

Minutes of the meeting of the ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT SELECT COMMITTEE held on MONDAY 19 JANUARY 2015 at 7.00 pm

**Present:** Councillor P Geary (Chair)  
Councillors Bint, Cannon, Green, McKenzie, McPake (Vice-Chair),  
Petchey and Wilson

**Officers:** S Heap (Committee Services and Scrutiny Manager)

**Also Present:** Councillors Brackenbury, Hosking, Long and McDonald

**Public:** 2

**ET15 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR**

RESOLVED –

That Councillor Petchey be appointed as a Vice-Chair of the Committee for the remainder of the Council year 2014/15.

**ET16 MINUTES**

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Select Committee held on 21 October 2014 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

**ET17 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST**

Councillor Bint advised the meeting that, in relation to Item 6 (Highways – Prioritisation of Works), he had been the responsible Cabinet member when the Term Service Contract for Highways, Street Lighting and Network Infrastructure was awarded.

**ET18 HIGHWAYS – PRIORITISATION OF WORKS**

**Witnesses:**

Councillor Legg (Cabinet member for Public Realm), M Hainge (Service Director [Public Real Services]), R Kingsley (Head of Highways), A Rulton (Capital finance Manager) and M Lugg (Highways Maintenance Efficiency Programme)

The Committee received a presentation from the Council's Service Director (Public Realm Services) and the Head of Highways in relation to how highway works were prioritised and how this compared with other councils in the UK.

The Committee heard that the Council had approved prudential borrowing of £50m for investment in the highway infrastructure, which had coincided with the new Highways Contract, as well as changes to Department of Transport funding mechanisms and new guidance on the prioritisation of highway works, which the Council would be required to follow from 2016.

It was explained to the Committee that highways maintenance was carried out on either a reactive or planned basis. Reactive maintenance was generally carried out at short notice to address safety issues, with planned maintenance being part of the ongoing programme of works to renew highway assets, either as they reached the end of their serviceable life, or to extend their life. All works were carried out in accordance with the Code of Practice for Highway Defects, or the Council's Asset Management Plan. Reactive maintenance tended to be funded from the Council's Revenue Budget, with planned works funded from Department of Transport grants and the Council's Capital Programme.

With regard to reactive maintenance it was explained that defects were generally identified either as a result of public notification, or the ongoing highway inspection programme.

The Committee was advised of the various factors taken into account when establishing the planned maintenance programme, which included:

- (a) longevity;
- (b) condition;
- (c) records / data;
- (d) book value; and
- (e) whole-life costs

and how these factors fed into the prioritisation of works in order to achieve the best value from the funds available for highway maintenance.

It was also explained that the Council's performance in managing its highway network was monitored by the Department of Transport which allowed a direct comparison between local authorities and the sharing of best practice.

In answer to questions to the witnesses, the Committee noted that:

- (a) the Council needed to get the best use out of its limited resources, so an effective planned maintenance programme would significantly reduce the levels of revenue expenditure required to carry out reactive maintenance;
- (b) the Council needed to manage public perception so that the public and Ward councillors were aware why the Council was undertaking the work it was and when the various schemes would be carried out;
- (c) the relevant policies which explained the prioritisation of works were available on the Council's web-site;
- (d) to enable better planning of maintenance the Government was now making a 6 year financial settlement so that local authorities were aware of the core resources that would be

available over the period. It was also considered important that the Council had strategies in place to ensure that it maximised the resources available from Government;

- (e) the Department of Transport Challenge Fund, which was in addition to the core funding provided by the Department, was for large one off maintenance and renewal projects which the Council would need to bid for. The Council was using expert consultants to assist in its bids for Challenge Fund monies;
- (f) the £50m of additional borrowing to fund highway maintenance would not be sufficient to bring the network up to standard, the cost being more in the region of £150m, but it would contribute significantly to reducing further deterioration;
- (g) a new Highways Asset Management Plan was currently being developed, which would most likely be submitted for adoption by the Cabinet portfolio holder, rather than the Cabinet, once consultation had been completed. The Plan once adopted would be communicated to the public and town and parish councils;
- (h) a new bridge maintenance programme, based on new data gathered from recent inspections of all bridges, would shortly be brought forward;
- (i) the public reporting of highway defects would soon be easier as a mobile 'phone app' was due to be launched in April;
- (j) safety issues arising from deterioration of the block paving road surface in Midsummer Boulevard in Central Milton Keynes had been addressed, but it was recognised that there was a need to look at the appropriateness of the surface as part of the planned maintenance programme;
- (k) generally emergency safety works were carried out with materials available at the time, for example block paving might be replaced with tarmac until a fix using appropriate materials could be carried out; and
- (l) funds were being allocated to address problems on side roads and footways, but as prioritisation tended to follow levels of usage, major routes were therefore always likely to be given a higher priority.

The Committee also heard from Councillor Legg the responsible Cabinet member, who recognised the importance of keeping the public and Ward councillors informed.

