

Infrastructure and Development Select Committee

Minutes of the Meeting Held on Wednesday 29 January 2020

10.03am, Edwards Room, County Hall, Norwich

Present:

Cllr Barry Stone – Chairman

Cllr Graham Middleton (Vice-Chairman)

Cllr Jess Barnard

Cllr Stuart Clancy

Cllr Brian Iles

Cllr Mark Kiddle-Morris

Cllr Beverley Spratt

Cllr Vic Thompson

Cllr Colleen Walker

Cllr Brian Watkins

Substitute Members Present:

Cllr Eric Seward for Cllr Tim East

Also Present:

Cllr Alexandra Kemp

Officers Present:

Cllr Richard Blunt

David Cumming

Jan Holden

Vince Muspratt

Sarah Rhoden

Ceri Sumner

Matt Tracey

King's Lynn and West Norfolk District Council

Strategic Transport Team Manager, Community and Environmental Services

Head of Libraries and Information

Director of Growth and Development

Assistant Director, Performance and Governance

Director, Community, Information and Learning

Growth & Infrastructure Group Manager

1. Apologies and substitutions

1.1 Apologies were received from Cllr Claire Bowes, Cllr Tim East (Cllr Eric Seward substituting) and Tom McCabe (Sarah Rhoden substituting)

1.2 Also absent was Cllr Tony White

2. To agree the minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 2019

2.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 2019 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

2.2 Matters arising from the minutes:

- Cllr Spratt queried the discussion at paragraph 7.2.17 about potholes; he was disappointed that there was not a paper at the meeting about how potholes would be addressed. The Chairman reported that the discussion had been around amending the strategy to look at moving away from a priority system; the Officer had taken this suggestion away to look at. As requested by Member and shown on the Forward Plan, the March 2020 meeting would include a report on potholes

and the pragmatic approach to their repair.

3. Declarations of Interest

- 3.1 No interests were declared

4. Items of Urgent Business

- 4.1 There were no items of urgent business.

5. Public Question Time

- 5.1 One public question was received from Mr Gray and the answer circulated; see appendix A

6. Local Member Issues / Questions

- 6.1 Two Local Member questions and one supplementary question were received and the answers circulated; see Appendix A.

- 6.2 Cllr Kemp asked a supplementary question:

- The Borough Council's Regeneration Panel had met and agreed that the King's Lynn Transport plan was not a strategy; they noted that the plan did not include schemes to address the 2000 new jobs which would be created on the Nar Ouse Enterprise Zone, large numbers of people travelling into the town for work, shops and services, and the need for more buses to meet the need of retired people in villages outside of the town.
- The Chairman replied that this would be discussed at item 9, "King's Lynn Transport Strategy and Implementation Plan"; the strategy and Better High Streets Funding, which was being sought, would involve developing schemes to address such issues. There would be a chance for Cllr Kemp to contribute during associated consultations

- 6.3 Cllr Spratt asked for information on the Environmental Policy Member Working Group. This Member oversight group had been agreed by Cabinet to oversee the promises set out in the new environmental policy and sat with the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste, Cllr Andy Grant; Assistant Director, Performance and Governance, Community and Environmental Services, agreed to share information with the Committee. It was suggested that the membership should be cross-county as well as cross-party.

7. Update from Local Transport Plan Member Task and Finish Group

- 7.1.1 The Select Committee received the report outlining the Consultation on the Local Transport Plan, shaped by the Task and Finish Group. Select Committee was asked to provide comments or views on the key issues covered to be considered.

- 7.1.2 The Vice-Chairman and the Strategic Transport Team Manager introduced the report:
- Once feedback was received from the consultation, the Task and Finish Group would look at actions to bring back to the Committee
 - The Strategic Transport Team Manager encouraged members to share the

consultation with parish and town councils and stakeholders, confirmed that officers are in the process of writing to all Norfolk Councils to make them aware of the consultation.

