

COUNCIL
16 MAY 2019**REPORTS OF CABINET MEMBERS WITH RESPONSIBILITY
– CABINET MEMBER WITH RESPONSIBILITY FOR
HIGHWAYS**

Introduction

1. It is my pleasure as Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways to submit my report to Council on progress and developments that have taken place across my portfolio of responsibility since May 2017.

Communications with Members

2. Good communication is a key element for all organisations, including Highways, since County Councillors are, and must remain, the first and sole point of personal contact for all highways issues. This was one of my top priorities I addressed on taking up office.
3. For example, I have implemented the Highways & Transport Briefing Sessions by District. These provide a regular opportunity for colleagues to talk about relevant issues in their areas, which may be strategic or operational. Recent examples where further information was required include Planning and Streetworks. Relevant officers are on hand to answer any questions.
4. In order to fully brief Members on key issues throughout the year, I have instigated email updates, the most recent one being on Grass Cutting last month. The winter update is another example when we provide useful information to help Members with responses to any local enquiries. Whilst we have not had much snow this winter, we were prepared. All schools and Parish Councils are encouraged to purchase salt from us and, of course, we are always on hand to offer advice and guidance.
5. In addition, I have introduced a new system of public contact by re-directing highways-related enquiries from the Hub to the established Highways Control Centre. Whilst I embrace the corporate drive towards digital processes where they work well for routine issues (e.g. reporting a pothole or failed street lights), there will always be some people for whom, or complexities for which, the digital route is not the most appropriate medium.
6. Liaison Engineers meet regularly with their Local Members to keep them abreast of highways matters and run through these issues and provide progress updates. Liaison Engineers have facilitated a variety of works for Local Members including new footways, provision of school flashing lights, upgrades to street lighting, Pelican crossing upgrades, and many others.

7. The cohort of Liaison Engineers has been re-established at six officers, one for each District and they play an extremely important role at the heart of the Highways service, both in terms of communication and getting things done.

8. In May 2018, Wythall experienced major flooding. Our response to this situation was excellent with a multi-agency approach, including the setting up of a local hub to offer support and advice to local residents. In every situation, we complete a 'lessons learnt' exercise to look for improvements.

Pavement Maintenance

9. Worcestershire County Council has invested an additional £6m in footways maintenance over the last two years.

10. This investment, in addition to the core footways maintenance budget, over the two years has delivered over 180 kms of pavement being vastly improved across the County, equalling the distance between Worcester and Leeds, with 230 footway schemes completed during this last year alone. See attached table for spend information.

11. This key work for our residents continues in 2019/20 with a record 8 footway teams completing schemes.

Highway Maintenance

12. In the last year we finished our £12m 'Driving Home' programme completing improvements to over 150 miles of road and benefitting around 39,000 residents.

13. The impact on the condition of our carriageways from last year's severe weather should not be underestimated. The exceedingly long and wet winter followed by the exceptionally hot and dry summer caused considerable damage to the infrastructure.

14. The public routinely tells us that roads are their top priority and so we are investing in our highways network to ensure we have some of the best roads in the country. Our aim of being in the top quartile for the condition of our roads and footways is within sight.

15. In 2019/20 we will be spending over £17m on carriageway works. This includes the full amount of DfT Incentive Fund following our demonstration of compliance at the highest level (Level 3) in that process. See attached table for spend information.

16. In 2018/19 the Department for Transport provided Worcestershire County Council with a further £6.4m to spend on repairing potholes, maintaining our highways infrastructure and completing preventative maintenance, repairing our roads with surfacing and patching before potholes appear.

Surface Dressing

17. Our spring and summer surface dressing programme started last month around the Evesham area, then will follow on around Pershore, then Malvern before heading into the north of the County.