The Committee welcomed the work undertaken as a result of the additional borrowing and the new Highways Contract.

The Committee recognised the importance of the Council working with Anglian Water to ensure that drainage assets were well maintained so that poor drainage did not impact on the highway.

It was suggested that the justification for the prioritisation of works should be clear, simple and understandable.

RESOLVED –

1. That the responsible Cabinet member be requested to work with the Service Director (Public Realm) to develop a holistic communications / consultation approach around future plans for the management of the Council's Highways Assets which actively engages all stakeholders, including parish and town councils, in a variety of ways and is at heart of the Council's work on highway maintenance.
2. That the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee be requested to consider scrutinising the communications approach adopted around the management of the Council's Highways Assets as part of its programme for 2015/16.
3. That members of the Committee be advised of the long term planning processes that are in place to maintain the Council's Highways Assets
4. That the Cabinet be requested to ensure that adequate resources are available to enable the Council to apply for all appropriate Government Grants so maximising the resources available to support the Council's Highways Assets.
5. That the distinction between revenue and capital highways maintenance works be provided to members of the Committee.

ET19

#### **REFERRALS FROM THE BUDGET REVIEW GROUP - COUNCIL BUDGET 2015/16**

##### **Witnesses:**

Councillors Clifton (Cabinet Member for Economic Growth and Inward Investment), A Rose (Service Director [Planning and Transport]), B Mathews (Head of Transportation Services) and A Coleman (Passenger Transport Manager)

The Committee considered a referral from the Budget Review Group meeting held on 7 January 2015 on proposals in the Council's draft budget relating to bus subsidies and concessionary fares.

It was noted that the draft budget included a reduction in bus subsidies of £907k and savings of £785k from the Concessionary Fares Budget. However, information on the specific routes affected had not been available for the Budget Review Group

The Committee received:

- (a) an update on negotiations with bus companies;
- (b) details of the background as to why reductions to bus subsidies and concessionary fares were being considered, which included a significant increase in the take-up of junior

concessionary fares and the financial challenges facing the service area;

- (b) details of which bus route subsidies might be cut, including the reasoning as to why specific routes had been identified;
- (c) an update on consultations with users on the potential reductions; and
- (e) details of the current and planned allocation of the income and expenditure on the Parking Account.

The Committee heard from Councillor Clifton who referred to the budget challenges facing the Council and the need to find savings, which meant that it had been necessary to prioritise spending. With regard to bus subsidies, the subsidies were aimed at benefitting the majority of users, while continuing to serve the rural areas as well as possible.

Councillor Clifton explained that while a number of routes had been identified for a reduction in subsidy, negotiations were on going with operators, therefore the routes could change.

Councillor Clifton informed the Committee that the changes to the Older Persons' concessions only related to the period 9:00 am to 9:30 am, during which time they would still be able to travel for half fare. Changes to junior concessions would also mean that journeys would be charged at half fare

In response to questions Councillor Clifton indicated that:

- (a) Responses from town and parish councils had been received, despite it being said that they had not been consulted, and these had helped shape the proposals;
- (b) there was not an automatic link between the use of parking income to fund the construction of temporary car parks and the use of parking income to support bus subsidies, also the car parks would be income generating after three years;
- (c) it was the intention that the Council's Transport Service should become self financing;
- (d) he was confident that the Council was acting lawfully with regard to increases in parking fees and its use of parking income;
- (e) he would consult further with town and parish as best he could in the time available;
- (f) as Milton Keynes attracted more businesses the demand for car parking was increasing. However, it was not an option to keep increasing car parking provision so it would be necessary to consider ways to achieve a model shift and encourage greater use of public transport which was currently very low when compared with other cities;

- (g) with regard to Bus Service 33 he would be having a conversation with Northamptonshire County Council which provided a minority share of the subsidy.

Members of the Committee made a number of comments which included:

- (a) concern at the apparent levels of consultation, particularly the involvement of town and parish councils, which could have potentially supported services they considered essential for their area;
- (b) the need for clarity on the services affected;
- (c) a suggestion that where replacement bus services were to be provided they served as many locations as possible on their way to the final destination;
- (d) the potential to increase congestion, including outside schools, if bus usage decreased as a result in service reductions and a reduction in the concessions available, which would be contrary to the Council's aim to achieve a model shift;
- (e) the potential impact on young people if their concession was to be reduced; and
- (f) the need to take a holistic view of public transport provision and its relationship with car usage, which included a debate on the overall strategy.

