

**HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE
13 SEPTEMBER 2021**

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR E W STRENGIEL (CHAIRMAN)

Councillors M Brookes, K J Clarke, T J G Dyer, S P Roe and R A Wright

Councillors: attended the meeting as observers

Officers in attendance:-

Kiara Chatziioannou (Scrutiny Officer) and Robert Close (Democratic Services Officer)

19 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED

That Councillor Strenziel be elected as Chairman for this meeting of the Highways and Transport Scrutiny Committee.

COUNCILLOR STRENGIEL IN THE CHAIR

20 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/REPLACEMENT MEMBERS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors B Adams, Mrs A Austin, A Hall, R Gibson, and Mrs S Rawlins.

21 DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations of interest received.

22 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING OF THE HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 19 JULY 2021

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 19 July 2021 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

23 ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE CHAIRMAN, EXECUTIVE COUNCILLORS AND CHIEF
OFFICERS

No announcements were made.

24 WINTER SERVICE PLAN 2021/22

Consideration was given to a report from the Materials Engineer on the Winter Service Plan 2021/22. The plan was updated annually in line with national standards, no amendments were proposed as part of this report. The Council had 43 gritters able to treat the entirety of the Precautionary Salting Network within three hours. The Winter Service Plan identified that a minimum of 25,000 tonnes of salt should be in stock for the start of the Winter Season. Over 26,856 tonnes of salt were used over 99 precautionary salting runs in 2020/21.

The Committee considered the report, and during the discussion the following comments were noted:-

- The Committee was assured that sufficient amounts of salt and grit were available across the county in preparation for challenging weather conditions this winter.
- Members raised the issue of mutual aid in relation to Town and Parish Councils being provided with bags of salt to deal with severe weather conditions. This did not happen last year due to the pandemic, however this year, some Town and Parish Councils missed the opportunity to apply for support which was advertised in Town and Parish news in May 2021, with a closing date for applications for bags of salt being the end of June 2021. Direct communication with Town and Parish Councils was requested in offering this support and in establishing who was responsible for receiving this. Darrell Redford, Network Resilience Manager, was currently communicating with Town and Parish Councils to offer this support. Assurance was given that all requests were, and would continue, being accommodated. Direct communication was agreed to be implemented ensuring that Town and Parish Councils received the assistance required.
- Assurance was given to the Committee that County Councillors were being notified when a grit bin was being removed from an area they represented. It was also clarified that grit bins were not to be removed unless an area was already being gritted.
- Members were given assurance that there was an on-going recruitment process for 30 HGV drivers, through Balfour Beatty, for the existing fleet of 43 gritters across the county; hence a shortage of drivers was not expected. Moreover, as explained within the Winter Service Plan, contingency plans included the use of third-party contractors and farmers to help during periods of intense snow. In addition, a plan to introduce a strategic network of HGV drivers allowed for further challenges to be mitigated where these emerged.

RESOLVED

1. That the Highways and Transport Scrutiny Committee unanimously agreed to support the recommendations to the Executive as detailed in the report.
2. That the comments listed above be passed on to the Executive in relation to this item.

25 PASSENGER TRANSPORT UPDATE

Consideration was given to a report from the Head of Transport Services updating the Committee on Passenger Transportation. The market for passenger transport was extremely fragile and small, requiring support to be provided by Government and the Council. A shortage of PSV (Passenger Carrying Vehicles) drivers was having a detrimental effect on the market's ability to deliver local bus services and home to school contracts. Passenger numbers were beginning to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic, with adult and child fares being 70 – 75 per cent of pre Covid-19 journeys. However, older age concessionary pass holder journeys had only recovered to that of 45 – 50 per cent of pre Covid-19 figures. Government offered funding to facilitate designated buses to separate students from the wider public, while the Council allocated some of its Covid-19 funding to support operators with cleaning regimes and additional PPE. Covid-19 Bus Service Support Grant (CBSSG) was due to end in September 2021, but further Recovery Funding would be provided until April 2022. Reduced passenger numbers and driver shortages were resulting in routes failing to remain profitable, likely requiring support from the Council in the future. The Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT) had lobbied for support to relieve the financial impact. Coach operators were struggling to remain compliant with the Public Service Vehicle Accessibility Regulations (PSVAR); however, the Department for Transport were extending an exemption, originally due to expire 1 January 2020, to 31 March 2022.

