

COUNCIL
10 NOVEMBER 2016**REPORTS OF CABINET MEMBERS WITH RESPONSIBILITY**

Report of the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways

1. It gives me great pleasure to present my first report to Council as Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways. It has certainly been a very busy six months, especially in the first week, when on the second day of my tenure, Eastham Bridge collapses! Perhaps the Revd Phillip Jones knows something I don't when he said we should be building bridges!

2. It is I think fair to say that Highways is probably the most frontline portfolio that there is within the County Council. This is because it affects each and every one of our residents, whether it is pedestrians, motorists, those who rely on public transport, whether it be an OAP using their concessionary travel pass or a student travelling to school, whether you live in a large urban centre such as Redditch, Kidderminster or Worcester, or in a country lane in one of our beautiful rural villages. Highways matter to everyone and in my experience thus far, everyone has an opinion on this area of the Council's work and it isn't always the same opinion!

Highways Budget

3. The County Council continues to maintain its commitment to improving roads across the county. With this in mind we will maintain the current level of investment in the core Highways budget and ensure that the staffing levels are in place to achieve the ambitious programme of highways maintenance works and delivering on the £12m 'Driving Home' programme.

Depots

4. We continue to strive to improve the efficient operations at our Highways Depots As a part of this approach we are undertaking a review of Depots across the county to identify whether there are opportunities for making our delivery of Highways and other linked operations, for example Fleet Services, even more efficient.

Fixing Roads

5. Alongside our additional £12m 'Driving Home' programme of improving roads where you live, we have, as part of the Highways core maintenance works, completed surfacing works on over 150 roads across the county in this financial year with the Surface Dressing programme of works alone extending to repairing a further 300 roads (in this financial year).

Pavements/Footways

6. The Council continues to invest in improving Pavements and Footways in Worcestershire. By the end of the current financial year over £2.5m (revenue and capital) will have been spent completing over 100 footway schemes across the county, focussed on maintaining this vital asset in areas that communities want improving. Local Members will have already been written to, outlining the proposed work on footways for this year and seeking their comments on the proposals accordingly.

Winter Maintenance

7. The new winter season is now with us and as usual work has been completed over the summer months to ensure the county has strong resilience measures in place to deal with our winter weather. Our salt barns are full and we have a 5,000 tonne resilience stockpile, giving a total of 17,000 tonnes of salt ready for use. This prudent approach to stocking gives Worcestershire a better degree of resilience than the nationally recommended position for the start of the winter season giving sufficient salt for over 100 precautionary gritting runs.

8. The entire fleet of 32 gritters has been fully serviced and is ready for action to deal with ice and snow on our key road network. The gritters are located at key Depots around the county to make sure they can respond to ice and snow rapidly spreading grit along Worcestershire's key road network to keep residents and businesses moving. Fitted with ceramic-insert plough blades for dealing with snow, this ensures we can clear right down to the road surface, meaning the salt has less snow to melt and roads are much clearer for traffic.

9. All 1,200 grit bins are currently being filled in preparation for winter. We also continue to expand our Green Grit Bin programme with Parish Councils, which complements our existing stocks of yellow bins and sees more minor roads receive treatment when necessary.

10. Council will, of course, be aware that I took a report to Cabinet on 13 October 2016 for approval of our Winter Service Policy.

Eastham Bridge

11. I am delighted to report that work has started (mid-October) at Eastham, to construct a permanent structure following the collapse of the historic bridge in May 2016. Contractors were on site in early October to establish the site compound, offices and welfare facilities ahead of work starting.

12. Prior to works commencing on site, tremendous preparation has taken place behind the scenes with our own engineers, planners, contractors and with partners at Malvern Hills District Council, Environment Agency, Historic England and Natural England. This included progressing work on both temporary and permanent structures in parallel.

13. Communications with the local community have been ongoing via agreed routes since the collapse in May. It is anticipated that the new bridge will be open to traffic in Spring 2017.

