

Report of the Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Environment and Transport

Introduction

I have been asked to report as follows for Full Council on 16 February 2023:

1. **By Councillor Hannaford** on the year-long trial in Kehelland Village School who had been using vegetable oil to heat its premises. It was asked if similar trials were being considered in Devon schools.
2. **By Councillor Connett** on what action the County Council takes to ensure developers and other operators regularly and properly clean the roads of mud in the area around development works at South West Exeter/Exminster.
3. **By Councillor Hannaford** on the Traffic Commissioner's sanctions and actions with Stagecoach.
4. **By Councillor Hannaford** on the current work being done to look at a potential bus franchising scheme in Devon.
5. **By Councillor Hannaford** on further delays to Marsh Barton Railway Station.
6. **By Councillor Hannaford** on Stagecoach and plans to axe three double decker school buses to St Peters.

Response

1. The use of hydrotreated vegetable oil for heating in schools

Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO) can be used as an alternative to kerosene (oil) heating fuel. Across the Devon maintained school estate there are approximately 70 kerosene-fired heating or hot water appliances. Following a review, it is likely that 95% or more of the existing kerosene-fired plant are suitable for conversion from kerosene to HVO. The conversion from kerosene to HVO is a relatively straight-forward procedure and can be undertaken by most competent oil-fired appliance technicians.

Where the provenance of HVO can be certified as being derived from 100% waste sources then there are strong arguments for a significantly lower carbon emissions fuel than traditional kerosene. However, evaluations of existing HVO liquid fuels in the market have included examples of fuel produced with virgin plant oils such as palm.

Further research would be necessary into the HVO market and local heating oil supply chain prior to promoting any trial for the conversion to HVO heating to the maintained school estate. If it is concluded following further research that Devon schools can access a robust and appropriately certified HVO supply chain as an

alternative to kerosene heating oil, then Devon would promote the opportunity for trialling such an approach to our maintained schools.

2. The cleaning of mud on the roads around development works at South West Exeter/Exminster

The issue of mud on the road was raised with developers and contractors across Devon in a pre-emptive email from officers in November 2022.

They were reminded of legislation on this and what they must do, as follows:

- *Please do everything possible to prevent mud being deposited on the road. This includes cleaning mud from vehicles before they are taken onto the road. The fact that the cleaning of mud off vehicles, machinery and their attachments may be commercially inconvenient is not a defence.*
- *Comply with all Planning Conditions imposed on the site, including the provision of adequate on-site wheel washing equipment be installed as appropriate.*
- *Ensure that labour and equipment is available and is suitable for the soil and weather conditions present. Where a contractor is used, ensure that prior agreement is reached on who is responsible for mud on road issues.*

This was in addition to the inclusion of planning conditions in decision notices. We plan to send reminders to developers and contractors on a regular basis.

At the South West Exeter site officers have raised this issue again at a scheme Co-ordination meeting on 30th January 2023. The developers and contractors were again reminded of their responsibilities, and officers continue to visit the site to ascertain which particular part of the site is causing problems.

3. The Traffic Commissioner's Sanctions and Stagecoach

The Traffic Commissioner for the West of England, Kevin Rooney, published the Outcome of the Stagecoach South West Public Inquiry held on 27 October on 7 November. This is available on line at [Decision for Stagecoach Devon Ltd t/a Stagecoach South West - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/114444/Decision_for_Stagecoach_Devon_Ltd_t_a_Stagecoach_South_West_-_GOV.UK.pdf)

The sanctions were:

- To make an order to the value of £120,000 that the operator provide free travel for all passengers within the Exeter Plus travel zone for the weekends of 10/11 and 17/18 December. These free travel weekends took place
- A statement of intent that the operator will provide, at peak times and for two years, a dedicated member of staff at Exeter Bus Station to maintain displays and to provide advice to passengers, at an estimated cost of £70,000 per year. This resource is now in place.

We are very grateful for the actions taken by the Traffic Commissioner and the sanctions made. We continue to work closely with Stagecoach on improvements in service reliability, but we are not party to any further monitoring of commercial bus services by the Office of the Traffic Commissioner. However, Officers from our Transport Coordination Service report an improved situation on service delivery,

driver shortages and have received positive feedback from the new Managing Director of Stagecoach South West, Peter Knight.

4. Bus Franchising in Devon

While we await the outcome of the Devon Devolution deal, which potentially gives the County Council Franchising powers in the future, no work is currently taking place. Our focus has been on ensuring financial and operational sustainability of the current network. In order to release the County Council's funding allocation through the Government's National Bus Strategy we now have the Enhanced Bus Partnership in place with our local bus companies and a Bus Forum who met on Thursday 9 February 2023. This Forum gives a voice to interested parties, groups and stakeholders in the issues around, and development of, local bus services across the County.

5. Marsh Barton Rail Station

Marsh Barton station was planned to open this Winter; however, this will slip into Spring partly due to delays with the supply of building materials but also due to weather conditions, which can typically affect construction projects during the winter months. Sub-zero temperatures in December prevented concrete plants from opening and continued cold weather into the new year has delayed the tactile paving and retaining wall works, which has had knock-on impacts on the programme. The construction of the station is now substantially complete and the rail industry will soon be carrying out checks as part of the 'entry into service' process which will enable us to fix a date for when trains will begin stopping at Marsh Barton.

6. Removal of School Buses to St Peter's

Stagecoach has been operating services to St Peter's School on a commercial basis for a number of years. They have given the required notice to the Traffic Commissioner to withdraw them from April 2023 due to a steady decline in passenger numbers.

The majority of St Peter's students who use these services are not eligible for free transport to school from the County Council. Officers from our Transport Coordination Service are working with any families and students affected who are entitled to school transport from the County Council to make sure a suitable travel plan is found for them to access St Peter's.

Since 2011 it has been County Council policy to not financially support local bus services where the primary purpose of the service is to transport children who are not entitled to transport through the County Council's Education Transport policy. This would require additional funding which is not available. Officers have established that all children should still be able to use cross city-bus and train services to travel to St Peter's for the correct times. In some cases, this will require a change of bus along the route. They have also been assured by Stagecoach that there is sufficient capacity across the city network to cater for the demand taking into account the lower number of passengers involved.

Councillor Andrea Davis

Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Environment and Transport