

POLICY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES - 18 MAY 2020

Present: Councillor Brock (Chair);
Councillors Page (Vice-Chair), Duveen, Emberson, Ennis, Rowland, Skeats, Stevens, Terry and White

Apologies: Councillors

RESOLVED ITEMS

91. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 27 April 2020 were agreed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chair.

92. PETITIONS AND QUESTIONS

Questions on the following matters were submitted by members of the public:

	<u>Questioner</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Reply</u>
1.	Roger Lightfoot	New Pools	Cllr Brock
2.	Peter Burt	Reducing Traffic and Increasing Sustainable Transport	Cllr Page
3.	Peter Burt	Policy Committee Arrangements	Cllr Brock
4.	Rebecca Curtayne	Adult Social Care	Cllr Brock
5.	Rebecca Curtayne	Health of Reading's Diverse Community	Cllr Hoskin

Questions on the following matters were submitted by Councillors:

	<u>Questioner</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Reply</u>
1.	Cllr White	Domestic Abuse Increase	Cllr Brock
2.	Cllr White	Promoting Walking, Cycling and Road Safety	Cllr Page
3.	Cllr White	Plan to Recovery from the Coronavirus Lockdown	Cllr Page

(The full text of the questions and responses was made available on the Reading Borough Council website).

93. DECISION BOOKS

The Assistant Director of Legal & Democratic Services submitted a report listing the Decision Books that had been published since the previous meeting of the Committee held on 27 April 2020.

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In relation to Decision Book 589, 'One Reading Community Hub - Operating Days Options', Councillor White requested that consideration should be given to keeping the Hub open on Bank Holidays to avoid the facility being closed on two consecutive days.

Resolved -

That Decision Book Nos 592-593 be noted.

94. COVID-19 RESPONSE UPDATE

The Executive Director of Economic Growth & Neighbourhood Services submitted a report updating on the Council's response to the Covid-19 emergency response, following the declaration of a major incident on 20 March 2020 by the Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The report described the Council's emergency response in relation to some of the key issues which had to be addressed, which included:

- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
- Setting up and operating the One Reading Community Hub
- Rough Sleeping
- Workforce
- Testing
- Building capacity into bereavement services and leading on the LRF's Temporary Place of Rest.
- Rebilling Business Ratepayers to take account of reliefs announced, the payment of grants to businesses; and
- Rebilling of Council Tax payers in receipt of the Council's local Council Tax Reduction Scheme to reflect the £150 Hardship Relief announced.

The report also provided an overview of the current legal and financial issues arising from the emergency.

Resolved -

That the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic as set out in the report be noted.

95. REVISION OF HACKNEY CARRIAGE FARES

The Executive Director of Economic Growth & Neighbourhood Services submitted a report on a proposed fare increase, which had been received from the Reading Taxi Association. The Licensing Applications Sub-Committee 3 had considered the proposal at its meeting on 6 February 2020 (Minute 21 refers) and had authorised an increase in hackney carriage fares by means of a decrease in yardage after the flag drop to 133 yards for all daytime fares, subject to no objections being received as a result of advertising the proposed increase in a local newspaper. During the consultation period on the increase an objection was received on the basis of the unhelpfulness of some individual drivers. The objection was not strictly relevant to the issue out for consultation and therefore it was

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recommended that the fare increase should be implemented and the objector be asked to report specific instances of perceived driver unhelpfulness to the Licensing Team for advice. In addition, the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport, Tony Page, said he would be personally raising the substance of the objection with the Reading Taxi trade.

The proposed fare increase was based on a decrease in the yardage for day time fares only. After the flag drop, it was recommended to reduce the current yardage from 145 yards (0-2miles) and 140 yards (over 2miles) to 133 yards for all day time distances, which would equate to an average increase of 3.50%. However, as there was no proposal to reduce the yardage for night time fares, the overall average percentage over day and night fares would equate to an increase of 1.75%. This recommendation was consistent with the decision of the Licensing Applications Sub-Committee 3.

In addition, due to the Coronavirus pandemic the implementation of the fare increase would pose a serious practical difficulty. Officers would have to oversee the replacement of programmable chips in the taxi meters of around 240 cars. This was not feasible in the present circumstances because it would expose staff to unnecessary risks of engaging with a wide range of people and vehicles. It was therefore recommended that given the constraints of current circumstances, the taxi trade would be advised that implementation would only take place when it was safe to do so.

The report had appended the following supporting documentation:

- Appendix I - Current and proposed table of fares
- Appendix II - Letter from the Vice chair Reading Taxi Association
- Appendix III - National fares table
- Appendix IV - Response from RCDA in respect of the proposed fare increase
- Appendix V - Email objection to fare increase
- Appendix VI - Hackney Carriage Vehicle Driver Conditions.

