



Buckinghamshire County Council Select Committee

Transport, Environment and Communities Select Committee

Report to the Transport, Environment and Communities Select Committee

Title:	TfB Update
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Purpose of Agenda Item

Following an update on the TfB Progress at the Environmental, Transport and Locality Services Select Committee in September 2015 Members requested an update on the performance of the service delivered by Ringway Jacobs throughout 2015/16. This report provides members with an update on TfB's progress.

Background

At the last Select Committee, Members were advised that there was recognition that the service area needed to be strengthened and both permanent and interim appointments have been made to various posts within the Client Team. The posts of Director of Transport and Head of Highways (Client) were filled on an interim basis, and interviews for permanent appointments of both roles are due to take place this month.

Also the Service Provider and Contractor to BCC, Ringway Jacobs, had a number of vacancies and a series of meetings have been held between the two parties to discuss future shared resourcing strategies including possible graduate placements, trainee programmes, placements/secondments, apprentices etc.



Summary

The delivery of the TfB service in 2015/16 has been largely in accordance with BCC expectations and requirements, and shows signs of improvements in many areas.

The service has met the Council's strategic objectives, delivering the largest capital maintenance programme to date. Improvements have been made in the support systems and some processes, which now provide real-time insight into the service delivery particularly the response to customers and the repair of defects. The benefits of these upgrades have yet to be fully realised as work continues to improve the level of network asset intelligence and thereby focus resources, however plans are in place to address this in 2016/17.

There remain some service areas where improvements are still required; in particular, streamlining the customer engagement processes, improving pothole repairs and addressing the legal drainage issues across the County. These will be key areas of focus during 2016/17. TfB will also be working with the Council to consider whether there is scope to devolve some pothole repair works.

Contract Governance

The Council's overall governance of Ringway Jacobs has been strengthened, with the arrival of Stewart Corbett (interim Head of Highways) and Basil Jackson (Interim Transport Director). A regularised Transport for Buckinghamshire (TfB) meeting structure is in place which ensures service issues are being addressed.

The TfB meetings interface effectively with the Transport Environment Economy Business Unit (TEE) governance structure (i.e. Asset Strategy Board etc.) and the Cabinet Member's own Portfolio Board. The effectiveness of this arrangement has already been tested, and was largely responsible for ensuring the Council was able to meet the changing highway funding requirements of the Department for Transport.

The contract governance will continue to improve during 2016/17, as the service performance is now more visible and will enable greater focus on quality, not just quantum.

Medium Term Financial Plan

The Service has responded effectively to the Council's medium term budget objectives. Service efficiencies will be delivered through the development of the new IT system, Confirm. Some service reductions have however been necessary (e.g. grass cutting from 6 to 4 cuts and staff reductions). These changes have already been incorporated into the 2016/17 Annual Plan and are being closely monitored through specific Project Boards to ensure they are being delivered.

Customer Communication

By reference to the Council's over-arching customer strategy of self-help through digitalisation and the ongoing customer journey project, a broad review on how the Council's customers interface with the services TfB provide has been undertaken. The review included the methods, type, and volumes of customer interaction.

TfB has high levels of regular public contact (between 5,000 and 7,000 formal enquiries per month). The majority of these enquiries are unavoidable and relate to statutory transaction requests (65%). The remainder has been identified as poor signposting (4%), unnecessary clarification (21%), or progress chasing (11%). This management information is now reviewed monthly and is being used to inform improvements to the existing communication strategy.

The review has resulted in a number of improvements which include:

- i. the rationalisation of over 1,000 web-pages to 300 and the determination of update owners.
- ii. the development of the "Maintain-my-Street" web based application to replace "Report-It".
- iii. The development of on-line tools to assist with the submission and tracking of insurance claims.

Further improvements are planned which will include upgrades to the Members pages, automated status updates to customers enquiries, and service data accessibility to the contact centres to increase the first time customer resolution rate from the current 52%.

While digital improvements are being made, improvements are still required to ensure service messages are consistently delivered to a high standard by front line staff, to reduce the number of customer complaints. Actions are being taken to address and will involve working closely with the Council's complaints team.