The Committee considered the report, and during the discussion the following comments were noted:-

- Concerns were raised by Members over the ownership, and maintenance funding of bus shelters. It was advised that the Council could indeed consider offering to maintain bus shelters subject to funding. The National Bus Strategy looked to support bus shelters. In addition it was confirmed that local authorities could combine funding pots, including Section 106 agreements, to give a greater overall maintenance budget.
- Of the 55 per cent of users had a concessional pass; Members asked how many used it on a regular basis. This would be circulated to the Committee outside of the meeting.
- Observing the risk of students being removed from the Home School Transport Scheme, Members asked what alternative facility was in place to get them to school. It was explained that a taxi service was used to provide transportation, however, it

was stressed that removals from the Home School Transportation Scheme were often a result of a student's special needs rather than poor behaviour. In addition, a number of steps were taken before exclusion. Detailed data on the rates of school transport exclusion would be circulated to the Committee.

- Noting the relatively small market operated in Lincolnshire, Members asked if operators could do more to attract passengers such as running 'use it or lose it' campaign. The distance between market towns was stressed to Members, but they were advised that if demand was substantial then the introduction of a service would be explored. Operators were supported to advertise at risk services to the public.
- With the success of CallConnect, Members asked if there was still a need for traditional public transport. It was advised that there was a place for both traditional fixed route services and more responses services like Core Connect.
- Appreciating the pressure for accessible vehicles, Members asked if Tekal could be utilised to help reduce those costs. It was explained that while Tekal could offer support, however, resources were currently targeted at area of the most immediate problem such as special needs transportation and CallConnect.
- Members felt that bus service routes could be advertised clearer. They were advised that route information formed part of the Bus Service Improvement plan.

RESOLVED

That the report and comments be noted.

26 LINCOLNSHIRE ENHANCED PARTNERSHIP SCHEME & BUS SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Consideration was given to a report from the Head of Transport Services on the Lincolnshire Enhanced Partnership Scheme & Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP). The alternative option of a franchising scheme was not available to the Council as it did not have an elected Mayor or control over planning policy. The funding opportunities would allow the Council to further invest in the strategic bus network and support the development of the economy. Bus Services offered a significant opportunity to reduce carbon emissions of the transport network. The BSIP would include:

- Training offered by Boston College;
- A mobile app to provide all-operator information;
- User-friendly journey planner;
- More frequent buses;
- A longer operating day;
- Offering services to new developments;

- App based booking for Callconnect;
- A quality corridor between Boston and Skegness.

In addition, infrastructure tiers were also proposed with time table information for bus stop flags, dry waiting areas for shelters, real time travel information for interchanges and CCTV and bike storage for bus stations. Traffic light priority would be introduced at all Scoot controlled junctions to support buses running late. The BSIP would also seek to align operator policies to ensure that there was a consistent age of eligibility across all operators and a broadly consistent discount for those young people. Interchange hubs would be explored around large urban area. Layover locations would be introduced to allow breaks and wait for school closing times. Loading times, advanced parking notifications and Variable Message Signage would be considered in Skegness. A decarbonisation roadmap was proposed to include retro-fit emission capture technologies, electric bus projects, a bus renewal programme and increased requirement for operators to use vehicles compliant with higher Emission Standards. A passenger charger would document what service users could expect aboard, including among other, Wi-Fi and USB chargers on every bus, bus sanitation and cleanliness, the age of the vehicle, its carbon emissions and the driver's behaviour and attire. To implement an Enhanced Partnership Scheme the Council would have to publish its intent before June 2021. This had already been completed by the Executive Director for Place. The current stage was for the Council to prepare and publish a Bus Service Improvement Plan by the end of October 2021. Finally, the Council would have to undertake all statutory processes in preparation of this. Officers had been engaging with local bus Operators, District Councils, MPs and the Greater Lincolnshire Local Enterprise Partnership to gain their views on what the Lincolnshire BSIP should focus on. Risks included limited timescales to engage with stakeholders, unclear guidance on assessment and pressure to propose an ambitious scheme.

The Committee considered the report, and during the discussion the following comments were noted:-

- Members requested further clarity on how the public was being consulted. It was clarified that an engagement cycle had been undertaken via an online survey which received a good response level. A formal public consultation was scheduled to take place in November through December 2021, in line with governmental guidance, to obtain views of both service users and members of the wider public. Information was being promoted online, through Parish Councils' notice boards and local magazines to raise awareness of the public and receive feedback.
- Assurance was given that bus service operators were getting advance notice when road works were taking place. Highways and Transport Services made efforts to ensure alternative routes were available where road works were taking place.
- In relation to resources, Members were informed that Boston College was engaged to establish courses due to its major investment in transport and logistics school with

state-of-the-art facilities and advanced technological means of specialism in this field. Members were assured that Boston College, which also had facilities outside the area that may be used to provide markets with local skilled workforce, was used as a trial area and that this was being rolled out more widely to other areas around the county through other additional service providers.

- Members raised concerns that the long-term viability of pocket hubs, which were host to Park and Ride schemes, were not affected though withdrawn cooperation. Members were assured that there was a view to relocate Park and Ride sites to designated pocket hubs. There was a range of these types of facilities and the optimum solution for each location was considered. Legal agreements were in place to ensure viability of existing schemes and there were already providers across the county that expressed interest. Members emphasised the need for schemes in the East and West of Lincoln City on any land suitable for Park and Ride locations.
- Seeking assurance, Members asked that funding for EPS & BSIP was still secured. Assurance was given that part of the funds was already being spent and that there were further funds still available; moreover, even where funds were insufficient, schemes' delivery was obliged through partnership binding agreements. Partnerships were made aware of available funds and every effort was made to ensure that the Council was not exposed to financial risk.
- In response to comments raised regarding the electric bus scheme trial, it was advised that this was being considered in Boston and Grantham in line with feedback received from operators and District Councils. These areas were indicative rather than definitive, other areas were also being considered. Assurance was given that the areas were being reviewed based upon other factors, such as the number of vehicles and services operated in these areas, plus the associated charging infrastructure requirements.
- A Member emphasised that it should be acknowledged in the report that the agreement would have had a positive impact on Section 17, by way of reduced crime and disorder through individuals being discouraged from drink driving and young people being better connected with areas they wished to visit reducing antisocial behaviour exhibited in some areas.

RESOLVED

1. That the Highways and Transport Scrutiny Committee unanimously agreed to support the recommendations to the Executive as detailed in the report.
2. That the comments listed above be passed on to the Executive in relation to this item.

27 HIGHWAYS QUARTER 1 PERFORMANCE REPORT (1 APRIL TO 30 JUNE 2021)

Consideration was given to a report from the Head of Highways Services updating the Committee on the performance of the Highways Service including the Major Highway Schemes Update, Lincolnshire Highways Performance Report and Transport Complaints

Report. Significant issues developed with the supply and delivery of materials such as concrete and steel with some significant cost increases. The Lincoln Eastern Bypass was now complete, Grantham Southern Relief Road was near completion with links to the A1, the Spalding Western Relief Road was awaiting a response from the landowner solicitor, work had recommenced on Roman Bank, Skegness, however, issues had arisen with water utilities. Though quarter 1 over 16,000 defects were repaired including 12,515 potholes. The rate of repairs had increased by over 1000 when compared to quarter 1 2020/21. 141 miles of surface dressing, 39 miles of carriageway patching and surfacing and 55 miles of footway resurfacing had been completed which would hopefully show a benefit soon. 399 minor works jobs had been completed including civils, minor patching, and drainage. An AdEPT peer review had been carried out in parallel with a LGA peer review. It was considered that the Council was a service that delivered excellent value for money and used data intelligently. Customer complaints relating to highways and transport had seen an increase from the last quarter by 33 per cent; this may, however, have been due to increased use of highways.

The Committee considered the report, and during the discussion the following comments were noted:-

- Noting the suggestion within the report, that the Council had a contractual commitment to a long-term social value programme, Members sought further detail on the number of opportunities offered to vulnerable adults and children. The statistics behind the current opportunities offered would be circulated outside of the Committee, although, it was noted that graduate placement schemes were also offered.
- Appreciating the 3 cut phases laid out within the report, Members asked if there was any flexibility for further, or rearranged, cuts to suit times of increased growth. It was explained that this was an on-going concern which officers endeavoured to be as strategic as possible. However, where issues would arise in a particular area of the county, these could be addressed separately.

RESOLVED

That the report and comments be noted.

28 HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received a report from the Scrutiny Officer, which enabled the Committee to comment on the content of its work programme for the coming year to ensure that scrutiny activity was focussed where it could be of greatest benefit.

RESOLVED

That the work programme presented be agreed.

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HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
13 SEPTEMBER 2021

The meeting closed at 12.03 pm