

15 January 2015

8. REPORTS OF CABINET MEMBERS WITH RESPONSIBILITY

REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER WITH RESPONSIBILITY FOR HIGHWAYS

1. I am very pleased to present my report to Council as Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways.

Public Transport Budget Reduction

2. A revised bus network was implemented in Worcestershire on 1 September 2014 as a result of the reduction in budget of £1.6 million. This followed a major public consultation exercise with a record 8,500 responses. A detailed analysis of the responses led to recommendations to the Cabinet in June to continue funding public transport to the sum of £1.7 million in order to maintain access to schools, for essential economic activity and for health purposes.

3. The introduction of the new network was very successful in that relatively few complaints have been received. Most of the revised services are operating well and most people are able to continue to access the majority of the priority activities, as identified in the consultation. Inevitably, there have been some problems, mainly with certain services that are now operated commercially. This is understandable when reduced resources are trying to facilitate the movement of sometimes large numbers of people. The main complaints have been about increased fares and the loss of the Park and Ride service in Worcester. The site of the Perdiswell Park and Ride will be handed back to Worcester City Council in mid-January 2015.

4. In the consultation operators declared that they were concerned that further reductions in the support to public bus services, following the reduction in Bus Service Operators Grant, could lead to more bus service withdrawals and bus companies ceasing to trade. Castleways Coaches ceased trading in the summer and Whittles in Kidderminster closed their operations at the end of 2014. However, the Council has worked with operators, at short notice, to provide replacement bus services in the Kidderminster area. These are mainly tendered but some are provided commercially.

Road Safety

5. From 1 September 2014 a new structure for road safety education delivery in schools was implemented after a transitional period over the summer term. All road safety education is now delivered by instructors who also deliver Bikeability cycle training in schools. The team offer pedestrian training in addition to class talks for any age group. Currently there are 5 instructors delivering this programme. This term, through our new staff, we have launched a new walking bus for Astwood Bank First School which has helped reduce congestion outside the school gates. This was reported in the press. We are also looking at new projects, for example, following recent incidents, working with other teams to address safety on and around school buses.

6. So far we have received excellent feedback from schools, and booking requests from schools that have not engaged previously. Our ambition is to train more pupils across more schools and we hope to have figures to demonstrate we have achieved this next year.

Choose How You Move in Redditch

7. The Choose How You Move in Redditch project is a £3.5 million programme of travel choices marketing, information provision, interventions and infrastructure improvement, largely funded through the Government's Local Sustainable Transport Fund.

8. This successful and well-received programme, which has involved a mix of infrastructure improvements, information enhancement, marketing, events and workplace and school interventions, is now drawing to a close after three years of intensive engagement in the town. Its principal aim is to discourage single-occupancy car use, by encouraging travel choice towards more sustainable and space-efficient modes of transport. In practice, this means promoting the use of the right mode of transport for the right journey, and particularly active travel (walking and cycling) for shorter trips.

9. The Infrastructure element has involved the upgrade and improvement of over 60 bus stops and shelters across the Borough, improvement of underpasses to make them safer and feel more secure, the installation of a significant amount of secure cycle stands, improvements to access schools and workplaces, dropped kerbs, surfacing enhancements and signage improvements to assist wayfinding around the Borough and its complex transport networks.

10. In particular, the Choose How You Move programme has involved an intensive Personalised Travel Planning exercise, which has been delivered to **all** households in Redditch, to extol the benefits of travel choice, and particularly active travel modes (walking and cycling) for shorter trips.

11. The programme has included welcoming the Tour Series major cycle race to Redditch on an annual basis. The specially devised circuit through the town centre, with its steep climbs, sharp corners and exhilarating straights has consistently delighted both participants and spectators, putting Redditch and Worcestershire firmly on the map.

12. The final results of the programme will be published in Easter 2015, however, further details of the programme can be viewed at www.chooseredditch.com

Walking and Cycling Improvements

13. A significant amount of work has been delivered to encourage walking and cycling within Worcestershire. This work is funded through a variety of funding mechanisms, including Department for Transport Major Scheme funding, the Local Sustainable Transport Fund, Section 106 developer funding, Integrated Transport Block funding and of course County Councillor, Locally Devolved Funding. A summary of schemes delivered is as follows:

- 1 zebra crossing
- 30 sets of dropped crossings
- 3 disabled ramps
- 3 new sections of footway
- 7 other walking schemes
- 31 bus stop infrastructure
- 27 cycle stands given out
- 4 Cycle Safety schemes
- 2 replacement walk/cycle bridges
- 2 National Cycle Route improvements
- 5 other cycle schemes

- improvements
- 200 bus stop flags replaced
- 4 cycle signing schemes
- 8 cycle lockers
- 50 cycle stands installed (7 schemes)
- 1 accident remedial scheme
- 1 Variable Message Static signs scheme
- 1 electronic information screen
- 1 upgraded Information screen and Journey Planner
- 5 new and updated walking and cycling maps

Street Lighting

14. By the start of December 5,500 lights had been converted to part-night lighting in Droitwich and Bewdley. Conversion work has moved on to Bromsgrove, Kidderminster and Redditch with Rubery to follow and then Worcester and Malvern.

15. The energy saved so far is £77,000 p.a. and the carbon emissions charges saved are £4,000 p.a.

16. Additionally, LED lanterns (low energy) are being installed during planned renewals and maintenance, highway improvements and in new developments. Taken together, the target of £500,000 savings appears to be achievable. Ultimately, as the technology becomes more reliable and less expensive, LEDs are expected to become the norm in the replacement of older (high energy) lanterns.

Highways Maintenance Service Contract

17. The contract was won again and smoothly mobilised by Ringway and County Council teams working together to deliver successfully the main planned maintenance programme over the Summer season. Progress can already be noticed on the two-year programme upgrade of road markings and cats-eyes which is expected to have a positive influence on safety. The contractor is collecting more information than ever before on the extent and condition of the county's drainage assets so that maintenance can be optimised within available resources.

18. The new contract enables public realm projects that are similar in nature to maintenance activities to be carried out, as evidenced by the recently completed Angel Place enhancement in Worcester.

19. During January, the hub for the contract at Highways House, London Road Worcester, will be moving to Warndon depot so that the site is cleared for development into a new Waitrose Store. This move involves the conversion of unused workshop space at Sixways into new office accommodation which is being facilitated by Ringway, whilst the now redundant Sixways Park and Ride building is now being prepared for use later on in the year as joint highways accommodation.

Snow, Ice and Floods

20. The past year saw its fair share of seasonal weather extremes which we coped with well, drawing upon our retained corporate knowledge and experience in recent years.

21. At the start of the season there were 15,900 tonnes of salt in stock, which would be sufficient for over 100 primary precautionary gritting runs should all of it be needed, including using the 5,000 tonnes resilience stockpile at Lye depot. This gives a good

degree of resilience and is better than the nationally recommended position for the start of the season.

22. We continued to invest in technology on our vehicles, with our entire gritting fleet now equipped with the latest brine-spraying equipment, which delivers a more effective and efficient salting operation. Ceramic-insert plough blades can clear right down to the road surface, which means the salt has less snow to melt and roads are much clearer for traffic. All 1,200 grit bins have been filled in preparation for winter. We also continued to expand our Green Grit Bin programme with parish councils, which complement our existing stocks of yellow bins, and see more minor roads receive treatment when necessary.

23. February 2014 saw the county being the focus of national attention when we experienced the most severe flooding since the summer of 2007. The River Severn burst its banks leading to days of challenges for our services and I am proud of the way that officers and contractors responded to the difficulties presented.

24. New Road in Worcester was opened to two-way traffic as we put in place arrangements that kept the city moving and open for business, while Tybridge Street, Hylton Road and North Parade were flooded. As waters rose even further, we operated a pedestrian shuttle bus services through the flood waters along New Road and Bridge Street which avoided a lengthy journey around the Southern Link Road. This service proved highly popular and brought out the 'Dunkirk Spirit' of those travelling.

