

Service Delivery for Highways, Infrastructure Development and Waste: In-Year Briefing

Briefing Paper by the Chief Officer for Highways Infrastructure Development and Waste

1. Summary

This report provides an in-year briefing on service delivery within Highways, Infrastructure Development and Waste.

2. Current Position Statements

2.1 Highways and Traffic Management

As the Committee is updated regularly through the Highways Dashboard reports, the in-year briefing only covers those areas not previously reported this year.

The public rights of way network and the walking/cycling recreational trails have remained open and available for the public to use during lock down and beyond. We have seen a marked increase of the use of these routes, both very local paths and the named routes, (sections of the Exe Estuary Trail show an increase of 153%). We have increased our cutting regimes to assist with social distancing and during the first lockdown phase made sure to work closely with landowners to address their concerns and continue to do so. There has also been an increase in reports from the public reflecting the increased use and also perhaps a new audience/type of user of these networks.

Both of the Country Parks remained open throughout lockdown to enable people to visit and enjoy the environment for health and wellbeing. Grand Western Canal visitor numbers have quadrupled, while Stover has seen a 50% increase. Both have been awarded the nationally recognised Green Flag award again this year. Stover has started the recruitment of its National Lottery Heritage funded team to deliver the project to restore Stover Park to its 18/19th century parkland landscape.

The Materials Laboratory adapted quickly during lockdown and continued to operate testing services such as coring of roads, taking advantage of reduced traffic levels and minimising disruption. The laboratory successfully maintained its UKAS accreditation, a nationally recognised quality approval. This is usually achieved through a series of visits to the laboratory, so it was a challenge to work with the providers to achieve this remotely by the surveillance visit being carried out virtually and supplying videos of the staff undertaking the testing.

In February, Skanska UK announced their intention to withdraw from the highway maintenance, street lighting maintenance and rail maintenance sectors, and that they were starting the process of the Skanska Infrastructure Services divestment, of

which the Devon Highways Term Service Contract is part. The programme for the divestment was set as

- Preferred bidder identified – early Q4 2020
- Sale agreed, subject to novation of contracts – end Q4 2020
- Novation of Contract from Skanska to Buyer – Q1/Q2 2021

It is understood that the programme is still on track.

The Winter Service began on the 15th October, all staff involved have received up to date training to prepare us for the months ahead. All plant connected to the service is operational and has been calibrated. We have upgraded 5 gritters in the fleet and invested in 4 additional tractor towed gritters to increase resilience.

The Roadworks Permitting scheme has now gone live along with Street Manager, the Dft's new software for handling street works administration. The permitting team are currently processing an average of 4000 permits a month, with the scheme currently achieving its self-funding requirement. However, it is proposed that the first review of the scheme is postponed until April 2022, to ensure that we have a more realistic view of "normal" conditions, to enable a proper assessment.

The new Streetlighting contract has been awarded and will run for the next 10 years. Mobilisation has begun with an emphasis on delivering the LED upgrade programme.

The Civil Parking Enforcement Team (CPE) received a Certificate of Recognition in this year's PATROL Parking Annual Reports by Councils (PARC), recognising the team's 2018/19 annual reports. With reduced enforcement during lockdown members of the team assisted in updating the asset inventory register. On easing of lockdown restrictions, the team worked with local communities and the Police to tackle parking issues in areas of concern.

Work has been ongoing to develop a programme which will be available soon, enabling members to get a clearer view of when Traffic Orders can be delivered. During the Covid crisis, the traffic team have administered and assisted communities in providing Emergency Active Travel Fund (EATF) solutions.

We continue to make good progress regarding support for volunteers that want to assist their community. We now have;

- 80 road warden agreements in place (up from 75 in 2019)
- 12 trained in traffic management since November 2019 (total 238 since 2014)
- 57 signed up for the Highway Safety Awareness online course
- 5 parishes have had pothole repair material since November 2019
- 17 bids received so far this financial year for the Highway Maintenance Community Enhancement Fund, approved 13.

With the closure of Lucombe House in September the team has also moved its base successfully to Great Moor House, although staff continue to work from home.

As part of the move, a new Network Operational Control Centre (NOCC) has been built at Great Moor House. The new NOCC has been upgraded and modernised to enable DCC to continue to effectively manage winter and emergency events.

2.2 Infrastructure Development

A new private sector partnership contract commenced on 1st April with a new Consultant, WSP, taking over from Jacobs UK. It was a difficult time leading up to the start of the contract with lockdown commencing, the week before but we are pleased to report we have got off to an excellent start, helped greatly by the WSP senior management team being familiar with working with Devon.

Although in the early part of lockdown and with closures in the supply chain, some sites had to close a few of the larger sites remained operational. Most sites were working by the end of April with adjustments to working practices to keep the sites Covid secure. With the designers working from home the design, tender preparation and evaluation work on schemes continued as normal throughout the lockdown, with some schemes reprogrammed to take account of the lower traffic flows.

Works continue on developing a number of multi-use trails and cycle projects including, Clyst Valley trail, Teign Estuary trail and cycle improvements in Exeter. In addition, the team have been working on schemes under the emergency active travel fund including Russell Way crossing and Ludwell Lane.

Remedial works associated with the February storm (Dennis), have been progressed at various locations around the County, including Austin's Bridge, a new retaining wall East Portlemouth, and design work for the landslip on the Ashburton Road, Bovey Tracey (landslip).

Sherford Main Street, Moor Lane Roundabout, Alma Bridge replacement and the A382 phase 1 sites continued through lockdown, with the first three now completed and the latter due to be completed in the new year.