18. Over 250 sites will be treated, at a programme cost of around £1.2M.

19. In the surface dressing process, hot bitumen is sprayed onto the road surface using a calibrated tanker. In many cases, structural patching of the road will have taken place months beforehand. Chippings are then applied onto the bitumen from a metered spreader. The new surface is rolled, and then swept to remove loose chippings after 24 hours, again after 48 hours and again after 7 days.

20. Surface dressing improves the skid resistance of the road surface. It seals the road surface against water ingress, preventing potholes forming. It is an extremely effective method of extending the life of the road.

21. Details of the surface dressing programme will be shared with members by the Liaison Engineers.

22. The process is weather dependant and the programme will be amended as the year progresses.

Walking and Cycling New Projects

23. The County Council continues to invest in walking and cycle provision across Worcestershire. Aside from the numerous schemes developed through the planning system via S106 obligations, we are delivering improvements in Bromsgrove through the £3.4m National Productivity Investment Fund (NPIF). The programme will be complete by Spring 2020 and will significantly improve access to key destinations in Bromsgrove for walkers and cyclists. In addition, £4m has recently been allocated towards essential maintenance works on Sabrina Bridge in Worcester and a new bridge across the River Severn linking the west of Worcester with Gheluvelt Park.

24. Across 2018/19 and 2019/20 almost £600k will have been spent on cycle related projects.

Updated Design Guide: New Parking Requirements

25. At the Cabinet meeting in June 2018, I presented the updated Streetscape Design Guide (formerly the Highways Design Guide) for adoption. It is considered to be good practice for a Local Highway Authority to have an up-to-date guidance document to assist developers with local requirements which tailor highway design to meet the aspirations of this Council and the Local Planning Authorities (District Councils).

26. The Streetscape Design Guide supports the aims of Worcestershire's fourth Local Transport Plan (LTP4).

27. The Streetscape Design Guide has evolved based on productive discussions with stakeholders in both the public (e.g. District Councils) and private sectors (e.g. developers). Particular emphasis was placed on the requirement for new developments to provide additional off street parking in order to tackle the growing problem of congestion caused by increasing levels of on street parking. We must now work to ensure that local planning authorities implement these new requirements.

Review of Grit Bins Policy

28. Members will be aware that I asked for a review of grit bins to take place at the end of last year. No change was necessary to the County Council's policy on its own

(yellow) grit bins. The criteria remain the same with each criterion carrying a weighting, with gradient carrying a higher weighting.

29. However, the assessment for green grit bins has changed slightly to make it more sensitive to what the community wants. Most green grit bins will be on private land and their location would need the consent of the landowner and a brief inspection by Highways staff to avoid any hazard to the highway user. Where the bin is to be located on the public highway, a signed agreement now needs to be in place between Worcestershire County Council and the owner (for example, the Parish Council or group of residents). This will clarify ownership and responsibility for maintenance/refilling. The owner will also need to hold the appropriate public liability insurance. Outside of Parish Council areas, Members can use their Locally Determined budget to purchase a green grit bin for use on the public highway if there is a demand for it, and then 'gift it' to the residents/businesses.

30. The policy document, assessment forms and other information are available on the Worcestershire County Council website:
http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/info/20007/travel_and_roads/381/gritting_ice_and_snow/2

Review of Lengthsman Scheme

31. I am aware that some colleagues may feel that the Lengthsman Scheme has become too bureaucratic so I asked for a review of the scheme to look specifically at what work can or cannot be undertaken and how. The new agreement was in place last month.

32. My focus has to be the safety of all highway users, including the Parish Lengthsman. We have invested in training to ensure that every Lengthsman is qualified to work on the public highway and has the required Personal Protective Equipment to do this. This proved a difficult task as there was a wide take up and limited availability on courses.

33. The Parish Lengthsman Scheme continues to be successful and justly popular with local communities. My aim is to see it expand further to take on duties best done at the most local level.

Passenger Transport Review

34. In 2013/14 the Council undertook an extensive public consultation exercise on proposals relating to financially supported bus services. The objective was to understand people's priorities for service provision and the likely impact of proposed service changes. The outcomes from this consultation defined the shape of the current passenger transport network within Worcestershire.

35. Since the consultation, there have been many changes in the commercial bus market, reflecting the difficulties that operators have in identifying and maintaining profitable services. Commercial services have gradually reduced and some have been completely withdrawn in parts of the county. Some commercial operators have ceased to operate altogether and some have stopped running local bus services.

36. This decline in the commercial bus market is likely to continue in line with national trends of falling patronage. This decline is due to rising car ownership and use,

changing shopping and employment patterns, and rising operating costs. Worcestershire County Council is continually facing calls to consider subsidising those commercial routes that have been withdrawn. We have, therefore, made a commitment that we will develop and adopt a robust Worcestershire Passenger Transport Strategy over the next 12 months.

37. The Worcestershire Passenger Transport Strategy will take a strategic and holistic view of all passenger and community transport provision, including home to school transport arrangements, fares and ticketing, concessionary travel, bus priority, infrastructure and information. This Strategy will be informed by a Passenger Transport Review of needs and demands (including future development), together with an assessment of how well these are met by current services. The Passenger Transport Review will also consider changes in the local market for passenger transport and different options for the future.

38. The findings of the Passenger Transport Review will inform the Worcestershire Passenger Transport Strategy which will set out a way forward. There will be clear policies detailing Worcestershire County Council's position on aspects of passenger transport provision and it will highlight future approaches to be adopted.

39. To assist with the review, we have appointed Integrated Travel Planners (ITP), a specialist in strategic planning and optimisation of transport networks. ITP will engage with all of the appropriate stakeholders and we will host a number of stakeholder events.

40. A public consultation will commence on 7th June 2019.

Real Time Information

41. A total of 108 real time in-shelter displays have now been installed across Worcester City, Malvern, Redditch and Droitwich as well as a new Interchange display installed at Bromsgrove Bus Station. Wyre Forest locations are currently being surveyed.

42. Worcestershire County Council was shortlisted for a National Transport Award for its innovative work in Real Time Information and its use of Transport Solar Technology.

43. Three Information Points have been successfully installed at The Cross, Cornmarket and Cathedral Square in Worcester. Once approval has been secured from West Midlands Trains, a point will also be installed at Worcester Foregate Street Station. The final point for Worcester City will be located outside Worcester Guildhall. Three internal information points have also been installed at the University of Worcester. Other potential town centre sites in the County are being investigated.

Utilities

44. In 2018/19, up to the end of March, permits have been granted for around 18,000 utility works on our highway network. Performance over this period has identified Severn Trent Water having a 12% failure rate of inspected sites (22% for live sites) and Cadent Gas with a 16% failure rate (14% for live sites). 'Failures' can occur at various stages and for a number of reasons including incorrect traffic management, unsafe working, wrong materials used and incorrect reinstatement method employed.

Currently, across most utility works, failure rates are worst for live sites. Severn Trent Water and Cadent Gas are the poorest performers during the period with failure at an unacceptable level. As Severn Trent Water is performing poorly across the whole region, we are insisting on improvement through regular regional meetings. Cadent Gas's performance is being dealt with locally through improvement meetings and plans. Permits for our own works this year covered over 6,650 sites.

Traffic Regulation Order Consultation Pilot

45. I have introduced a trial to consult residents more fully regarding waiting restriction proposals outside their homes. This has had the desired impact of ensuring that directly affected residents are more aware of proposed parking restrictions and can have a meaningful say in their introduction. However, the number of objections, costs, workload and timescales have increased. To reduce this impact, the trial has been adapted to pursue increased consultation at a later stage in the legal process.

Extending Roadworks Permit Schemes

46. In March 2016 Worcestershire County Council adopted a Permit Scheme for roadworks. After the first year of operation a review identified that the scheme had been successful. The original scheme charged a fee along traffic sensitive routes. We have now amended the Permit Scheme Order allowing us to charge a fee for works on all roads starting in May. This will increase our resources to monitor and manage the scheme enabling greater control and realising improvements such as reduced congestion on our busy roads. In particular, it will facilitate an increase in the number of inspections carried out to tackle the poor site performance of utility companies.

Congestion - Worcestershire Network Efficiency Programme

47. Since the original £5m Budget was allocated in 2017, we have been working through the known congestion sites to assess, design and implement solutions across the County.

48. Successes with the Worcestershire Network Efficiency Programme so far include:

- a. The roundabout arm at Icknield Street Drive, Redditch where we have widened the approach from the south to improve flow and capacity;
- b. Traffic Regulation Order amendments on the approaches to the signalised junctions at the A435 Astwood Bank and Hanbury Road, Droitwich have allowed us to remove parking, clear detection loops and vastly improve the efficiency and capacity for traffic;
- c. A442/A449 at Hoobrook /Chester Road South island, Kidderminster whereby opening up the dual carriageway exit north, revised carriageway markings and reconfigured signals at the A4420 Hoobrook Link Road have allowed us to massively reduce congestion to the south; and
- d. We have improved journey times along Worcester Road, Bromsgrove by removing pinch points and narrowed sections of carriageway, which has also aided the issues of this AQMA (Air Quality Management Area)

49. In Worcester, we have invested in new equipment at many signalised sites to improve their efficiency including:

- a. Shrub Hill/Tallow Hill/Midland Rd – we have also re-configured the signal phasing to improve traffic flow and queuing at this busy 4-armed junction on the Hospital/City corridor;
- b. Waitrose and Sebright signal improvements have seen increased green time for the A44 corridor, helping to improve journey times between the M5 and City;
- c. Deansway, North Parade and New Rd pedestrian crossings have all been upgraded to better integrate them into the SCOOT system across the City, reducing unnecessary delays;
- d. Copenhagen St, Dolday and New Road signals have also been improved which brings benefits to those junctions independently, but when the A44 corridor is completed, it will allow the whole route to work efficiently; and
- e. TRO reviews along the key corridors of the A38 north and south, A44 west and east of the City and other sites are also ongoing at this time.

50. Modelling work is being carried out across Kidderminster so that a staged plan of improvement can be produced. We will then move onto modelling work in Bromsgrove, as we try to improve the journeys for people travelling the A448 from Kidderminster to the A38/M5, considering key junctions to the west of the town. Evesham modelling work, in conjunction with the Signals Team, has created a suite of improvements for the busy north/south High Street corridor between Greenhill and Abbey Bridge, hoping to start work this summer. Three key schemes in Worcester City will be progressed in the year ahead, namely the Croft Road crossing, Sidbury/ City Walls Road signals and St Johns/The Bullring. We are also improving congestion by replacing the hated Asda zebra crossing in the heart of the City.

51. This year's Budget has allocated a further £5m over the next three year period, so I am drawing up schemes for each of the four named sites (A38 Upton Junction, The Evesham Transport Strategy, The Bromsgrove Transport Strategy and A449 Hoobrook Roundabout, Kidderminster).

Street Lighting

52. Following the investment agreed as part of the Highways Infrastructure Investment Fund in 2018, the Council's Street Lighting Service is working with our contractor, Prysmian, delivering a capital programme of concrete column replacement and LED roll-out. This has resulted in a reduction in energy usage (and costs). Following a survey of the concrete columns, a programme was established to replace concrete lighting columns with new steel columns and energy efficient LED lanterns. Good progress has been made with the column replacements and this will continue through 2019/20, integrated with the extensive Footway maintenance programme.

Roll-out of LED lanterns will continue in 2019/20 resulting in further energy savings as planned. The reduced availability of the low-pressure sodium lighting (SOX), that was introduced in the 1970s, has also led to a more reactive lamp replacement strategy in addition to planned LED replacement.