25. Elsewhere, the Army assisted us with the deployment of sandbags to protect properties and ran an equally popular service ferrying passengers through flood water at Upton-upon-Severn. When waters receded, the clean-up operation started in earnest. We continue to develop flood schemes strategies, working together with partner agencies. Our submission to Government resulted in an additional £2 million severe weather funding which has helped us develop more drainage improvements and flood relief schemes. We are, for example, currently developing plans to raise the level of New Road, to give extra resilience in times of high flood.

Major Projects

26. Members will not be surprised to hear that I am delighted to report on the completion of the replacement of Abbey Bridge and approach viaduct at Evesham. Despite difficulties and delays, the bridge and viaduct re-opened fully on 10 March 2014. Inevitably, the events that led to delays have commercial consequences which remain to be resolved with our contractor.

27. The measures that were put in place throughout Evesham during the works; additional buses, proactive traffic management, cheap parking, variable message signage, temporary footbridge access, retailer loyalty schemes etc. were a tremendous support to the town during these essential works. The completed scheme now looks good and secures a safe and improved river crossing at this location for many years to come.

28. We completed a £2.1 million Public Realm improvement in Bromsgrove High Street in August, delivered in partnership with Bromsgrove District Council. The scheme completely renovates the main shopping street in the town, with improved paving in various materials, new street furniture such as benches and bollards, renewed lamp columns, new drainage systems and attractive planters. The market has returned to the High Street with new, uniform canopies and provides a pleasant and attractive place to shop.

29. The commencement of a Public Realm improvement scheme at Tenbury is imminent.

30. In Worcester city, the carriageway and footways were refurbished over the main river bridge and this work was completed quickly and was well managed around the floods, the cricket and racing traffic, and whilst major works were ongoing at the Ketch.

31. Angel Place was refurbished in association with Crowngate and Worcester City Council. The works were completed around the clock and have been exceptionally well received by both traders and shoppers alike. Lighting, street furniture and paving have all been replaced and, like Bromsgrove, the market has returned rejuvenated and renovated. The block paving and coloured tarmac surfacing complements works undertaken last year in the High Street and we are currently finalising plans for a similar scheme at Cornmarket.

32. The major works at the Ketch have been ongoing during the year and have proceeded well, without any major traffic delays. The Ketch roundabout will double in size and with dualling of the section heading towards Norton. There have been major utility diversions, substantial lengths of new kerblines, new surfacing and protection of the electricity pylon. We have worked with local residents on noise mitigation measures and motorists are now starting to see on the ground how the scheme will look once completed. Works are scheduled for completion in early summer 2015 and our intention is to move directly to the next phase of the Southern Link improvements, from Norton to Whittington, including the construction of a new railway bridge. These schemes have been undertaken in liaison with my colleague the Cabinet Member for Economy, Skills and Infrastructure.

Routine Maintenance

33. Our general highways maintenance programme has continued throughout the year. In January, the Government invited all Highway Authorities to bid for additional Pothole Relief Funding, stating that monies would be awarded not simply on road length but also on the basis of evidence of effective highway maintenance policies and procedures.

34. Our successful bid resulted in the award of £3.2 million of additional funding, with praise from the DfT for our Asset Management technique. When considered pro-rata against other authorities with much greater road lengths, our award of funds was proportionately one of the best in the country.

35. We again delivered a large £3.5 million surface dressing programme in the summer, to protect and extend the life of many of our roads, taking advantage of favourable dry conditions. Surface dressing is an efficient way of treating roads and can extend their life for up to 10 years combined with structural patching. This remains a very cost effective method of treating road surfaces.

36. We have also fully resurfaced over 150 roads, with the A450 at Mustow Green, A456 Kidderminster town centre, Coventry Highway and others in Redditch, the B4120 at Cofton Hackett, the A443 at Holt, A449 Powick being a few recent, specific, high-profile examples.