Design work on the Tiverton Eastern Urban Extension junction (phase 2) and the A382-A383 link is nearly completed with the schemes ready to go out to tender shortly.

Design works continue on other schemes including the future phases of the A382 and works associated with the South West Exeter and Dawlish Housing Infrastructure schemes.

A361 North Devon Link Road between South Molton and Barnstaple has successfully been procured and the contract is waiting to be awarded. The project will include the main line delivery improvements between South Molton and Barnstaple as well as junction improvements and subject to confirmation of funding the scheme is due to commence on site in 2021.

There are currently 66 schemes within the Schools Maintenance Programme of which 44% (29 schemes) have already completed this year. The schools basic need programme has seen the completion of Phase 1 expansion of Cullompton Community College, and initial phases of expansion at Orchard Manor School. In addition, we have expansion projects on-site at Pathfield School and Bidwell Brook Special School that are due to complete later this year or in 21/22 respectively.

Progress on the new Marsh Barton Station has greatly improved and site work should commence in Spring 2021, subject to the granting of planning permission.

2.3 Waste Management

The Waste Management Service has had an eventful and challenging 6 months, but the team has worked hard to maintain operations during the Covid 19 pandemic collaborating closely with district councils, internal teams and other key stakeholders as well as maintaining close links with the Devon public.

The network of 19 Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs) closed from 24th March 2020 for 6 weeks following the Government putting the country into lockdown. During the closure period, site staff and HGV drivers were redeployed where possible and some were utilised by District Councils to keep kerbside waste and recycling services going during periods of severe staff shortages caused by self-isolation etc.

When the HWRCs re-opened, strict social distancing measures were in place and the numbers of public on site at any time were limited. Security staff had to be deployed to enforce a 'one in one out' policy at sites to ensure that they did not become overcrowded. Demand on the sites at this time was unprecedented, given the backlog of waste in people's homes. This, along with reduced capacity at sites, caused significant pressures. Traffic Management personnel had to be deployed at busy sites to limit queuing issues on the Public Highway. Overall, this was an extremely busy and challenging time for the HWRC network, and the sites remained very busy throughout the summer period. Demand now appears to be easing and the sites are returning to some form of normality (albeit with social distancing).

The 2019/20 data has shown an increase in the recycling rate to 56.6% making Devon provisionally the 2nd best recycling county in the country. East Devon has now surpassed the 60% recycling rate at 60.5%. The draft Resource and Waste Management Strategy for Devon and Torbay has been completed and subject to Cabinet agreement will go out to public consultation in the New Year. A key focus of this document is on reducing the carbon impact of the services. Recommendations from work carried out by the University of Exeter and Eunomia Consulting have been included and have contributed to the Devon Climate Emergency work.

Due to the Covid 19 pandemic the behavioural change campaign work over the first six months of this year has been focussed on social media and web-based advice. Nevertheless, this has been very effective and has helped people reduce, reuse and recycle even more during lockdown with recycling quantities at the kerbside up by 12%. Campaigns have been implemented focussing on food waste, home composting and textiles, metals and plastics. An online recipe book <https://www.recycledevon.org/love-food-hate-waste-recipes/Have-your-food-and-eat-it-Recipe-Book.html?page=1> was launched to help people reduce their food waste. Textiles have a significant carbon impact so the team have been promoting the campaign <https://www.recycledevon.org/buy-less-wear-more/>. A new Recycle Devon website has been launched and Facebook followers are up to 12,800.

The Schools Waste Education team has been providing resources for home schooling but are now back in schools working in an outdoor setting. The Recycle Devon Guides Badge is being developed following the success of the Recycle Devon Scouts badge. The Community Action Groups in Devon (CAG Devon) project has advised groups via their new website and social media. An online Skills Share event is planned.

In the final year of the Ecowaste4food project (a 4-year EU funded project aimed at reducing food waste in the supply chain) a “DIY dinner” series of cooking classes were held across Devon prior to lockdown promoting cooking skills and ways to reduce food waste, the participants benefitted from over 1000 hours of tuition in total.

The Devon Reuse Project’s event of the year was the Big Fix 2020 coordinated by Devon’s Reuse Officer whereby 68 Repair Cafes were held simultaneously across the country. This was incredibly successful with 926 volunteer menders, 2278 items fixed and 32 tonnes of CO2 saved. In Devon alone 14 cafes were held, with 203 menders, 580 items fixed and 7 tonnes of CO2 saved.

The Clean Devon Partnership (a county led multi agency approach to litter and fly tipping) now has 25 partners and launched in March with a Duty of Care campaign. A litter campaign is being developed for the Spring. See <https://cleandevon.org/>

3. Budget Update - Revenue Expenditure Highways, Infrastructure Development and Waste

Highways, Infrastructure Development and Waste is overall forecasting a breakeven position.

Waste management is forecasting an underspend of £750,000. The impact on waste tonnages of the Covid-19 lockdown has been mixed but garden waste tonnages have been significantly lower, partly the result of the closure of the household waste recycling centres.

The Highways and Traffic Management and Infrastructure Development services are forecasting an overspend of £750,000 mainly due to increased costs of safety defects, partly as a consequence of the wet winter of 2019/20.

Meg Booth

Chief Officer for Highways, Infrastructure Development and Waste

Electoral Divisions: All

Cabinet Member for Highway Management: Councillor Stuart Hughes

Cabinet Member for Infrastructure Development and Waste: Councillor Andrea Davis

Cabinet Member for Community, Public Health, Transportation and Environmental Services: Councillor Roger Croad

Local Government Act 1972: List of Background Papers

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Background Paper	Date	File Reference
Nil		
Service Delivery for Highways, Infrastructure Development and Waste In Year Briefing - Final		