'Driving Home'

14. Members will be aware of the 'Driving Home' programme, which sees an additional £12m investment into our highways over this year and next. Each member has received details of the proposed roads to be treated in their individual divisions.

15. The programme is progressing well with over 37 miles of improvements benefiting over 3,000 residents.

16. A communications campaign is in place to support the programme. The public tell us that fixing the roads is one of their highest priorities and, therefore, this programme is directly responding the residents who we represent.

Parish Lengthsman Scheme

17. The Lengthsman Scheme continues to go from strength to strength. From inception in 2002, with five Parish Councils undertaking our trial, we have now been able to accommodate 157 Parish and Town Councils on the Scheme, covering around 95% of Worcestershire. Due to continued investment from Worcestershire County Council and the support and hard work of subscribed Parish and Town Councils, this is one of the most popular schemes of its kind in the country and is nationally recognised as a successful model of partnership working.

18. Further to feedback from local councils, the remit of the Lengthsman has been expanded and now includes such tasks as maintaining and rotating Vehicular Activated Signs, refurbishing visibility railings and the painting of heritage street furniture.

19. Regular training sessions take place to ensure that Lengthsmen are trained for working in the highway and can comply with the current traffic management regulations.

Street Lighting

20. Progress to the end of September on the part night lighting programme is that over 16,000 lights have been converted to switch off between midnight and 6am GMT, with this completing 95% of the original scheme total. Currently the teams are finishing off areas of Worcester and Malvern which will complete the project. This contributes to planned energy savings and reducing carbon emissions.

21. In addition to this, a number of other energy saving projects have either taken place or are underway. For example, many of the major routes into Worcester city have been upgraded to LED lighting (City Walls Road for example).

Hoobrook Link Road

22. The Hoobrook Link Road scheme was made operational for road users as planned in September 2016. This includes the link road and associated junction improvements on Worcester Road and Stourport Road. The link road provides improved access, connecting two key employment corridors, promoting economic growth and relieving traffic congestion.

Public Transport

23. Mainstream Education and Public Transport contract renewal dates have now been aligned by area and re-profiled to be reviewed on a rolling programme basis. In accordance with our "open for business" commitment this will provide operators with visibility of contract termination dates and ensure that significant elements of their business are not all at risk at one time.

24. Market shaping and development is continuing, we are striving to augment resilience in the commercial sector by amending our procurement method and contract specifications.

25. Several commercial bus services have been de-registered this year, our mitigation has been to provide the services in-house for a fixed transitional period. This allows us to collate crucial passenger number and journey information (that would be otherwise commercially sensitive). The information forms the basis of an options appraisal pertaining to service provision. One such service has been transferred to Community Transport. Other de-registered services will be reviewed in an holistic manner, this will allow operators to be more creative and have greater autonomy and thus potentially more commercially viable.

26. I know that Local Members and indeed communities quite properly show great concern when their area is affected by a reduction in bus services. However, the stark reality is that if the service is commercially operated, the Council has little, if any, power to resist this, other than to comply with its statutory duties as and where necessary. The Council will be aware that the total budget for subsidised bus services now stands at approximately £1.6M and this money can only be spread so far. I don't propose to rehearse again the previous decision to reduce subsidised bus services, everyone will be well acquainted with the decision taken at the time.

27. A new procurement method provides far greater autonomy for operators to submit responses for contracts and allows us to evaluate alternative "added value" options. We are actively encouraging operators to engage with us and collectively identify new ways of reducing cost. Additionally we are re-evaluating our contract specifications by making them less specific to encourage entrepreneurial responses.

28. The first mini competition for public transport is currently underway and will be followed by mainstream education contracts in November, for January and February start dates.

29. This has followed the introduction of a five-year rolling programme for the retendering of Mainstream schools contracts where we will be optimising routes through specialist software and offering resource based contracts. The use of this software has delivered contract savings of £215,000 for SEN schools.

Transport Technology

30. The Worcestershire Real Time Information System (RTIS) is fully operational and being used both internally and by Operators. In-shelter displays (currently showing scheduled information) are being deployed in Worcester City with the public "live" launch by the end of December this year.

31. LCD solar powered in-shelter displays are the first of their type in Europe and will enable us to deliver Real Time Information where not feasible before.

32. The successful development of the online School Transport application tracker, which supports our Digital Strategy, has resulted in significant reduction in volumes of calls. Customers are opting to use a self-service approach, rather than calling via the Worcestershire Hub. In addition improvements have been made to back office processes.

Community Transport

33. Following the withdrawal of First Bus's commercial service between Upton-upon-Severn and Malvern in April this year, the County Council stepped in by providing a temporary bus route, operated by Fleet Services, whilst a more permanent solution could be found. Following passenger surveys and consultation, two local CT operators (Malvern Dial-a-Ride and Community Action) developed a new Community Bus service which enables passengers from the various communities to make a return journey into Malvern. The new service will operate from Monday through to Saturday. Journeys need to be booked in advance, providing a more personal service with greater flexibility. In addition, other journeys can also be provided by the organisations' voluntary car and Dial-a-Ride minibus operations.

34. The new arrangement is a good example of communities, councillors and voluntary organisations working together to come up with a tailored solution. The new service is part funded by contributions from two Members' Divisional Funding.

Highways Liaison

35. Over the last 10 years the role of Highways Liaison Engineer has proved hugely successful, and we are now revising the role to ensure it encompasses the wider aspirations of the authority.

36. The revised role will be responsible for liaising with Councillors on all Highways and Transport activity in their relevant area, ensuring consistency and continuity. To reflect this broader role we now have additional resources to ensure that issues are dealt with promptly and the process is managed end to end.

37. Some Members of the Council will have seen various changes with their local Liaison Engineer, particularly in the Wychavon and Malvern areas. Having gone to a model where there were four Liaison Engineers across the county, I am delighted to confirm that this model moves back up to six. This was fully implemented on 1 November 2016.

38. Your Liaison Engineer will, in future be proactive and make contact at least monthly; they will be able to provide you with an overview of what's happening in your Division.

39. We recognise the importance of providing Members with timely, accurate responses to their correspondence. In terms of continual improvement our new Customer Access Platform has enabled us to revamp our process; this will allow us to fully track all Member correspondence across the Directorate. We are currently piloting this with Liaison Engineers to understand exactly what's required and we are working with our Design Team to develop a process/database which meets Members' and officers' needs.

Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs)

40. At any given time, the Traffic Management Team are regularly dealing with a live list of 100 TROs.

41. Whilst the number of TROs has risen, the average process time has reduced from 42 weeks in 2010 to 26 weeks on average this year. Additional resource is being sought so as to further reduce process times.

Small Works Schemes

Traffic calming

Shawhurst Lane Wythall, Woodrush Schools.

42. A Traffic calming scheme using bolt-down speed cushions to slow vehicles down in advance of a designated crossing point thereby protecting children using the school crossing patrol and at other times when residents may need to cross. To be implemented in school half term - February 2017.

Matchborough Way, Matchborough School

43. A Traffic calming scheme using bolt-down speed cushions, to slow vehicles down in and around the school and supplement existing infrastructure improvements. Which have taken place in recent years adjacent to the school. To be implemented in school half term February 2017

Groveley Lane Cofton Hackett

44. "Visual" traffic calming scheme incorporating carriageway resurfacing, lining, signing, lighting, uncontrolled crossing improvements. To be fully delivered in 2017.

Walking

City Walls Road, Worcester

45. As part of the Key Corridors schemes to improve the City Walls Road area, a number of schemes have been completed. A new pelican pedestrian crossing has been installed just north of the Fownes Hotel.

46. Windsor Row footbridge, which links from New Street to the St Martin's Gate multi-storey car, has had the bridge deck re-laid and parapets repainted. The 'hole in the wall' staircase has been in filled and the paved area opened up by removing the hedging and replacing with railings. To deter loitering, cobbles have also been laid.