Management of Utilities and Events

37. Our Streetworks Team continue to manage the many Utility schemes throughout the county. As well as planned works such as the recent water and gas main replacements in Sansome Walk, Worcester, and major electricity mains replacement

between Feckenham and Evesham, and in Malvern town centre, we have to contend with and manage many water main bursts, emergency gas leaks and failure of electricity supplies. We have also accommodated numerous BT excavations as part of the High Speed Broadband project. All of these are co-ordinated around our own maintenance programme in order to minimise disruption although our efforts here are not always appreciated by our residents.

38. Our Streetworks Team are nationally recognised for good practice in this area and we are developing a Streetworks Permit Scheme to better control poor performance by utility companies

39. This year we have also provided the traffic management for a number of significant high profile events such as the Worcester Military March, the Tour of Britain Bicycle Race, the Tour Series event in Redditch, the Steve Cram Run-Walk-Run event in Worcester and Martley and various Remembrance Day and Sea Cadet parades.

40. The works by the Highways Agency on the M50, the scheme involving central barrier replacement on the M5 and the current pinch point improvement works at M5 Junction 4 (Lydiate Ash) all impact upon our highway networks and we continue to liaise with the HA on these projects.

On Line Access

41. This last year has seen improvements to the County Council's website including a much simpler and logical 'Report It' feature.

42. Individuals are now able to easily report issues online, quickly identifying the defect location using an interactive mapping function, attaching a photograph if required, and can report multiple issues without the need to input constantly personal details.

43. People can identify the locations of grit bins, can see illuminated signs and streetlights and can even see the places where lights have been switched off. Our gritting routes are available to view online, and we now provide more accurate, timely and comprehensive roadworks information online than we ever have.

44. People now receive quick e-mail feedback on issues reported, with multiple status changes as their issue is progressed. The system is now routinely used and approved by Parish Council clerks. The percentage of those using online channels to report highway issues has risen from 15 to 49% between May and now, with very positive feedback.

DfT Funding

45. During the last quarter of 2014 the DfT engaged with English highway authorities regarding future funding. Worcestershire took an active part in this consultation and returned our views in good time for the DfT's consideration.

46. In general terms the Government announced a considerable increase in highway maintenance funding over the next six years. This funding is for the first time, going to be distributed to the various English highway authorities in three different ways, rather than simply on a network "needs" basis.

47. The decision has been made still to allocate the majority of funding on a "needs" basis i.e. dependent on the length of the authority's highway network, the number of bridges within that network and the number of lighting columns.

48. Recent investment in the county's bridges and lighting column stock means that the County Council is in a position to support changes to the "needs" formula that no longer adjusts for things like asset in need to structural repair.

49. The DfT have also introduced an "incentive" fund to encourage efficiencies, good asset management practices and excellent maintenance contracts. We believe the County Council are well placed to receive our full allocation in this category due to our track record in all these areas.

50. The third and final part of the funding will be a "Challenge Fund". The DfT are holding back an amount of funding each year over the next six years. For Worcestershire this is likely to be in the region of £5.5m in the first 3 years.

51. There will be two rounds of bidding allowed, one prior to April 2015 and one in a further 3 years to try and procure a share of the "Challenge fund".

52. Overall Worcestershire have received an excellent allocation of just over £15 million for 2015/16. This allocation includes all of the "incentive" element but excludes the "Challenge" fund. It is our intention to submit a bid for a share of the "Challenge Fund" in due course, when the DfT release details of how this can be done.

53. In conclusion I would hope that members can see that the Highways and Transportation service remains one of the most important, busy and high profile areas in the Council. I wish to place on record my appreciation and thanks to all the staff in the BEC Directorate for the help and assistance given to me. More importantly however the service has continued to make life better for the people that live, work and travel throughout Worcestershire and it is the general public that we are here to serve.

John Smith OBE

Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways