

**HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT SCRUTINY
 COMMITTEE
 11 SEPTEMBER 2023**

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR M BROOKES (CHAIRMAN)

Councillors T R Ashton, K J Clarke, Mrs S Rawlins, A N Stokes, Mrs C L E Vernon, R A Wright, P Ashleigh-Morris and N Sear

Councillors: R Davies and C Perraton-Williams attended the meeting remotely as observers

Officers in attendance:-

Helen Reek (Support Services Manager), Jonathan Evans (Head of Highways Client and Contractual Management Services), Kiara Chatziioannou (Scrutiny Officer), Sam Edwards (Head of Highways Infrastructure and Laboratory Services), Verity Druce (Head of Transport Services) and Thomas Crofts (Democratic Services Officer)

Officers in attendance remotely:-

Karen Cassar (Assistant Director Highways)

20 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/REPLACEMENT MEMBERS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors E Strengiel, A Hall and R Gibson.

It was reported that, under Regulation 13 of the Local Government Committee and Political Groups Regulation 1990, Councillor P Ashleigh-Morris was replacing Councillor A Hall and Councillor N Sear was replacing Councillor E Strengiel for this meeting only.

21 DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

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

22 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING OF THE HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT
 SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 17 JULY 2023

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 17 July 2023 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

23 ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE CHAIRMAN, EXECUTIVE COUNCILLORS AND LEAD
 OFFICERS

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The Chairman reminded Members of the invitation to visit the new Operational Control Hub, which launched in Lancaster House on 1st Floor, on 2 October 2023.

24 REFRESH OF THE BUS SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN (BSIP) FOR LINCOLNSHIRE

Consideration was given to a report from Helen Reek, Support Services Manager, regarding the Refresh of the Bus Service Improvement Plan which was due to be considered by the Executive Councillor for Highways, Transport and IT between 18 September and 6 October 2023. The following matters were highlighted:

- The purpose of the Plan was to serve as a demonstration of Lincolnshire's challenges with public transport and the Council's ambitions for how it can improve services in partnership with operators. The Plan served as a collaborative plan and summarised how the Council looked to use any future discretionary funding opportunities from the Department for Transport (DfT).
- Following feedback from the DfT on the first BSIP produced in 2021, amendments had been made to identify specific needs of a large sparsely populated rural county like Lincolnshire, in terms of improving its public transport.
- Improvements had been made to the formatting and readability of the Plan through the use of graphics, and through reducing the overall number of objectives in order to focus on the most significant priorities.

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

- Members argued that the updated plan allowed the Council to reference the achievements of Callconnect, Lincolnshire's demand responsive transport and continued improvement (including extending core hours of service, reviewing staffing requirements, expanding to urban areas etc.). Assurance was given that the service continued to operate via use of the new App and the telephone appointments booking system. Members requested assurance that timetables of local bus service in certain areas would be reviewed to ensure that needs of the local communities are met (e.g., return service hours going into Louth should extend beyond 4:30pm as individuals are using the service to attend hospital appointments).
- Members emphasised on the importance of positive outcomes of working with bus operators through the Enhanced Partnership. Funding remained a key fundamental for all parties and additional money was anticipated to enable further progression of schemes and projects, delivering intended outcomes.

RESOLVED

1. That the Committee support the report and agree the recommendations to the Executive.
2. That comments made be shared with the Executive for consideration ahead of the decision being made.

25 TRANSPORT QUARTER 1 PERFORMANCE REPORT 2023/24

Consideration was given to a report from Verity Druce, Head of Transport Services. The following matters were highlighted:

- The Service had experienced a busy run up to the September school start, which was a standard part of the annual cycle of activity. The service had been managing the volumes more effectively than the previous year.
- High numbers of applications for educational travel had been received and processed, with the original deadline being the end of May. The service had been able to work to processing applications received by the end of July, to establish the travel provision for the start of term, however any applications received after this date could not be guaranteed.
- The cost of travel provision contracts remained high compared to previous years, with operators still experiencing cost pressures.
- A further risk this year related to schools and academies making changes to their session times, aligned to the Government's Schools White Paper, which included schools offering minimum hours in a school week. Several schools informed the service, and contracts had been amended accordingly. However, there may be other schools which making changes to session times in September, which the service was unaware of. It was important to note that not all travel provision contracts with operators could be changed.
- The Council had entered into a temporary partnership arrangement with Norfolk County Council to support the interconnect 505 service in order to evaluate its patronage and longer term feasibility.
- Transport Services received a total of 37 contacts in Quarter 1 of the 2023/2024 year, from individuals wishing to give feedback, report issues or complain about various services. Out of these 37 contacts, 27 entered the formal complaints process and 10 cases were handled as an Early Resolution, which equated to 27% of all contacts received. This was an increase of 11% in cases handled as Early Resolution from last quarter. Complaint numbers were expected to increase in the next quarter due to the educational travel activity peak.

During consideration of the report, the Committee raised the following comments:

- Current staff vacancies accounted for 10 out of 80-90 of service-wide staff and 10 out of 40 operation staff. The use of temporary posts had helped support the service throughout the recruitment period with many temporary posts being made permanent, and recruitment continued.
- Work was underway to improve the accessible data regarding educational travel, to help predict demand levels.
- Officers were looking to include commendations as well as complaints in the reporting system.
- Postage issues had been noted regarding the distribution of bus passes.

- The educational travel service's value for money was analysed via benchmarking data and a calculation of the costs per child. It was noted that costs had begun to stabilise compared to last year but the costs were affected by several factors which may change, including fuel prices.
- Competition for educational travel contracts from bus and taxi providers was varied across the county – with greater competition and sufficiency levels seen among taxi providers. The Council continued to work with the market to develop the service.

The Committee agreed that more standardised reporting was needed and that requested timetabling changes from academy schools could have many unforeseen consequences in terms of traffic management.

RESOLVED

1. That the Committee's satisfaction be recorded on the activity undertaken in quarter 1 and the performance of key metrics as presented.
2. That comments and suggestions made be taken under consideration by the relevant Officers and the Executive Portfolio Holder.

26 NORTH HYKEHAM RELIEF ROAD (NHRR)

Consideration was given to a report from Sam Edwards, Head of Highways Infrastructure and Laboratory Services, regarding the North Hykeham Relief Road planning application which was due to be considered by the Executive on 3 October 2023. The following matters were highlighted:

- The report should have read £73 million instead of £79 million regarding the Council's funding contributions.
- Changes to the originally proposed route were highlighted. Changes had been made to accommodate new infrastructure and compensate for recently identified poor ground conditions. However, the route was still set to go through the same Council-bought properties on Station Road, Waddington.
- Costs associated with the new route remained similar to those of the original route.
- Attention was drawn to the following:
 - The roundabout at South Hykeham was to be doubled in size.
 - Footway and cycleway routes were to extend alongside the route.
 - Flood attenuation ponds were to be situated alongside the route.
 - Stack ground slopes were to be created in elevated areas to compensate for the poor ground conditions.
 - The relief road was to be a dual carriageway.

Members were guided through the proposal with reference to graphics and an aerial flyover.

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

- The use of traffic signals at the Hykeham Roundabout was queried as members were sceptical as to the effectiveness of traffic lights on roundabouts. Officers explained that due to the high number of vehicles using the roundabout combined with it being a 5-arm roundabout opposed to a 4-arm roundabout without traffic lights simply would not operate effectively. Traffic lights offer the solution that controls traffic flow and maintains access opportunities for all arms. This junction choice has been tested and scrutinised through the Business Case process and will continue to be scrutinised by National Highways as the asset is there's and wouldn't be accepted should it not provide the appropriate traffic relief.
- Members emphasised that designs should reflect future infrastructure developments especially on roundabouts (i.e., provision for the design and development of service areas and filling stations) to ensure that drivers were deterred from travelling through Lincoln when not necessary. It was also noted that there was margin for further economic development and improvements in the area where NHRR extended in. Officers assured Members that the design took under consideration future plans/need for development, housing and economic growth as outlined in the Central Lincolnshire Local Plan. Other developments would not be considered in the design of the road as otherwise this would be deemed as public money being used to benefit private businesses. The design does not predicate any retrospective developments; however these would need to be assessed at the time of planning submission on how it will impact the highway network and thus what improvements the developer would need to make to mitigate those impacts.
- Members requested for cautious consideration of budgets and costs and received assurance from leading Officers that inflation and fluctuations observed in the past 18 months were factored in and also that future inflation had also been factored in.

RESOLVED

1. That the Committee support the report and agree the recommendations to the Executive.
2. That comments made be shared with the Executive for consideration ahead of the decision being made.

27 HIGHWAYS PERFORMANCE REPORT, QUARTER 1 (1 APRIL TO 30 JUNE 2023)

Consideration was given to a report from Jonathan Evans, Head of Highways Client and Contractual Management Services. The report gave an update on all aspects of the Highways Service delivery, the quarterly performance data for the key contracts (Highways Works, Traffic Signals and Professional Services), and strategic highlights relevant to the Highways Service in Lincolnshire. The following matters were addressed: contract performance, service performance, performance trends, operational issues, highways complaints and Corporate Plan performance indicators.

It was noted that recruitment to key specialist roles within the Service was ongoing and had proved challenging in the current labour market.

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During consideration of the report, the Committee raised the following comments:

- The use of new technologies in highways maintenance and repair was always being pursued when there was not a detrimental impact on the whole life cost.
- Regrettably, the Council's pursuit of cost recovery in relation to works that had been impeded by external agents had rarely been successful.
- Audits of gully cleansing activity by contractors were undertaken to ensure that works had been actioned as recorded. The requirement for photographic evidence was being explored by the service so that it can be added without disrupting service delivery.

The Committee noted that multiple complaints could relate to the same matter; however, officers gave assurance that where specific patterns were discernible, complaint themes were highlighted within the report.

RESOLVED

1. That the Committee's satisfaction be recorded on the performance and activity achieved, and in the efforts in resolving complaints.
2. That comments and suggestions made be taken under consideration by the relevant Officers and the Executive Portfolio Holder.

28 **HIGHWAYS MAJOR PROJECT UPDATE REPORT**

Consideration was given to a report from Sam Edwards, Head of Highways Infrastructure and Laboratory Services. The Committee were guided through recent developments in relation to the Council's current major highways projects.

During consideration of the presentation, it was asked if a certain width was mandated for shared use cycle and pedestrian paths. Officers did not have the precise information to hand but gave assurance that the paths included in the schemes were subject to the appropriate approval before works were undertaken.

RESOLVED

1. That the report and comments be noted.
2. That comments made be taken under consideration by the relevant Officers and the Executive Portfolio Holder.

29 **HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME**

Consideration was given to the Committee's Work Programme, which was presented by Kiara Chatziioannou, Scrutiny Officer. The following changes, which had been made after publication, were highlighted:

- The Highways Infrastructure Asset Management Plan and Highways Infrastructure Asset Management Policy were to be rescheduled to the 11 December 2023 in order to better accommodate the sequencing of the decision making process.
- An additional item on Transport Services Education Travel Information Dashboard was now scheduled to come the meeting on 30 October 2023.
- The Anglian Water Street Works Performance – Update on Action Plan was to be moved to the meeting on 30 October 2023 in order to accommodate the changes above.

RESOLVED

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

The meeting closed at 11.55 am