47. The pedestrian guard railing along the entire length of City Walls Road has been replaced with the black Worcester railings.

Birmingham Road, Alvechurch

48. A new Zebra Crossing and pedestrian ramp has been installed at Birmingham Road, Alvechurch serving Alvechurch Middle School and Crown Meadow First School.

Riverside, Kleve Walk, Worcester

49. After the discovery of a colony of Lesser Horseshoe bats nesting in the Cathedral, the lit bollards at Kleve Walk were found to be disrupting their feeding pattern. The switch-on timings for the bollards has been reduced to enable the bats to feed

unimpeded. To ensure the safety of the public, a section of railings, to match those used elsewhere along the Riverside, are to be installed shortly. To further define the river edge, a line of solar lights 'bat hats' are to be installed adjacent to the railings and bollards. Finally, an information board will be installed to give details of the new bat colony.

Shelsdon Close, Wythall (Lea Green Lane, Station Road & Norton Lane)

50. Some S106 funding is being towards walking improvements, feasibility and outline of scheme is being worked on currently.

Brickfields Walk, B4550 Astwood Road, Worcester

51. On PROW WR-858 that crosses network rail line from Astwood Road to King George V playing fields is being closed off so a new gate and fence is being erected to stop anti-social behaviour and rubbish dumping. Worcester City Council are progressing a Public Space Protection Order (PSPO)

Signing

52. A number of small signing schemes have been undertaken, in Worcester, and Kidderminster.

Bus Stop Improvements installed

New Road, Bromsgrove (Next to New Rail Station)

53. To aid the re-routed bus movements through the newly improved Bromsgrove Station, a build-out has been removed at the top of New Road and the eastern side car parking removed and replaced with double yellow lining.

Birmingham Road Alvechurch

54. Two new bus shelters installed including raised kerbs and footway improvements

Malvern

55. Three bus stop sites in Malvern including two new bus shelters and associated footway improvement works

Badsey Road, Evesham

56. New bus shelter hardstanding and 90m of new footway to help users access the stop.

B4204 Martley Rd, Lower Broadheath (by Bell Inn)

57. New bus shelter, hardstanding and footway with two uncontrolled crossings to access it.

Bus Stop various

58. In addition bus stop improvements have been carried out at 12 locations including new or replacement bus stop poles and flags.

Bus Stop Improvements imminent

B4085 Cleeve Road, Middle Littleton (by Kanes Foods)

59. Replacing old bus shelter and concrete base with new shelter and base and making shelter more visible for users.

B4079 Kemerton, Rd Bredon (near Surgery)

60. New bus shelter to be installed together with bus stop area having dropped crossings and footway improved.

Cycling

61. A number of small cycling signing schemes have been undertaken in and around, Beckford, Malvern, Worcester, and Stourport.

Diglis Parade

62. The Riverside shared-use path between Portland Walk and the Canal swing-bridge has been widened to 2.5m and railings installed on the river side

Diglis Dock Road

63. The Riverside shared-use path between the old Oil Dock and Navigation Road is to be improved by blocking Diglis Dock Road with removable bollards, the lighting improved, signing, lining and the installation of a road hump at the end of Navigation Road to alert drivers that they are entering a shared use zone.

Improvements for the mobility impaired

64. A DDA package of 31 No dropped kerbs and tactile are about to be installed and delivered throughout the county before Christmas.

65. Included in the above is an improvement to the flooding issue being experienced at existing crossing in Worcester Road Malvern by installing an additional 2 drain gullies and re-profiling the footway kerbing so users of the crossing do not get soaked by passing vehicles. Maintenance crews have jetted out all the existing pipes that these gullies will feed into.

66. In conclusion, can I place on record my thanks to the Director, John Hobbs, all of his senior leadership team but importantly the many officers and people on the ground doing the day-to-day work to keep this county moving.

Marcus Hart

Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways