

Infrastructure and Development Select Committee

**Minutes of the Meeting Held on Wednesday 13 July 2022
10.00am, held at County Hall, Norwich**

Present:

Cllr James Bensly – Chair

Cllr Steffan Aquerone
Cllr Chris Dawson
Cllr Jim Moriarty
Cllr William Richmond

Cllr Chrissie Rumsby
Cllr Barry Stone
Cllr Vic Thomson
Cllr Maxine Webb
Cllr Tony White

Also Present:

Grahame Bygrave	Director of Highways, Transport and Waste, Community and Environmental Services (CES)
Michelle Carter	Head of Customer Service and Development, CES
Alex Cliff	Highway Network and Digital Innovation Manager, CES
Ross Cushing	Contact Centre Delivery Manager, CES
Nicola Ledain	Committee Officer, Democratic Services
Tom McCabe	Executive Director, CES
Karl Rands	Assistant Director, Highway Services, CES
Sarah Rhoden	Assistant Director, Performance and Governance, CES

1. Apologies and substitutions

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Cllr David Bills, Cllr Claire Bowes and Cllr Robert Savage.

2. Minutes

- 2.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 25 May 2022 were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chair.
- 2.2 It was clarified that all public questions and responses from the meeting on 25 May would be attached as an appendix on the published set of minutes.

3. Declarations of Interest

- 3.1 Cllr Maxine Webb declared an 'other' interest as her husband worked for Norse Highways; the performance of which was due to be discussed.

4. Items of Urgent Business

- 4.1 There were no items of urgent business.

5. Public Question Time

- 5.1 There were no public questions received.

6. Local Member Issues / Questions

- 6.1 There were no local Member issues or questions received.

7. Blue Badge Policy Update

- 7.1 The Committee received the annexed report which outlined the Blue Badge Policy which was due for review, having been approved by Cabinet in February 2020. The report outlined the changes that would be made to the policy reflecting internal practices and changes of national guidelines.
- 7.2 The following points were noted in response to questions by the Committee;
- 7.2.1 Officers explained that where the eligibility of a blue badge could not be determined from the information on an application, a mobility assessment was undertaken.
- 7.2.2 There was an approval rate of applications of 75%. The 25% of applications which were not approved, were a mix of those applications which were not eligible and those applications that did not conclude. These had been consistent figures over the last few years. A written response comparing these figures to other Local Authorities would be circulated.
- 7.2.3 Officers administering the scheme were mindful of making the process of applying and providing evidence as seamless as possible, bearing in mind that quite often the person applying for the scheme was not the person who would receive the badge, often a carer or relative on their behalf. The service had recently moved to using a phone-based assessment and they also had direct access to Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) information to ease the burden on applications to provide evidence.
- 7.2.4 A right of responsibility booklet was issued with the badge to confirm the correct usage of the badge, and Officers confirmed that the person who the badge belonged to must be in the vehicle when a badge is being used.
- 7.2.5 Although it seemed that four years until the next review of the policy seemed long, the policy was a live document, and it was likely that it would be shared with the Committee sooner due to changes of the national guidelines and local operational changes.
- 7.2.6 As the scheme is heavily prescribed by Central Government there was limited value in consulting with service users on the policy. However, Officers were working internally with colleagues from the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion team on an Equality Impact Assessment of access to services from the County Council.
- 7.2.7 The team administering the Norfolk Assistance Scheme have the same access to DWP information as the Blue Badge Scheme. In addition, it is possible to share information received from the Blue Badge applications with the Norfolk Assistance Scheme, as long as the relevant privacy notices are in place.
- 7.3 The Select Committee, having reviewed and commented on the proposed changes to the policy as set out in appendix 1 of the report, **NOTED** that it was intended to review the policy at least every four years, with reviews before then if there were any

changes to the national guidelines or other significant operational learning changes that may be beneficial.