The Capital Maintenance Programme

The 2015/16 capital maintenance programme was the largest ever delivered by TfB since the contract started in 2009, at circa £31m. This included market testing £10m of surfacing works.

A total of 335 individual schemes were successfully constructed across the County throughout the year, which were monitored by the Client's supervision team.

Improvements have been made in the general implementation of schemes with the introduction of tighter quality procedures. There is however further improvement still

required in the timing of follow-on activities (i.e. the adjustment of ironwork and laying white lines) to complete schemes. These will be addressed in 2016/17.

Area Schemes

110 individual local schemes were successfully delivered in 2015/16, which included 42 LAF schemes and 20 parking schemes (the highest number delivered in one year to date). This has been due to TfB investing additional resources and implementing a number of process improvements, which have increased delivery confidence levels. A further 80 schemes are in progress and are expected to be completed in 2016/17.

Improvements are still required in communication, particularly the provision of quotations, and there remain a small number of legacy schemes that need to be resolved. These will be reviewed as part of the 2016/17 programme of work.

Routine and Reactive Maintenance Works

This service area has been delivered with a degree of mixed success. On a positive note the grass cutting and gully cleaning operations (both rural and urban) have been largely delivered to programme, which has resulted in a reduced number of complaints compared to previous years. The Service has also worked collaboratively with the devolution project team, and while there was some early confusion on responsibilities, these were quickly resolved. This approach has extended into the second tranche of devolution for 2016/17 and has taken on board some of the lessons learned from 2015/16, particularly with regard to maintenance specifics.

The number of potholes repaired in the year has increased by 71% compared to previous years. Given these volumes the quality of repairs has not been consistent across all areas and requires improvement. An action is being developed with TfB to address this which will be closely monitored by the Client team.

This volume of potholes is in part due to a updated highway maintenance policy (which was introduced in November 2015, and includes both next day and within 28 days repairs) but also a general reflection on the condition of the network in some areas. The new capital plan and patch programme should help to address some of these “pothole farms”.

Street Lighting

The 3 year replacement programme of the old orange sodium street lights with LEDs on the county’s A and B roads is substantially complete, with only 90 of the 10,300 lanterns still to be installed.

However there remain an unacceptably high number of outstanding responses to historical lighting enquiries. These will need to be addressed by TfB staff in the first half of 2016/17.

Winter Maintenance

This 2015/16 winter season has been mild when compared to previous years and resulted in a lower than average number of gritting runs being undertaken (approximately 80% of the norm).

A proportion of the existing winter maintenance fleet requires replacement as some vehicles have now reached the end of their operational life. Ringway Jacobs is investing in 5 new gritters to replace the old fleet which will arrive in 2016/17. The remainder will undergo substantial refurbishment prior to the next winter and will ensure the resilience of this service until at least 2023.

A full winter service review will be conducted during the summer of 2016, to verify the service is meeting the County's needs.

Asset Management

The Service continues to build towards the adoption of asset management principles, with the engagement of members, through the successful implementation of the 3 year rolling programme. This will continue into 2017/18.

Changes have been made by the Department for Transport (DfT) to the highway maintenance funding arrangements, which requires Councils to adopt asset management as a core strategy to their highway maintenance programmes. Failure to reach the required standard could result in a substantial reduction in funding (circa £1.7m).

TfB staff, with the support of the TEE and Council governance arrangements, have met the DfT requirements for 2016/17, and therefore the Council will not incur any funding deductions.

This challenge will continue into 2016/17 and will require the adoption of asset principles for all highway assets. TfB staff, with the client team, have an action plan and established a specific project board to ensure progress towards these objectives is being made.

Apprentices

TfB have successfully recruited and retained 6 apprentices during 2015/16, and is the largest number of apprentices employed to date by TfB in single year. This is the result of providing training opportunities in both the conventional on street operations and now office based activities. All of the apprentices live local to Buckinghamshire.

12 Point Improvement Plan - Update

By reference to the 12 point improvement plan that was tabled to the committee in 2014, an update is included in Appendix: 1 attached.