53. We continue to roll-out the use of energy efficient LEDs lanterns and the replacement of the most dangerous concrete columns. To date we have changed 6,395 older SOX and SON lanterns with LEDs and replaced 522 concrete columns. The new LED lanterns are controlled by sensors, turning on and off at predetermined ambient light levels.

Winter Maintenance

54. We have invested in a modern Winter Service fleet, vital to ensure Worcestershire's key roads are treated to keep residents and businesses moving. There are 34 gritters in the fleet which are strategically allocated to depots around the County. Those of you who know me will be aware that I am a leading advocate for embracing new technology! Gritters are no exception. The gritters we have today have the capability to provide GPS tracking (location details) and send information on road surface temperatures allowing the Service to collate data so that, for example, we can adjust the discharge rate for salt to ensure we operate efficiently in small areas that may otherwise be problematic.

55. The formal "Winter Service" Period is from mid-October through to mid-April. The recent Winter Service period did not bring the snow events of the previous year, and returned to a more typical position. The table below shows the headline information for the 2018/19 period.

56. At the start of the Winter Service Period we had just over 14,000 tonnes of salt stock, including our strategic reserve that was maintained through the period. Current levels equate to just under 10 days of continuous treatment at 20g/m, well above the required level.

Winter period	183 days
No of standbys (where marginal or sub-zero temperatures were forecast:)	68
No of primary treatments	30
No of secondary treatments (precautionary)	15
No of snow events	1
Tonnes of salt spread across network	5,127
Salt delivered to Parishes (tonnes)	22
Salt delivered to schools (tonnes)	21

57. We actively monitor using a forecast specific to Worcestershire, in conjunction with 12 weather stations and sensors we have deployed around the county throughout the entire season. This ensures we have the best weather information available to enable effective decision making in terms of when to treat and also prepare, communicate and effectively deal with more severe weather when it arises.

Community Transport (CT)

58. Worcestershire's Community Transport Development Plan and Strategic Grant Quarterly Reviews took place in early February. Objectives are being met in all areas including:

- a. More control and coordination of marketing of and access to CT services
- b. New website for Worcestershire CT at www.communitytravel.org.uk;
- c. New leaflets currently being produced for widespread distribution;
- d. 16 WCC contracts being run by CT schemes including Adult Services and local and community bus routes;

- e. Numerous other contracts with independent day centres, academies, charitable organisations and housing associations being run by individual CT schemes;
- f. Effective partnership working with District Councils and several initiatives taking place with Parish, District and County Councillors;
- g. Ongoing upgrade of computer hardware and software by CT schemes to ensure efficient booking, scheduling and administrative processes;
- h. Expansion of Minibus Leasing Scheme by WCC for CT schemes and renewal of lease agreements for 2019/20 underway.

59. With the support from colleagues, we have introduced two new Community Bus routes:

- a. one serving Habberley. The Habberley Community Bus runs every Tuesday and Thursday and is providing around 14 single passenger journeys on each trip. It has funding until March 2020 from the local County Councillor; and
- b. the other serving the Brickfields area of Worcester. This new Community Bus route is the 'Tolly Shopper' operated by Worcester Wheels on Monday and Wednesday from the Tolladine area of the city (where there is no commercial bus route) to Sainsbury's, the WRH and Crowngate.

60. Work is ongoing with the Acute and Community & Health Trusts regarding transport to and from their locations.

61. CT in Worcestershire delivers approximately 12,500 journeys each month.

Budget

62. Through the use of a blend of capital, revenue and grant monies, spending on highways remains at the level set in the previous year. This reflects the high priority that this administration attaches to these services and assets. Table for budget information is to follow.

Acknowledgements

63. I would like to place on record my thanks to the Director of Economy and Infrastructure and the relevant heads of service, managers and staff across the Council for their commitment and continued hard work and for running one of the best Highways networks in the country. The work is unremitting and relentless but we face every challenge with determination.

Alan Amos
Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways