



Buckinghamshire Council

Transport, Environment & Climate Change Select Committee

Minutes

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE TRANSPORT, ENVIRONMENT & CLIMATE CHANGE SELECT COMMITTEE HELD ON THURSDAY 9 NOVEMBER 2023 IN THE PARALYMPIC ROOM, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNCIL, GATEHOUSE ROAD, AYLESBURY HP19 8FF, COMMENCING AT 10.00 AM AND CONCLUDING AT 10.51 AM

MEMBERS PRESENT

B Chapple OBE, R Carington, P Brazier, M Caffrey, M Collins, C Cornell, E Gemmell, S Guy, N Naylor, M Rand, D Watson and A Wood

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE

S Broadbent, G Williams, D Barnes, P Martin, R Barker, N Beswick, L Vallis and C Ward

Agenda Item

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor P Cooper.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor S Broadbent declared a personal interest as Chairman of the East West Main Line Partnership during Item 7 (Work Programme) when discussion referred to East West Rail attending TECC in February 2024.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 September 2023 were agreed as an accurate record.

4 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

Two public questions had been received to be considered at the meeting and were answered by the Cabinet Member for Transport. The questions and answers would be appended to the minutes.

5 HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT IN BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

The Cabinet Member for Transport, Councillor S Broadbent, introduced the report to the Select Committee and noted the following in his introduction:

- The service, which transported around 7,500 children per day, 400 of which via the 'Spare Seat' scheme, had undergone a three-year service improvement journey. This had

led to policy and procedural changes including commercialising routes, simplifying the Spare Seat fee structure, introducing new payment methods and improving communication with parents. These improvements had reduced customer enquiry and complaint volume and improved enquiry and complaint response times.

- This was a statutory service that was dynamic and demand-led and involved close liaison with the Schools Admissions and Integrated SEND Teams regarding referrals.
- There were around 500 Personal Transport Budget (PTB) plans in place which had an important role to play in meeting children's travel needs in a flexible and cost-effective manner.
- In Buckinghamshire there had been a 79% increase in SEND transport costs since 2015 which reflected the overall national trend. The County Council Network (CCN) was working to collate the national cost pressures and feedback to Government.
- The service ensured best value for money where possible and reviewed SEND eligibility criteria and procurement options to check appropriate transport provision was in place. SEND transport cases had a 15-day resolution Key Performance Indicator (KPI) and the team had around 20 cases actively open throughout the year.

The following points were made during the Committee discussion:

- Historically SEND transport had been funded by Government however this had changed and was funded by the Local Authority general fund.
- It was challenging to apply an average cost per transport arrangement due to the range in costs associated with each individual's need. Appropriateness was deemed as the most important aspect in decision-making. The Cabinet Member gave examples of arrangements such as specialist transport provision with medical equipment on board or a carer. It was difficult to budget for need due to case complexity being unknown until the travel needs assessment was completed
- The Cabinet Member reiterated the CCN position of SEND transport costs increasing nationally which had been supported by the Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transport (ADEPT) and the Association of Transport Co-ordinating Officers. (ATCO). Additionally, there had been an increase in Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) transfers.
- The legacy County Council had made provision for transport to grammar schools but this changed in 2012 to the statutory requirement of nearest suitable school; reverting this would cost millions of pounds.
- The Client Transport compliance team carried out checks that correctly trained staff were in place if they were required in a user's transport package.
- There was a requirement for home to school transport operators to meet the standards outlined in the contractual arrangements which included returns to indicate the vehicles and drivers being used. Compliance checks were also carried out with the Taxi Licensing Team based on spot-checks and intelligence reports. The team also worked with the Driver and Vehicles Standards Agency (DVSA) and Traffic Commissioners.
- The service was conscious that it was a high spend area for the Council and had carried out benchmarking with Oxfordshire, West Northamptonshire and Berkshire.
- Re-tendering exercises in 2021 had saved between £3-4m however this had been nullified by increased demand for transport. Some contracts had been handed back by operators and safeguards to the procurement framework were being considered when re-tendering to the provider market.

The Chairman noted the complexity of providing home to school transport and thanked the Cabinet Member for Transport and the officers for the report.

6 POLLUTION IN BUCKINGHAMSHIRE'S RIVERS AND CHALK STREAMS: 12-MONTH PROGRESS UPDATE

The Chairman of the Review Group, Councillor R Carington, introduced the update report and noted the following points:

- Members and the Scrutiny Officer were thanked for their work.
- Most of the recommendations had either been completed or working towards completion.
- It was positive that the Environment Agency had provided an update however it was disappointing that Thames Water and Anglian Water had not.

The following was noted during the Committee's discussion:

- Crews were continually working towards clearing gullies and as of 3 November 2023, 55,219 gullies had been cleared.
- The Scrutiny Officer was asked to chase up Anglian Water and Thames Water for their reports. These would be circulated to Members once received.

Action: C Ward

7 WORK PROGRAMME

The Chairman reminded Members that East West Rail would be attending February's meeting and that March's meeting would be HS2 only. A Member asked that the issue of diesel rolling stock be covered during the EWR item which was noted. The Cabinet Member for Transport advised that there had been a recent update to the EWR route (available here: <https://eastwestrail-production.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/public/Route-Update-Announcement/4c8cb5ea3b/Route-update-report.pdf>) and that the Council continued to lobby for the inclusion of the Aylesbury spur.

A Member requested that the Climate Change and Air Quality report at the next meeting include the outcome of on-street electric vehicle charging trials in Wendover.

8 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday 1 February 2024 at 10am.