

**HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE
30 OCTOBER 2023**

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR M BROOKES (CHAIRMAN)

Councillors A M Hall (Vice-Chairman), T R Ashton, K J Clarke, R A Gibson, A N Stokes, E W Strengiel and Mrs C L E Vernon

Councillors: R D Butroid and P Ashleigh-Morris attended the meeting as observers

Councillors: R G Davies and C L 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), Richard Fenwick (Head of Highways Asset and Local Management Services), Mick Phoenix (Traffic Manager), Ashley Behan (Street Works and Permitting Manager), John Monk (Head of Highways Design), 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)

Others in attendance:-

Sean McCarthy (Head of Network Operations and Leakage, Anglian Water) and Khyati Pugh (Street Works Manager, Anglian Water)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/REPLACEMENT MEMBERS

An apology for absence was received from Councillor T Dyer.

2 DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

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

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING OF THE HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 11 SEPTEMBER 2023

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 11 September 2023 be agreed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

4 ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE CHAIRMAN, EXECUTIVE COUNCILLORS AND LEAD OFFICERS

The Chairman reminded Members that there was a planned visit to the new Operational Control Hub in Lancaster House following the end of this meeting.

5 CROSS KEYS BRIDGE - IMPROVING RESILIENCE

Consideration was given to a report from John Monk, Head of Highways Design, regarding improving resilience at Cross Keys Bridge, which was due to be considered by the Leader of the Council between 6 and 12 December 2023. It was outlined that Cross Keys Bridge was a grade 2 listed 1897 bridge that carried the A17 across the River Nene, towards King's Lynn. Regarding the works, it was clarified that £48,000 had been committed for the replacement of the bridge's hydraulic system, but further investment was suggested for the electrification of the bridges mechanisms in order to futureproof the asset and bring down maintenance costs.

Members were invited to visit the site at a date which was to be confirmed.

The Committee commented on the detail of the report and expressed their support towards future proofing the bridge which was a key piece of infrastructure for the county.

The following points were highlighted:

- Members requested assurance that transitioning to full electric operation will indeed be more reliable and resilient, considering the potential issues with electric motors, and inquired about the presence of a manual override and fail-safe mechanisms within the current electrically operated hydraulic system. Officers explained that the transition to full electrification eliminated reliance on aging Victorian components that currently bore loads and moved within the hydraulic system, preventing incidents such as coupling breakage, which would not be an issue under the new electric system.
- Officers clarified that the electrification process will result in minimal, primarily nighttime closures on the A17, which aligned with the report's emphasis on its importance. This approach was considered less disruptive and more manageable compared to the installation of a parallel hydraulic system alongside the existing one.
- Members emphasised the importance of savings resulting from the transition to an electric motor, and officers clarified that the anticipated savings would amount to approximately £40,000 annually in maintenance costs. However, the most significant savings would be in terms of potential reputational and disruption savings. This included mitigating the substantial impacts on the agri-food sector and neighbouring areas if a major issue with the bridge under the hydraulic system were to close the A17, as well as avoiding disruptions to the port of Wisbech due to an inoperable bridge over the river Nene, which would negatively affect the economy.

RESOLVED

1. That that the Committee support the report and agree the recommendations to the Leader of the Council.
2. That comments raised by the Committee be shared with the Leader of the Council for his consideration ahead of the decision being made.
3. That a visit of Cross Keys Bridge be planned for Summer 2024 for the Committee.

6 HIGHWAY WORKS, PROFESSIONAL SERVICES AND TRAFFIC SIGNALS CONTRACT EXTENSION

Consideration was given to a report from Jonathan Evans, Head of Highways, Client, and Contract Management, regarding the Highway Works, Professional Services and Traffic Signals contract extension, which was due to be considered by the Executive on 7 November 2023. The following matters were highlighted:

- Current contracts comprised:
 - Highway Works Term Maintenance Contract – Provider: Balfour Beatty.
 - Professional Services Contract – Provider: WSP.
 - Traffic Signals Term Maintenance Contract – Provider: Colas.
- The contracts were awarded on an initial six-year term with the potential to extend for a maximum of a further six years. The extensions could be awarded individually or in blocks.
- A specific “Contract Refresh” clause was included in the contract scope at the time of tender, to enable a full review of the service and performance of the contracts. This clearly set out the process and extent of the review before any extensions could be considered.
- The process for considering extensions began in Spring 2022, with a full review of the service areas and the performance of the contracts. An action plan was created identifying tasks for all partners focussed on the key areas for improvement within each contract. At that time, it was agreed that no extensions would be offered, and a further review would be carried out in 2023 to test improvement against the action plan. Contract reviews then took place during Spring 2023 using the agreed action plans.
- It was determined that the Highways Works Term Contract was not currently viable, at a cost of 8% to 10%, which meant that the contract was loss making. Benchmarking went on to prove the unsustainability of the current contact in comparison to similar contracts elsewhere.
- The market was currently unfavourable, and it was decided that the best offer could be secured by negotiation with the current contractor.
- With the agreement of all parties, a deed of variation was created to adjust the current contract. Key aspects of the variation included targeted performance measurement s and the removal of constraints on service deliver.

- New aspects included within the deed of variation included:
 - Improved safety inspections and ad hoc inspections.
 - Derestrict barriers to small pothole fixes.
 - Recycling of road plainings.
 - A 45-hour working week delivered by Balfour Beatty.
 - Improved recording of contractor identified faults.
 - Price list adjustments.
 - Improvements to the scope of the service.

The Committee commented on the detail of the report and Members expressed their support for the report, appreciating that the significant investment was focused on performance improvement rather than cutbacks highlighting the positive anticipated impact on the region.

The following points were highlighted:

- Members raised concerns about the lack of apprenticeships for local residents and youths in high-volume contracts, suggesting that a contract of this magnitude should provide a more significant number of apprenticeship opportunities. Officers responded by acknowledging the historical challenge but noted recent improvements in apprenticeships, particularly in the Balfour Beatty contract where there were nine apprentices. They also mentioned the introduction of care leavers and the implementation of social value volunteering schemes, highlighting the positive impact these initiatives have had on the community. However, Officers acknowledged the potential for further improvement and committed to reinforcing these efforts during the next phase of the works.
- Members expressed disappointment about the need for contract penalties due to performance issues, while noting that the reason for elements of this was due to retention and recruitment of locally based staff. The importance of training and mentoring junior staff due to the challenges of recruitment and retention in the sector was emphasised. Additionally, concerns were indicated on the current contractor's difficulties in maintaining the necessary procedures and resilience and requested assurances that the authority would ensure stability in future.
- Clarity was sought around the percentage of the total contract represented by the budget pressure of £1,785,987 and how much extra it would cost when renewing the contract for another six years. Furthermore, there was a request for an explanation of how the improvements to service delivery mentioned in paragraph 3.17 would offset this budget pressure. Officers explained that the budget pressure of £1,785,987 was approximately a 3% increase in prices for the Balfour Beatty works contract. The proposal involved adjusting specific price list items to align with market rates and offsetting the price list rise with several quality improvements to maintain the economic balance of the contract. This £1,785,987 adjustment accounted for the offsets and reflected the commitment to delivering a value for money service to the residents of Lincolnshire in a sustainable way.

- Further clarity was sought regarding the potential costs associated with not renewing the traffic signals term contract and opting for a new contract, including the financial implications of both scenarios. Officers offered assurances that the procurement exercise for the traffic signals term contract was managed in-house, utilising the expertise of the LCC central procurement team and staff from the Highways department. They estimated an allocation of £20,000 to £30,000 for the process, primarily covering staffing time. They acknowledged the commercial and financial risks associated with procurement but emphasised that the recommendation was made to address concerns about resilience in the traffic signals business.

RESOLVED

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

7 ANGLIAN WATER PERFORMANCE - SIX-MONTH REVIEW

Consideration was given to a report from Mick Phoenix, Traffic Manager, and Ashley Behan, Street Works and Permitting Manager, which provided an update on Anglian Water's performance when undertaking work on or next to the highway. The following matters were highlighted:

- Over the past 6-month period improvements in Anglian Water's performance had been noted and welcomed.
- 56 unnecessary road closures had been prevented and there had been a 14% increase in the amount of road closures being completed within 3 days.
- There had been a 74% decrease in instances of permitted works overstay, which meant a reduction in the amount of works taking longer than had been planned.
- Anglian Water had invested £350,000 in a road closure reduction project to investigate alternatives to road closures.
- Anglian Water had invested in traffic management training for its works teams.

Representatives from Anglian Water presented their achievements to the Committee but acknowledged that further work was needed to establish more joined up systems of work. It was clarified that £750,000 had been committed to establishing a new street works system to help improve this issue.

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

- It was recognised that better management of signs and cones was needed following the completion of maintenance works. Anglian Water were focused on improving this aspect of works and had received fines for noncompliance.
- The Committee felt that too many fines were still being issued in relation to non-permitted road closures. It was clarified that these closures were only actioned as out

of hours emergencies and that work was underway to improve the reporting for properly permitted closures.

- The Committee recognised the improvements made by Anglian Water and thanked the team for their efforts.
- The Committee felt that greater effort could be made to mitigate the impacts of road diversions while works were conducted. They also noted that diversions had a far greater impact in rural locations where the road network was more dispersed.

RESOLVED

1. That the report be received, and the Committee's satisfaction be recorded on the progress reported to date.
2. That comments and suggestions made in relation to the report be taken under consideration by our Anglian Water Partners, the relevant LCC Officers and the Executive Portfolio Holder.

8 POTENTIAL TOPICS FOR SCRUTINY REVIEW BY SCRUTINY PANEL A

Consideration was given to a report from Kiara Chatziioannou, Scrutiny Officer, which enabled the Committee to consider whether to make any suggestions for an in-depth scrutiny review. The following matters were highlighted:

- The criteria to be met for any topic to be put forward to Scrutiny panel A was outlined.
- Members were advised that when considering a potential topic for review, the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board would reflect on the level of priority of topics and needed to ensure that work was not being duplicated.
- Members were also advised that on this occasion a topic for consideration by Scrutiny panel A had not been proposed. This was on the basis that in 2022/23 two Scrutiny Reviews were carried out in parallel within the remit of Place which created pressures on resource allocation. Furthermore, the topic of Traffic Management Policy Review was already scheduled to be undertaken by Scrutiny Panel B, which was to be overseen by this Committee and aligned with the Place directorate's remit.

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

- Work was underway in relation to Scrutiny Panel B's review of traffic management policy. Work was being pursued despite the Government's overdue white paper not being published, as its publication could not be surely relied upon.
- The scrutiny review prioritisation tool was used to quantify overlapping themes and priorities of any suggested reviews for programming.
- The matter of parking outside of schools was to factor in Scrutiny Panel B's review of traffic management policy.

RESOLVED

That the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board be advised that the Highways and Transport Scrutiny Committee does not wish to put forward any suggestions for a scrutiny review by Scrutiny Panel A, on the basis of the statement from the Executive Director, as set out in section 6 of the report.

9 TRANSPORT CONNECT LIMITED (TCL) - TECKAL COMPANY ANNUAL UPDATE

Consideration was given to a report from Verity Druce, Head of Transport Services, and Helen Reek, Support Services Manager – Transport Services, which provided an update on the Council's wholly owned company, Transport Connect Ltd (TCL). The following matters were highlighted:

- Matters concerning the company's governance, finances, performance, and business planning were outlined.
- Changes affecting TCL included:
 - There had been an increase in the frequency and number of operator meetings.
- All contracts had been reviewed by both parties to ensure the volume of activity was sustainable – this had led to a small number of SEND education travel provision contracts being terminated.
- Operator costs had risen, largely due to increased wages, in line with all transport operators.
- Responsibility for winter maintenance and laboratory vehicle maintenance had been taken on by TCL.

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

- The Council's gritter vehicle maintenance requirements had been undertaken by TCL through a contractual arrangement, which offered the Council value for money.
- The gritter vehicle maintenance supplier market was currently sparse and costly.
- Currently, there were 32 contracts provided by TCL for education needs.

RESOLVED

1. That the report be received and the Committee's satisfaction be recorded on the performance reported and the TCL Business Strategy for 2023/24.
2. That our comments and suggestions made in relation to the report be taken under consideration by Officers and the Executive Portfolio Holder.

10 TRANSPORT SERVICES MANAGEMENT INFORMATION DASHBOARD

Consideration was given to a report from Verity Druce, Head of Transport Services, which provided the Committee with an update on progress with a new Management Information Dashboard for Transport Services. The following matters were highlighted:

- Work was underway to establish a management information dashboard that presented priority management information relating to educational travel. Key areas of focus over the medium to longer term were as follows:
 - Passenger numbers and trends, including projections.
 - Application numbers and trends.
 - Contract prices, volumes, trends with reasoning.
 - Expenditure forecasting more longer term.
 - Projecting future passenger trends more longer term.
 - Identifying and trending additional cost elements – e.g. passenger assistants, passengers requiring lone travel provision.
 - Identifying opportunities for efficiencies.
- The data had proved more complex to extract and present on a dashboard than anticipated. The work was being undertaken by dedicated resource in the Council's Corporate Performance Team, which had extensive experience.
- The first phase of priority data has been successfully established; however, more data cleansing and validation was needed. As such, the data presented at the meeting remained estimated.
- The next priority was to focus on data relating to costs and the processes required for forecasting expenditure.
- A new role had been recruited to in Transport Services, with a focus on systems and data, which helped the service to develop its capabilities in this area.
- All management information requirements were to be reviewed and re-prioritised.

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

- There were known issues concerning school transport provision in the North Hykeham area. Work was underway to resolve these issues.
- The key priorities to be completed by the end of December 2023 were to cleanse and validate data concerning passenger numbers and to extract and present data concerning the cost of travel provision.

RESOLVED

That the report be received, and comments and suggestions made in relation to the updates be taken under consideration by the relevant Officers and the Executive Portfolio Holder.

11 HIGHWAYS – GULLY CLEANSING, DRAINAGE REPAIR SCHEMES AND SURFACE WATER FLOODING

Consideration was given to a report from Richard Fenwick, County Highways Manager, and Shaun Butcher, County Programme Manager, regarding reactive, cyclic, and planned aspects of highways drainage maintenance including low level flooding response. The following matters were highlighted:

- The current cycle of maintenance works had cleansed 71,180 gullies.

- Recent flooding events had interrupted cyclic cleansing – with 805 assets having been affected.
- 180 jobs had been generated by the service since April 2023.
- Vehicles parked over gullies and drains had continued to obstruct works from being fully completed and work was underway to explore actions that could be taken to resolve the issue.
- A live demonstration regarding the prioritisation toolkit was to be given to the Committee if Members felt that it was of benefit.

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

- The Committee supported further action taken against those responsible for vehicle that obstructed scheduled gully and drain cleansing including fixed penalty notices and towing.
- It was clarified that fixed penalty notices could be issued if the Council placed no waiting orders on the areas concerned. However, the Council was currently reliant upon the police to enforce this.
- It was recognised that some gully cleansing works were being recorded as completed despite only being partially completed. Work was underway to improve the inspection and sign off of these works with the contractor.
- The Council sometimes suggested street sweeping to district council partners and commissioned its own street sweeping if it complemented gully cleansing activity.

RESOLVED

1. That the report be received, and the Committee's satisfaction be recorded on the activity reported covering the past six-month period and of future activity discussed.
2. That comments and suggestions made in relation to the updates be taken under consideration by the relevant Officers and the Executive Portfolio Holder.

12 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 noted that the Stamford Transport Strategy report was to be moved from the meeting in January 2024 to the meeting in March 2024.

RESOLVED

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

The meeting closed at 12.15 pm