8. Highway and Transport Network Performance

- 8.1 The Committee received the report which provided an annual summary of how NCC managed their highway assets and the highway network overall. It noted that the report did not include the A11 and A47 which were managed by National Highways.
- 8.2 The following points were noted in response to questions from the Committee:
 - 8.2.1 Officers acknowledged that road closure signing was challenging, and Officers explained that strict national rules concerning road closure signing had to be adhered to. A diversion on the highway network had to be placed at point of closure and had to identify a diversion using the same class of road. Signage stating that businesses were open as normal were used as much as possible. Officers were also aware that local communities would be aware of other routes which were not the recommended route and therefore the impact these journeys caused resulted in Norfolk County Council receiving several complaints.
 - 8.2.2 The performance figures in the report reflected the condition of the highway assets regardless of who they were maintained by and therefore any works carried out by other than NCC would still affect the performance figures. Officers explained that 50-60k permits for work on the highway were issued each year to companies including utility companies and housing developers. Street works inspectors would inspect any work carried out to ensure they were delivered to the correct standard and if they were not, then fixed penalty notices could be issued.
 - 8.2.3 The overall satisfaction factor score comes from the National Highways and Transportation Survey which asked people their view and gave an overall public perception. Although this figure was above the national average, the aim was to increase it.
 - 8.2.5 Referring to page 25, point 1.1.1 clarification was given that the higher percentage figure noted meant that there was more highway maintenance due to be carried out on A roads than the previous report stated. This was partly due to inflationary pressures as well as assets deteriorating. A fair assumption would be that some of these items on the maintenance backlog could deteriorate and could cost more in the long term to rectify. The Asset Management Strategy identified what work would be carried out with the available funding. There was a £13billion national shortfall in funding for highway maintenance. Indicative figures had been received for the next two financial years. This figure would remain at the current level which gave some reassurance and enabled some longer term planning.
 - 8.2.6 Members highlighted that the report detailed a backlog of maintenance to bridges and there seemed to be little bridge maintenance being carried out. Members were concerned that bridge could become dangerous if left. Officers confirmed that the bridge maintenance backlog had increased and that they were looking at proportioning a greater part of the budget for work on bridges in the next financial year. Strengthening work on bridges was complex work and as a result, cost increases for that work were higher than the average 25%. Inspections had identified more bridge maintenance needed which had increased the backlog figure in the report.

- 8.2.7 National Highways were responsible for the A11 and A47 but they did not carry out a similar report.
- 8.2.8 The Director of Highways, Transport and Waste indicated that insurance claims were not increasing because of the assets. He had regular meetings with the risk and insurance team who had confirmed this. However, a more detailed response would be circulated to the Committee.
- 8.3 The Select Committee;
1. **NOTED** the progress against the Asset Management Strategy Performance framework (Appendix C of the report and the refreshment of targets, policy and strategy (Appendix C, D and E of the report).
 2. **NOTED** the progress in the development of congestion and reliability indicators.

9. Performance of Key Highway Contracts

- 9.1 The Select Committee received the annexed report which summarised the active contracts the Council's Highways Service had procured in terms of services provided, performance and value for money. The Highway Service Contracts reviewed in the report were Tarmac, Norse Highways, WSP, Swarco (formerly Dynniq), Amey, and Eastern Highways Alliance (EHA).
- 9.2 The following points were noted in response to questions from the Committee:
- 9.2.1 The Director for Highways, Transport and Waste clarified that volunteers in individual communities wanting to undertake weeding or any maintenance themselves, should contact the relevant Highway Engineer. There were several contracts already in place with Parish Councils regarding grass cutting.
- 9.2.2 Officers confirmed that the Highway Rangers teams were still carrying out duties across the county.
- 9.2.3 Inflationary pressures for the contractors were being monitored and regular conversations were being held. Any monetary difference that had been incurred by the contractor was being paid.
- 9.2.4 Officers agreed to investigate issues surrounding placing SAM2 flashing speed signs onto street lampposts and other posts as it was highlighted that there had been an issue in one particular area. Officers explained that they should be placed on designated posts and moved around the parish at regular intervals.
- 9.2.5 Roadside nature reserves were being increased three-fold to help increase the diversity of the roadside verges. Norfolk Wildlife Trust were maintaining these.
- 9.2.6 The four-year extension to the Tarmac contract was an agreement between them and Norfolk County Council based on a savings proposal they could offer NCC. The performance on page 61 was the performance that was managed and monitored by NCC.
- 9.2.7 Members asked for an item considering walking safety and/or walking to school safely to be scheduled on the forward work programme. The Executive Director explained that there were already initiatives underway such as closing roads around

schools in the Greater Norwich area. This project had been underway for two months and could be an initiative that would be rolled elsewhere in the county. It was suggested to be reviewed by the Committee in late 2022.

- 9.2.8 Innovation was key for the Highways Authority and contractors were pressed for providing new ways of working. That pressure was maintained so that good and fair innovation was received throughout the term of the contracts.
- 9.3 Having reviewed and commented on key highway contract performance and arrangements, the Select Committee **NOTED** the report.

10. Forward Work Programme

- 10.1 The Select Committee received the report by the Executive Director of Community and Environmental Services which set out the Forward Work Programme for the Committee to enable the Committee to review and shape.
- 10.2 As previously discussed in the meeting, a report considering the pilot project of walking safely to school would be scheduled on the programme.
- 10.3 Members asked if an overview of the performance of the recycling centres could be scheduled on the forward work programme; specifically reporting about the waste tipping charges, any correlation with fly-tipping and how much revenue the charges had brought into the Council.
- 10.4 Having reviewed the report, the Select Committee **AGREED** the Forward Work Programme set out in Appendix A and **AGREED** the suggested items for the programme as discussed.

The meeting closed at 11.20am

Chair



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