In answer to questions to the witnesses, the Committee noted that:

- (a) the Council had a strategic model which modelled the impact of changes, to the likes of bus subsidies, to show the impact the changes would have on the transport network as a whole;
- (b) in relation to the impact on usage of changes to concessions, it had found previously that it had not impacted;
- (c) it was hoped that retained services would stay as they were, but all services were subject to negotiations with the operators so could change at some time;
- (d) if the frequency of services was reduced the costs to the operators remained relatively constant as there was still the need for the same number of vehicles and drivers;
- (e) with regard to the provision of temporary car parks in Central Milton Keynes there would be a 6 month notice period and it was reaffirmed that car parks would be income generating after three years,
- (f) Service 1 to Newport Pagnell and Service 18 would be retained;

- (g) the potential impact on persons living in the rural communities, particularly those without access to a car, was recognised. It was intended that those persons who depended on the bus for shopping, medical visits and recreational activities would be able to use alternative forms of transport, such as Community Transport and taxi buses. To this end it was reported that Community Transport services were being reviewed and negotiations were ongoing with 'on demand' transport operators and it was hoped to run a pilot later in the year;
- (h) officers had looked at the reliance on car ownership in specific areas when identifying bus routes where subsidies could be reduced, along with alternative routes which could be accessed from those areas and patterns of usage;
- (i) investigations into the establishment of public transport hubs / interchanges was included in the Local Transport Plan, together with 'through ticketing'; and
- (j) the proposals around the changes to subsidised bus routes were based on the new timetables to be introduced in April.

The Committee received input from three members of the public, which included a submission on behalf of the Milton Keynes Bus Users Group. The Committee also received a written submission from Little Brickhill Parish Council and noted the concerns of Wavendon parish council at the impact the reductions in subsidies would have.

RESOLVED –

- 1, That the Cabinet be advised of the Committee's disappointment at the potential impact the reduction in bus subsidy and increases in concessionary fares, if they are necessary, would have on the local economy, education parking, travel patterns and modal shift.
2. That the Cabinet be recommended to receive legal advice on:
  - (a) the implications of the Barnet Judgement regarding increases to parking fees to raise surplus revenue for use on other transport purposes; and
  - (b) whether it is lawful to allocate expenditure from the Parking Surplus Account 2015/16 before the year starts and any sequential spending priorities set out in Section 55 of the Road Traffic 1984 Act.
3. That the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee be requested to consider establishing a task and finish group to consider:

- (a) The impact arising from any reductions in bus subsidies or increases in concessionary fares relating to:
    - (i) changes in travel behaviour;
    - (ii) parking, including around schools and local centres / shops;
    - (iii) travel patterns;
    - (iv) modal shift;
    - (v) the local economy, particularly travel to work, to education, by grandparents who act as unofficial childminders to allow other members of the family to work;
    - (vi) other Council services;
    - (vii) the effect elasticity of demand on the budget (whereby a greater saving being achieved from the concessionary fare savings could be ploughed back); and
    - (viii) the night time economy.
  - (b) measures to potentially mitigate any negative impacts; and
  - (c) whether additional spend on promotion would increase ridership.
4. That the initiative to make greater use of small vehicles service be welcomed.
  5. That the Cabinet be recommended to consider the possibility of either reducing the frequency of some services and / or using fewer vehicles in order to create a saving which could be used to support other bus services.
  6. That the Cabinet be recommended to consider alternative ways of achieving the level of savings required from the transport budget by identifying alternative reductions from within that budget.
  7. That the Cabinet be recommended to review of the proposed spend on temporary car parks in Central Milton Keynes and the long term implications of their removal.
  8. That the Cabinet be recommended to consider whether any reduced demand for concessionary fares may result in less take up, so freeing up additional resources which could be used to lessen the reduction in bus subsidies.
  9. That the Cabinet be advised of the Committee's concerns at the apparent lack of consultation with town and parish councils and other stakeholders which it finds unacceptable.



**ET20**

**HIGHWAYS CONTRACT SUB-GROUP**

The Committee considered appointing a replacement for Councillor E Gifford on the Highways Contract Sub-Group, following her appointment to the Cabinet.

RESOLVED:-

That Councillor Petchey be appointed to the Highways Contract Sub-Group.

**ET21**

**RESPONSES FROM CABINET – 10 NOVEMBER 2014**

It was noted that at its last meeting on 21 October 2014, the Committee had made a number of recommendations to Cabinet. The recommendations, together with the responses provided by the responsible Cabinet member, as detailed below, were noted:

(a) Flood and Water Risk Management

“That the Cabinet be requested to ensure that there was no reduction in budgets related to flood and water risk management.”

Response from Councillor Legg, the responsible Cabinet Member

Councillor Legg indicated that the Cabinet took its responsibilities under the under the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 seriously and the findings of the Select Committee would be noted and taken into account as part of the Budget 2015/16 setting process.

(b) Review of Personal Injury Collisions Data

“That the Cabinet be requested to ensure that adequate resources, including staff resources, are available to support the Review and the findings of the review.”

Response from Councillor Legg, the responsible Cabinet Member

Councillor Legg, indicated that the Cabinet took the issue of road safety very seriously and the Cabinet was due to consider a report on the Comprehensive Review of Accident Trends in Milton Keynes at its meeting in January 2015.

Councillor Legg also indicated that the request from the Select Committee would be taken into account as part of the Budget 2015/16 setting process.

THE CHAIR CLOSED THE MEETING AT 10.43 PM