- The plan would be informed by carbon targets and appraisals

7.2 The following points were discussed and noted:

- Members felt the plan should be consistent with the Council's new recommendations on climate change, however, there was no mention of the environmental policy or carbon reduction in the consultation, so suggested that ideas to improve air quality in urban areas and near schools should be included
- Parish and town councils had been written and should be aware of the consultation
- Officers were asked whether the new travel plan would create an open and fair market for small bus operators; the working group had considered this issue and heard evidence and challenges from big and smaller bus operators. Officers were looking into what measures could be taken moving forward
- It was suggested that some of the language in the consultation could be more accessible, and that "growth in urban areas and villages" under "sustainable transport" could be misunderstood as relating to growth in sustainability
- The consultation would be used to draft the strategy which would include a vision for tackling issues including air quality and carbon reduction; Officers acknowledged that carbon neutrality by 2030 would be a challenge but technical work into how this could be achieved was ongoing, including work with the University of East Anglia (UEA) on how this could be achieved
- Cllr Clancy was concerned that the questionnaire did not mention Norfolk's economy, the rural or urban economy; he felt that, as infrastructure was necessary to support the economy, this was an important area for consideration
- The Task and Finish group had also been asked to look at rural connectivity and the withdrawal of subsidies for rural community transport
- Ongoing work to encourage parents to move towards sustainable methods of transport at school pick up and drop off was discussed, and its role in addressing carbon reduction and child safety; broad approaches to address this would be looked at alongside air quality and climate change in the plan by looking at behaviour change measures.

7.3 The Select Committee **COMMENTED** on the Local Transport Plan to be considered as part of the public consultation process, the outcomes of which will be used to help determine the future strategy

8. Holding Highways England to Account

8.1.1 The Select Committee received the report setting out the full draft response to the consultation by the Office of Rail and Road on Holding Highways England to Account, in order that the Select Committee put forward its views to help shape the final draft for Cabinet to consider at its meeting on 3 February 2020.

8.1.2 The Strategic Transport Team Manager introduced the report. Due to the concerns raised about the time taken for projects to come forward by Highways England it was highlighted as important to respond to the consultation to ensure that the Council's comments were taken into account

8.2.1 The following points were discussed and noted:

- The Chairman raised concerns about the £300m committed for RIS1 in 2014

which had not been spent. Officers had sought assurance that expenditure in RIS2 would be used from money set aside for it, but further assurance would need to be sought for what would happen to the RIS1 funding; Members queried what had happened to this money.

- Members felt that further pressure was needed on Highways England from the Council and MPs to ensure schemes were completed
- A Member expressed concern over whether the consultation would have an impact on the delivery of projects by Highways England
- A key issue was highlighted as a lack of capacity within Highways England to deliver schemes in the East of England
- Cllr Clancy felt the Executive and Officers had tried to hold Highways England to account but was concerned about the lack of accountability and management within the organisation. Cllr Clancy **proposed** that the Committee make a resolution to Cabinet which was seconded by the Chairman:

8.2.2 *“The Select Committee recognises that Members and officers have made a significant effort to work with Highways England to help them to understand Norfolk’s issues and priorities and support them to bring much needed improvements to the County. It is unfortunate that these efforts have not resulted in the appropriate improvements being secured for Norfolk.*

The Select Committee strongly recommends to Cabinet that the County Council’s response to the consultation clearly makes the following points:-

- *That we do not consider Highways England to be fit for purpose*
- *We are extremely concerned that Highways England appear to be unable to bring projects to delivery in a timely fashion, meaning much needed funding promised for local communities remains unspent*
- *We are very concerned about our ability to effectively engage with Highways England about local issues as there is little local knowledge or consistency in contact arrangements from Highways England*
- *We do not believe that such significant levels of public funding should be managed by an unelected and undemocratic organisation*

The Select Committee also recommends to Cabinet that the Leader and Cabinet Member raise concerns about Highways England being not fit for purpose with Norfolk MPs and work together to strongly lobby Government for the abolition of Highways England and returning the delivery function of Highways schemes on the national road network to DfT to improve accountability and performance of this crucial service.”

8.2.3

- Lack of consistent feedback from Highways England was raised as a concern
- A Member felt that greater collaboration in holding Highways England to account between Conservative Members or other Counties experiencing the same issues could help bring action; the Chairman discussed the collaborative discussions with Ministers over the last years to try and bring schemes to completion
- A report and the resolutions by Select Committee would also be taken to Cabinet including information on all lobbying which had taken place to date by the Executive, which the Officer described as extensive; the Director of Growth and Development agreed to circulate details of lobbying to the Committee. It was felt that a key issue related to the work of Highways England, namely the lack of capacity across the country to deliver investment, and other projects being prioritised.
- Some of the issues in Highways England related to reliance on consultants and a structure which required them to renew contractual arrangements too frequently; Highways England were looking at contracting consultants for longer periods of

time to address consistency issues and timescales towards delivery

- Concerns were raised about traffic flow into Great Yarmouth over the summer

8.3.1 Cllr Jess Barnard **proposed** an amendment to the proposal put forward by Cllr Clancy at paragraph 8.2.2:

1. to remove the line: "We are very concerned about our ability to effectively engage with highways England about local issues as there is little local knowledge of consistency in contract arrangements from highways England"
2. remove the final paragraph and replace with: "The select committee recommends to cabinet that the Leader, cabinet member and Norfolk MPs take immediate and collective action to address the unaccountability and inefficiency of highways England, and for government to explore the establishment of an alternative body with democratic and geographical accountability"

8.3.2 Cllr Clancy accepted the amendment; the Committee **AGREED** the proposal

8.4.1 The Select Committee:

- **REVIEWED** and **COMMENTED** on the draft response to the consultation
- **RECOGNISES** that Members and officers have made a significant effort to work with Highways England to help them to understand Norfolk's issues and priorities and support them to bring much needed improvements to the County. It is unfortunate that these efforts have not resulted in the appropriate improvements being secured for Norfolk.
- **STRONGLY RECOMMENDS** to Cabinet that the County Council's response to the consultation clearly makes the following points:-
 - That we do not consider Highways England to be fit for purpose
 - We are extremely concerned that Highways England appear to be unable to bring projects to delivery in a timely fashion, meaning much needed funding promised for local communities remains unspent
 - We do not believe that such significant levels of public funding should be managed by an unelected and undemocratic organisation
- **RECOMMENDS** to Cabinet that the Leader, cabinet member and Norfolk MPs take immediate and collective action to address the unaccountability and inefficiency of highways England, and for government to explore the establishment of an alternative body with democratic and geographical accountability

9. King's Lynn Transport Strategy and Implementation Plan

9.1.1 The Select Committee received the report setting out the draft King's Lynn Transport Strategy report which had been developed following a transport study carried out for King's Lynn by the Borough and County Councils and which included an implementation plan of transport schemes to address priorities and objectives to address issues on the transport network such as congestion and accessibility as well as making King's Lynn more attractive to economic investment and help existing businesses within the town.

9.1.2 Cllr Richard Blunt of King's Lynn and West Norfolk District Council introduced the report:

- Through the strategy and implementation plan, Councillors and Officers had looked at schemes to address increased traffic and other issues caused by economic and housing growth taking place in King's Lynn
- At the meeting of Borough and County Councils on Tuesday 28 January, the associated action plan was supported unanimously

9.2 The following points were discussed and noted:

- A Member felt that a key issue in King's Lynn was a lack of buses, lack of buses at key times such as in the evening, and regularity of service rather than their attractiveness to customers. Officers noted that bus services were primarily commercial, which impacted on the County's ability to support services. Some Members felt more pressure was needed on bus operators to provide services needed by residents
- Opportunities for bringing forward large-scale growth would become available through engagement with bus companies, developers and planning authorities to enhance bus services
- The Chairman noted that parking and one-way systems in the town also needed addressing
- Cllr Blunt reported that emissions, caused by the flow of traffic in and out of the town, was an issue and therefore improving traffic flow was a key area for focus
- It was pointed out that only 3% of traffic in King's Lynn was by bus; Cllr Blunt noted that there was a lack of adequate bus services from rural villages to the town
- Cllr Blunt confirmed that, through the strategy, key areas where traffic flow could be improved were being investigated to help reduce emissions; work to reduce emissions would also include looking at better positioning of carparking facilities and upgrading the ferry
- A Member felt that emissions and traffic flow could be mitigated by encouraging more use of public transport and therefore more pressure was needed on bus companies and more focus on public transport in the document
- The Vice-Chairman agreed that public transport needed addressing, including development of a good bus route. He also noted that the economy of the town needed protecting; there was a bid underway for the Better High Streets Fund

9.3 The Select Committee:

1. **REVIEWED** and **CONSIDERED** the draft King's Lynn transport strategy and implementation plan
2. **NOTED** that work on a Sustainability Appraisal is being carried out in conjunction with work on the Local Transport Plan

10. Norfolk Rail Prospectus

10.1.1 The Select Committee received the report setting out updates to the Norfolk Rail Prospectus, which set out the measures and improvements considered necessary across the rail network, as well as the county council's policy on aspects such as reinstatement of lines and new rail stations. The draft prospectus had been considered by the Norfolk Rail Group and consultation was now underway to engage more widely

10.1.2 The Strategic Transport Team Manager introduced the report, noting that the County had a good track record of working with the rail network to deliver new schemes.

10.2 The following points were discussed and noted:

- Concerns were raised about recent issues regarding delayed and cancelled rail services in Norfolk and the role played by Abellio Anglia and Network Rail in this
- It was suggested that Forncett Station should be reopened and requested that this ambition be included in the prospectus
- It was noted that Network Rail did not effectively engage with the Community Rail Partnership
- Changes to the Bittern Line were listed in the prospectus for post 2029; it was suggested that to meet targets to reduce car usage this should be addressed

sooner

- Some Members felt that more pressure was needed on Network Rail to improve the Norfolk rail network, and more emphasis on this in the prospectus
- A lack of consultation by Network Rail with the Community Rail Partnership regarding bringing in charges at North Walsham Station was raised as a concern
- The Chairman noted the Prime Minister's commitment to re-open rail lines closed in the Beeching era which would support more people to use public transport
- Concern was raised that the consultation was not accessible due to being very long with lots of information; it was also noted that there were no open questions for people to provide their own feedback. The Strategic Transport Team Manager reported that the audience had been targeted at stakeholders and the rail industry, but suggested Officers could seek comments in focussed groups as part of the local transport plan consultation work
- No information was included in the consultation about price increase and cost of travel, which was an issue for some people who wished to travel by rail
- It had been identified that staff should be available at larger stations, and therefore only some stations had been included in the consultation under this topic
- *The Vice-Chairman left the meeting at 11.40*
- It was noted that disabled facilities at stations were not mentioned in the prospectus
- A request was made for the line between Norwich and Liverpool Lime Street to be retained as it was effective and well used
- It was suggested that a more joined up approach was needed, for example through transport hubs
- A Member suggested that actions to move towards carbon neutrality should be in the prospectus
- Cllr Clancy raised concerns about the progress of the feasibility study at Ely; the Strategic Transport Team Manager agreed to provide him with an update on this
- The Chairman asked that "priorities for new infrastructure" came above "Reopening of lines and new stations" in key priorities on page 208 of the report

- 10.3 The Select Committee **COMMENTED** on the revised Norfolk Rail Prospectus so that the views of the Select Committee can be taken into account as part of the public consultation exercise.

11. Market Town Transport Network Improvement Strategies

- 11.1.1 The Select Committee received the report summarising the work to date of the Market Town Transport Network Improvement Strategies and showing the proposed next steps.
- 11.1.2 the Strategic Transport Team Manager introduced the report
- 10 towns had been considered and specific issues and projects related to these towns had been developed
 - Some schemes had already been funded and were underway;
 - Work was underway to look at how to take action plans forward, working with stakeholders and agencies to identify funding to take schemes forward
- 11.2 The following points were discussed and noted:
- Members thanked officers for their work on the studies
 - Officers confirmed that they were in dialogue with North Norfolk District Council regarding a funding opportunity to take forward measures identified in the North Walsham Network Improvement Strategies

- Officers confirmed that Red Lion Street in Aylsham was included in the action plan

11.3 The Select Committee **REVIEWED** and **COMMENTED** on the completed market town transport network improvement studies

12. Norfolk Library Strategy

12.1.1 The Select Committee received the report giving detail on the strategy developed by Norfolk Library and Information Service to reflect the strategic objectives of Norfolk County Council, as detailed in Together, for Norfolk.

12.1.2 Cabinet Member for Communities and Partnerships, Cllr Margaret Dewsbury, and the Head of Libraries and Information introduced the report

- Cllr Dewsbury thanked the Head of Libraries and Information and team for their work
- Examples of schemes and projects underway were discussed including the opening of three Business and Intellectual Property centres in addition to the main centre at the Millennium Library, the children's and families offer, mental health information at libraries and schemes to address social isolation such as knit and natter.
- Libraries had been moved to accessible locations for their community, for example the library in Attleborough recently moved to be part of a multi-function hub
- The Head of Libraries and Information thanked Members for attending the Norfolk Reading Challenge prize giving; 10,000 children took part in the challenge
- In 2019-20, 175,000 people in Norfolk used a library, amounting to 3 million visits. Every month, approximately 12,500 people visited libraries to attend groups or events

12.2 The following points were discussed and noted:

- Libraries were noted as important to people experiencing social isolation
- As new housing developments came forward, Officers would review libraries' locations and size to ensure they continued to best serve their local community.
- A report had been presented to Corporate Select Committee discussing the Local Service Strategy; this involved working with District Councils and communities to identify their needs, which would include work related to libraries and changes which could be made to ensure better outcomes for residents.
- A Member asked how under-represented and under-privileged groups could be helped to access libraries. The Head of Libraries and Information reported that all offers were designed to be as accessible as possible to ensure people with disabilities and other needs could access services, for example, activities for children with special educational needs at DigiFest, work with the People from Abroad team at the Millennium Library, and the "feed and read project" held at libraries in the summer to help address holiday hunger.
- The council had made a commitment to have changing places toilets in libraries where they are being extended or turned into multi-function hubs.
- A Member congratulated the service on their effective resource management; Members congratulated the work of libraries and the library service team. Members felt learning could be taken from the service by other departments, including their approach to involve users in changes and innovations
- The level of social value from investment in static libraries was noted; officers were reviewing how the most vulnerable and isolated people were reached by the service
- the size of North Walsham library and the grant available under the One Public Estate was raised; the Head of Libraries and Information was aware of these issues

and had a meeting planned with North Norfolk District Council on this topic.

- 250,000 items had been borrowed electronically; digital downloads had increased use of the library service as people were able to use the service remotely

12.3 The Select Committee reviewed and considered the proposed vision and strategy for the Library and Information Service, as set out in section 2 of this report

13 **Forward Work Plan**

13.1 The Select Committee received the report setting out the forward plan for the Committee

13.2.1 The select committee agreed the wording of the recommendation agreed under item 8; see paragraph 8.4.1

13.2.2 Cllr Vic Thomson requested an update on Norwich Highways Arrangements was added to the forward plan; this was agreed for the March 2020 meeting.

13.3 The Select Committee **AGREED** the forward plan with the addition of the above update

The meeting closed at 12.34 pm

Chairman



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MEMBER/PUBLIC QUESTIONS TO SELECT: INFRASTRUCTURE AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE: 29 January

5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

5.1 Question from Mr Richard Gray

Will the Council use its influence to help persuade Konect Bus to return Nos. 3 & 4 back to Earlham Rd.?

In September Konect Bus unilaterally rerouted Nos. 3 & 4 via Newmarket Rd. Whilst understandable during the disruptive roadworks, this now means:

a] No direct bus from Earlham Rd to either the hospital or the bus station

b] First Bus No 26 is the only remaining service and is overcrowded with students in the morning, making it impractical for those with disabilities

c] No service to the hospital at all on Sundays

d] No bus service at all on Earlham Rd between the ring road and Fiveways

Response by Chairman of I&D Committee

The Council has limited influence over commercial bus services. However, we are in discussion with Konectbus about the future provision of their services in general and we may be able to affect a positive change on this route in the near future. We will keep residents informed of any progress.

It should be noted that residents do have access to other bus services in the area, that also serve the city and hospital, although this may require a slightly longer walk to the bus stop.

6. MEMBER QUESTIONS

6.1 Question from Cllr Eric Seward

North Walsham is one of just 67 towns in England that has recently received a grant of almost £1 million to improve the environment of its town centre under the

Heritage Action Zone (HAZ) programme. The bid was made by North Norfolk District Council who have also agreed to provide further match funding of £1 million

to improve the layout of Market Place. However, more match funding will be required to carry out the recommended improvements.

Can the Committee recommend that in the Highways Capital programme for 20/21 priority is given to providing funding for improvements to Market Place

given the promised contribution under the HAZ programme?

Response by Chairman of I&D Committee

Officers met with officers from North Norfolk District Council (NNDC) on the 10 December 2019 to discuss the potential for a Heritage Action Zone scheme. There is a possible opportunity here, however we need to work together with NNDC to understand the potential scope and scale of proposed works together with costs.

On 19 December, Cllr Martin Wilby wrote to NNDC in support of their bid to confirm our in-principle support for an improvement. This letter made it clear that we are very willing to work jointly with NNDC to find a means of delivering a beneficial package of townscape improvements as set out in the North Walsham Network Improvement Strategy and that we are keen to explore any opportunity to maximise the benefits of the proposed scheme and to consider all opportunities for match-funding.

We look forward the Government's Budget on 11 March 2020 which will inform our financial position going forward.

6.2 Supplementary question from Cllr Eric Seward

The public have been short changed on the Bittern Line for much of last year and the problems with signalling and the track are wider than Greater Anglia and could seemingly be resolved given priority and a reasonably small investment. The time for action is now. So how is the Council going to use the rail prospectus to put pressure on the train operators and network rail to bring real change on the Bittern Line and give the public a much better level of service?

Response by Chairman of I&D Committee

The rail prospectus is intended to set out clearly the county council's view of what improvements are required to the rail network. Although focussed on measures that would improve the services, it sets out that it is essential that the railway provides a reliable service. This is crucial for all users. The main purpose of the prospectus however will be to show clearly our view of the major service and infrastructure improvements required.

Both Members and officers work with the rail industry and pick up issues such as the one that you have raised in the course of this ongoing dialogue. Late last year, we were advised by Network Rail of their work to resolve signalling issues that had resulted in the disruption to a number of services. They advised that this might take some time particularly on the Norwich to Sheringham line.

Network Rail and Greater Anglia have just recently advised that all speed restrictions were removed in the second week of January. Since then, train punctuality on the route has risen, averaging 97.1% performance over the

subsequent fortnight with seven 100% days and no days below 91%. Greater Anglia assure us that their aim is to maintain that level of performance. They also report that customers really like the new trains, seeing them as a major improvement on the trains they are replacing.

If improved performance on the route does not prove to hold up over time, I would be happy to invite representatives of Network Rail and Greater Anglia to meet councillors to discuss in more detail how the rail industry is working to resolve these issues.

6.3 Question from Cllr Alexandra Kemp

King's Lynn Transport Plan

After two years of taxpayer funding, Lynn Transport Plan is in tatters.

It has no Parking Strategy, no Park-and-Ride, no more buses, no secure future for West Lynn Ferry. It opens up valued Greenway, Hardings Way, to general traffic, which would cause a highway hazard, slow down buses, and affect the wellbeing of older and disabled residents.

The Transport Plan compounds the neglect in Lynn over the last decade in transportation infrastructure, since Hardings Way Bus Lane was funded to relieve congestion and pollution on London Road in 2009.

Lynn Transport Plan nowhere provides for £22.8 million needed for West Winch Bypass.

Can the Committee recommend Cabinet rejects the Transport Plan?

Response by Chairman of I&D Committee

A key outcome from the transport strategy work was the need for a comprehensive car parking strategy. This has been acknowledged and the Borough Council has engaged Aecom to carry out work to devise a car parking strategy which is currently underway. This will consider parking demand and the availability of parking spaces in the town centre. These are key considerations in determining the suitability and sustainability of Park and Ride for the town which is being examined as part of the process.

The draft strategy also considers bus services and the role that the local authorities can play in partnership with the bus operators who run the services. In short, our role is to provide a free-flowing road network, with priority measures where possible, for the buses to run on as set out in the 2017 Bus Services Act.

The draft strategy also sets out measures to support the West Lynn Ferry, which for many is seen as a form of Park and Ride as it removes traffic from the town centre and is regarded as a valuable contribution to transport choice in the town.