executive Councillor for Highways, Transport and IT, updated the Committee on the Government's announcement that £262,000 was to be made available for Lincolnshire to invest in transport.

The Chairman welcomed Mike Reed as the new Head of Transport.

37 GRANTHAM FUTURE HIGH STREET FUND - MARKET PLACE & STATION APPROACH PROJECTS

Consideration was given to a report from Sam Edwards, Head of Highways Infrastructure and Laboratory Services, which provided the Committee with the opportunity to comment on the Grantham Future High Street Fund – market place and station approach projects, prior to a decision by the Executive for Highways, Transport and IT between 11 and 15 March 2024. The following matters were highlighted:

- The projects were being led by South Kesteven District Council.
- An £8 million bid had been secured by the District Council to fund the projects.
- The contract start date was due in April 2024.
- Contract options were outlined, as referenced within the report.
- A programme of community engagement was underway to help inform the direction of the projects.
- Contract costs had come back at less than anticipated.
- Principally, the projects sought to make Grantham's market place area a more usable space for events by lifting the carriageway and installing block paving to create a level surface.
- Works also included making the area more aesthetically pleasing by reducing the impact of former industrial structures between the station and the market place.

During consultation of the report, the following comments were raised:

- Members expressed concern about the project's costing and questioned whether there was confidence that there will be enough money to complete both projects. Officers acknowledged the difficulty in being completely certain due to the inherent risks in capital works. Officers mentioned that the initial cost is significantly less than what was in the paper, providing some room for changes, whilst also emphasising the presence of a £400,000 risk within the overall numbers.
- Officers detailed mitigation measures, including the ability to tailor the Station Approach scheme in case of cost escalation in the marketplace scheme. This included descope or non-implementation options to manage risks. It was acknowledged that while it could not be guaranteed the project would fall within the budget, experience suggested it was anticipated that it would.
- Substantial public opposition to the scheme was acknowledged, citing concerns about the extended disruption to the marketplace for perceived minimal benefit. Ongoing discussions with the District Council leadership were held seeking justification and sponsorship for the scheme, pushing for public support. Serious objections from traders were noted.
- Members expressed concerns about the disruption to traders and traffic flow in Grantham, especially during certain times of the day and when affected by issues on surrounding major routes; lack of public buy-in at the current stage of the process

was emphasised and a question was raised about what actions are being taken to address these concerns. Officers clarified that these are South Kesteven District Council-led projects, therefore communication responsibility sits with the District Council in relation to the purpose and benefits of the project to the members of the public. Officers explained further that LCC would lead the communications with regards the specific construction of the project, including traffic management, practical implications, and the day-to-day effects on businesses. LCC is looking to appoint a public liaison officer for this purpose. Further, a public engagement event was due at the end of March that was covering a wider range of Grantham projects - including reconstruction schemes and pedestrian crossing developments.

- Members, acknowledging the current lack of consensus from members of the public and business/traders for the schemes, agreed to support the Recommendations to the Executive Councillors which were pertinent to supporting taking all decisions necessary to progress these schemes as well as the “undertaking of an appropriate procurement process in relation to the delivery and construction of the Schemes”.

RESOLVED

1. That that the Committee support the report and agree the recommendations to the Executive Councillor for Highways, Transport and IT.
2. That comments raised by the Committee be shared with the Executive Councillor for Highways, Transport and IT for consideration ahead of the decision being made.

38 PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY FEES & CHARGES

Consideration was given to a report from Chris Miller, Head of Environment, which provided the Committee with the opportunity to comment on the public rights of way fees and charges prior to a decision by the Executive Councillor for Economic Development, Environment and Planning between 5 and 15 March 2024. The following matters were highlighted:

- Changes focused on offering greater guidance and advice to help inform applications so that they may be made more acceptable and allow more efficient service delivery – as rejections of unacceptable or incomplete applications caused the greatest workloads.
- Fees required updating since the last time they had been reviewed.
- Most costs to the service were in the form of legal and resourcing matters.
- Charges were not designed to generate profit.

During consultation of the report, the following comments were raised:

- Members welcomed the recommendations, particularly highlighting the introduction of the pre-application service where it currently did not exist. Members recognised the significance of having a comprehensive view across public rights of way processes and the benefits of streamlined contact and processes for future applications and emphasised the importance of covering the costs of administering the work as

projects progress along the track and through different phases. The following points were highlighted in discussion:

- Whilst Members were in agreement with the fixed fee approach, citing reasons discussed in the report, it was acknowledged that some charges were subject to a significant increase, recognising that this might raise concerns for service users, especially considering the lack of updates over the years. Nevertheless, Members expressed a favour of adopting a fixed fee over variable charges, recognising that this was simplifying the process and reduced the margin for error in manual fee calculations. Officers supported the notion that the charges, while seemingly high, effectively staggered the costs across different phases and maintained that the approach proposed spread the financial burden for applicants preventing a large sum being due at the end of the process. It was also noted that this was in alignment with practices of other authorities in the wider region.
- Members inquired about how the increases in charges and the annual automatic increases would be communicated to the public. Officers explained that albeit there was not a specific communication plan in place, there was intention to publish all fees and charges on the web, allowing service users to review costs before applying, giving assurance that there was great focus on transparency. Furthermore, assurance was given that the increases would not affect those with ongoing applications and clarified that the quoted cost at the start of the application process remained applicable for those.
- Members sought assurance regarding the ways in which the increased charges would be directed toward the Public Rights of Way Service and asked whether these would contribute to reducing the waiting time for people requesting diversions. Officers explained that with changes in legislation, the government anticipated an increased work volume and level of bureaucracy for the Council which in turn required additional resources. Assurances were given that increased charges would be reinvested to provide these additional resources creating thus a circular position. In relation to the pace and review of the process, these would be closely monitored which in turn was expected to potentially reduce waiting times.
- Members, acknowledging the implications for service users emerging from the increases in fees, expressed their confidence in the proposed being the optimum way forward and unanimously supported the Recommendations to the Executive Councillor.

RESOLVED

1. That that the Committee support the report and agree the recommendations to the Executive Councillor for Economic Development, Environment and Planning.
2. That comments raised by the Committee be shared with the Executive Councillor for Economic Development, Environment and Planning for consideration ahead of the decision being made.

Consideration was given to a report from Jonathan Evans, Head of Highways Client and Contractual Management Services, which provided the Committee with the performance data for the Highways service for Quarter 3. The following matters were highlighted:

- The key performance indicator data was outlined, as referenced within the report.
- Performance reporting had been interrupted by Storm Babet, and scheduled improvement works had been delayed by the additional work caused by the extreme weather events.
- Improvement plans had been issued to contractors that had underperformed, and contracts were being adjusted and extended with improvements in mind.
- A steady state approach to asset management was being pursued.
- Two new pots of funding for the service had been announced by the Government:
 - Redirected HS2 funding – Network North
 - Local Transport Fund
- £1,8 million had been allocated to repair works necessitated by storm damage.
- £2.5 million had been allocated to carriageway improvements.
- Regarding complaints received by the service, 218 contacts had been made, 111 of which were made formal complaints. This represented a decrease of 26 complaints on the previous year.
- Regarding the public satisfaction survey, the public felt that the condition of roads was worsening. Satisfaction rated had fallen from 48% to 46%, compared to the previous year; however, the gap between satisfaction rates in comparison to the national average had lessened.

During consultation of the report, the following comments were raised:

- The FixMyStreet reporting system was not intended for dealing with emergency issues caused by storm events. Work was needed to add clarity to the automated response produced by FixMyStreet in order to accommodate these types of issues.
- Members were concerned that 50% of engagement with residents was with residents over the age of 65 and that methods to improve engagement with younger demographics needed to be explored.
- Complaints concerning staff conduct were unacceptable to the Council and work with partners was underway to investigate instances.
- The service's budget for tree maintenance on highway assets was &700,000 per year. Some exceptions to the Council's responsibility for these trees existed across the county where there were local agreements. Officers welcomed intelligence from local councillors to inform the serve on problem trees.
- Improved quality checks were needed in relation to surface dressing works.
- The service did not prioritise cosmetic issues such as paint remnants on the highway and was focused on delivering functional repairs and maintenance.
- Recent storms had interrupted performance reporting due to pressures on resources.

RESOLVED

1. That the report be received, and comments made be taken under consideration by the relevant officers and executive portfolio holder.
2. That the Committee be updated on improved clarity in issues responses and processing on FixMyStreet.

40 HIGHWAYS MAJOR PROJECT UPDATE REPORT

Consideration was given to a report from Sam Edwards, Head of Highways Infrastructure and Laboratory Services, which provided the Committee with an update since the last reporting period on all aspects of the highways major project portfolio including progress made concerning the raising of the Grantham Southern Relief Road bridge.

During consultation of the report, the following comments were raised:

- Nettleham Road roundabout on the Lincoln bypass was being studied to ensure good safety and traffic flow in relation to the cycle path crossing.
- It was clarified that the northern portion of the Lincoln bypass was a council asset and that the long-term aspiration was for this section to be made a dual carriageway.
- It was clarified that the B1180 at the Spalding Greencell roundabout was a significant road despite being listed as a minor highway and that scheduled closures would have a big impact. Further analysis was to take place following the result of the contract tendering process.
- Cycle access within Lincoln was continually under review, but further projects were dependant on available funding.

RESOLVED

That the report be received, and comments made be taken under consideration by the relevant officers and executive portfolio holder.

41 ANNUAL UPDATE ON THE APPROACH TO TRANSPORT STRATEGY DEVELOPMENTS

Consideration was given to a report from Sam Edwards, Head of Highways Infrastructure and Laboratory Services, which provided the Committee with the annual update on the Council's approach to its Transport Strategy Developments.

During consultation of the report, the following comments were raised:

- Traffic modelling for Lincoln and Spalding had been updated to incorporate the North Hykeham relief road and roundabout improvements, respectively.
- Members agreed that the cycle path network required more access in the southwestern portion of Lincoln.
- Funding streams had been identified and bids would be made at the appropriate times.

RESOLVED

That the report be received, and comments made be taken under consideration by the relevant officers and executive portfolio holder.

42 HIGHWAYS - GULLY CLEANSING, DRAINAGE REPAIR SCHEMES AND SURFACE WATER FLOODING

Consideration was given to a report from Richard Fenwick, Head of Highways Asset and Local Management Services, which provided the Committee with an update on the Council's activities in relation to gully cleansing, drainage repairs and surface flooding. The following matters were highlighted:

- There had been 245 completed drainage issues undertaken since the last report.
- Issues regarding internal dwelling flooding and risk to life were prioritised over other works. Gardens, footpaths and then pooling on the highway came further down the issue hierarchy.
- Issue investigation wait times were reducing despite the added demand on the service caused by recent extreme weather events.

During consultation of the report, the following comments were raised:

- Cyclical gully cleansing as well as customer reports informed the service of areas where drains could not be accessed due to parked vehicles.
- Parked vehicles obstructing access to drains and gullies continued to present issues.
- The service was working well with partners. Successful partnership arrangements were proven during recent storms and emergency responses.
- Disputes continued in relation to culvert drainage liability. Members felt that this matter should be explored more fully at a subsequent meeting.

RESOLVED

1. That the report be received, and comments made be taken under consideration by the relevant officers and executive portfolio holder.
2. That an update on culvert drainage liability be presented at a subsequent meeting.

43 HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to the Committee's Work Programme, which was presented by Kiara Chatziioannou, Scrutiny Officer. It was reported that the following items had been added:

- Anglian Water Street Works Performance Improvements
- Sincil Bank Towns Fund Scheme – Lincoln Town Deal

8

HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

4 MARCH 2024

During consultation, the following comments were raised:

- The Committee meeting in December 2024 was due to take place on 9 December, not 3 December.
- An item on the Council's partnership with Network Rail was due to come to the Committee on 10 June 2024.
- Progress in relation to Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) processing was to be added as an item.
- An update on issues concerning FixMyStreet, as discussed under item 7, was to be added as an item.
- An update on culvert drainage liability, as discussed under item 10, was to be added as an item.

RESOLVED

That the work programme presented be agreed subject to the changes above.

The meeting closed at 12.20 pm