



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.

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Transport, Environment & Climate Change Select Committee – 9 November 2023

Agenda Item 4 – Public Questions

Question One

How are climate change and air quality impacts taken into account in the development and implementation of the Council’s Home to School Transport Policy?

Answer

In the implementation of the Council’s Home to School Transport Policy, the Council’s school transport contracts require suppliers to upgrade towards cleaner vehicles. All vehicles being operated on Council contracted services must meet the following European exhaust emissions standards:

- **Passenger Vehicles** (taxis and minibuses up to and including 16 seats) to meet or exceed Euro 6 emission standards by 1st September 2023.
- **Heavy Duty Vehicles** (buses and coaches – 17 seats and over) to meet or exceed Euro 5 emission standards by 1st September 2023.

The school transport contractual emission requirements dovetail with the [Council’s Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy](#), which states at section 4.12 (Emissions Policy)

“The council considers that every effort should be made to improve the efficiency of vehicles licensed to operate in its area by reducing the emissions of pollutants such as nitrous oxides, particulate matter and carbon dioxide. It is a duty for local authorities to bring down pollution levels, within their areas, to within acceptable limits in the shortest period of time possible. For Buckinghamshire Council licenced vehicles:

- Vehicles first registered since September 2015 must meet or exceed Euro 6 emission standards. From the date of the implementation of this policy, new licences will not be granted to vehicles that were first registered more than 5 years prior to the date that the application was made. All newly licensed vehicles will therefore meet Euro 6 standards.
- Vehicles first registered since January 2011 must meet or exceed Euro 5 emission standards. From the date of the implementation of this policy, licences will not be renewed in respect of any licensed vehicle that was first registered more than 10 years prior to the date of renewal. This applies to the renewal of licences only. All such vehicles will therefore meet Euro 5 standards.

This requirement does not apply to any existing licensed vehicles which are subject to “grandfather rights” in relation to the vehicle age policy.

In order to encourage a greater uptake of ultra-low emission (ULEV) and electric vehicles within the taxi trade, however, zero emissions vehicles will be licensed for a period of up to 15 years of age as opposed 24 to the standard period of up to 10 years of age referred to above. A ULEV is currently defined as having less than 75 grams of CO2 per kilometre (g/km) from the tail pipe.”

It is the aim of the Council that all licensed vehicles will have ultra-low or zero emissions by 2030 and this policy will be kept under review with this target in mind. All vehicles are subject to and must pass the council's testing requirements before a licence is issued.

Further to the above, the Council's [Getting to School Strategy](#) fulfils our duty to produce a Sustainable Modes of Travel Strategy as outlined in the Education Act 1996. This strategy sets out how we will promote the use of sustainable modes of travel to schools, colleges, and other education centres. Buckinghamshire School Travel Plans identify and address congestion, safety, health and environmental issues associated with car use on the school journey. Schools may organise campaigns and projects, run initiatives and events and promote activities to reduce single occupancy car use for the journey. The Strategy is currently being updated and will be published ahead of the start of the 2024-25 academic year.

Question Two

As a Young Expert Citizen appointed by the Centre for Education and Youth, I have conducted research into the issues facing young people who use wheelchairs when using public transport travelling to school and college in Buckinghamshire. This area of study is close to me personally, having experienced issues with getting on and off the bus with my wheelchair when travelling to college in Buckinghamshire. The findings of my research found:

- There is a lack of training for bus drivers in how to assist passengers, given the wide variety of different types of wheelchairs, when getting on and off the bus for school and college. Currently bus drivers struggle to assist wheelchair users through lack of knowledge on how to operate different types of wheelchairs.
- There is no mechanism to warn bus drivers of a change to a regular users' wheelchairs and how this change requires a different approach to assisting the user getting on and off the bus.

My recommendations, based on these findings, are the requirement for more wheelchair training for bus drivers and a new mechanism for regular passengers travelling to school and college, who use wheelchairs, to notify bus drivers of a change to their wheelchair and how the new wheelchair operates. How can the council address the findings from my research?

Answer

Most public transport bus services are commercially operated, but it is now the law that all buses are accessible. The Council doesn't have direct control over these commercial companies and each will have their own policies on the matter of assisting passengers with greater accessibility needs. The Council works with public transport operators who run under contract to us to ensure that the needs of passengers are met and the address any matters or issues that come up during the life of the contract.

As part of our forthcoming Enhanced Partnership, the Council is to commit to work to establish a standard of infrastructure that meets the requirements of all passengers and will also be working with public bus companies to establish a system of recognising passengers with hidden disabilities.

In relation to Council arranged school/college transport, under the Education Act 1996, the Council has a duty to make necessary travel arrangements free of charge to secure suitable home to school travel arrangements for eligible children. Eligibility includes age, distance to school, special educational needs, a disability (SEND) or mobility problems and safe walking routes.

The suitability of the transport arrangements made for young people with SEND who are eligible for travel assistance to school/college is in line with the individual's travel needs assessment, as undertaken by the Client Transport Team. Transport staff who work on Council-contracted home to school/college routes must complete safeguarding, disability awareness and induction training. Transport staff who work on contracts where wheelchair passengers travel must also complete specialist wheelchair training. Drivers and passenger assistants who work on wheelchair accessible vehicles wear specific Council identity badges. Over the last 12 months 268 transport crew members attended specialist wheelchair training courses delivered by the Client Transport Team.

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