Resolved -

- (1) That the objection to the fare increase, attached as Appendix V to the report, and summarised in paragraph 5.1.4 be deemed not strictly relevant to the consultation on the Hackney Carriage Fares increase on the grounds set out in paragraph 5.2.2 of the report;
- (2) That the Hackney Carriage fare increase be allowed to proceed as previously advertised, that being an increase in hackney carriage fares by means of a decrease in yardage after the flag drop to 133 yards for all daytime fares, however the taxi trade be advised that implementation could only take place when it was safe to do so in the present circumstances because it would expose staff to unnecessary risks of engaging with a wide range of people and vehicles.

96. RE-PROFILING OF £9M CAPITAL INVESTMENT IN HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE

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The Executive Director of Economic Growth & Neighbourhood Services submitted a report providing an update on the £9m capital investment in the Highways Maintenance programme and seeking approval for a reprofiling of the project given the current Covid-19 emergency situation. The report recommended reducing the Contract value of the minor road surfacing in year 1 (2020/21) to £1m with reduction to £0.25m pre-patching and reduced pavements / footways programme to £0.25m, making a total Year 1 value of £1.5m. Consequently, there would be an increase in Years 2 & 3 to £3.75m each year subject to capital funding being available. The implications of the recommendation were summarised as follows:

- the area of surfacing and number of roads & pavements / footways that could be resurfaced would be reduced by approximately 50% but it would provide a manageable programme should Covid 19 restrictions persist to later this year.
- It would still follow the contract tender preparation timescales being worked to for the current planned programme.
- The likelihood of delivering a 50% reduced programme in late Autumn would be more realistic and manageable with any slippage completed early Spring in March 2021.
- This option would also reduce the risk of causing too much traffic disruption by avoiding squeezing a full programme of works into a condensed timeframe.
- The contract programmes would be kept within separate financial years and half of the agreed year 1 investment would still be delivered.
- It should be noted that the current condition of residential (unclassified) roads that were originally included in year 1 would continue to deteriorate reducing the expected improvement in overall road condition.
- A reduced programme may increase the cost per m2 rate thereby reducing the total surfacing area and number of roads than could be resurfaced, which would reduce the expected improvement in road condition.
- The revised programme would provide flexibility should the Council need to review its capital expenditure plans as a result of COVID 19.

Resolved -

That Option 1, as set out in the report at paragraph 5.2 and summarised above, be taken forward which would implement a reduced Year 1 programme of £1.5m, with the balance of £7.5m being delivered over Years 2 & 3 subject to capital funding remaining available.

97. REALLOCATION OF ROAD SPACE - READING'S ACTIVE TRAVEL PROPOSALS

(In accordance with Section 100B (4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972, the Chair had agreed to allow this item to be considered as a matter of urgency to respond promptly to recent Government additional statutory guidance on the reallocation of road space in order to support local authorities to manage their road networks in response to the coronavirus outbreak).

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The Executive Director of Economic Growth & Neighbourhood Services submitted a report seeking scheme and spend approval for a number of highway schemes which would reallocate road space to pedestrian and cycle space in response to the need to support sustainable transport modes during the Coronavirus pandemic. The report explained that the Coronavirus pandemic continued to have a significant impact on how residents and businesses could operate. Social distancing requirements were likely to remain in place to keep people safe for some time. The Government had also advised people to avoid public transport, where possible, as people began to return to work and school. The Council needed to respond swiftly to changing travel demands by increasing active travel opportunities which would increase walking and cycling.

The report stated that whilst the Government had issued guidance and was allocating funding to active travel proposals the details had yet to emerge. The report set out an initial tranche of schemes for implementation including proposals for Gosbrook Road, Reading Bridge and Sidmouth Street. Further smaller and local projects were also being considered with the hope that they could be brought forward for implementation. It was recommended to use the Council's approved Capital Programme funding (for transport projects) to commence initial delivery of these proposed schemes. However, given the limitations of the Capital Programme, additional active travel schemes would need to be funded from the Government's Active Travel fund.

The report explained that the schemes had been prepared to address the key Government guidance in the following sequence - i) short term - reallocating road space to walking and cycling to enable mobility whilst maintaining social distancing and reflecting the necessary restrictions on public transport (both in terms of service frequency and occupancy) (ii) medium-long term - reallocating road space from private transport to public transport and active travel to meet public health, air quality and carbon objectives. Some schemes may achieve both and current circumstances presented a unique opportunity to take them forward.

The Government had stated that these measures could be introduced temporarily, either in isolation or as a combined package of measures. Some interventions, including new lightly-segregated cycle lanes, would not require Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs). Local authorities should monitor and evaluate any temporary measures they installed, with a view to making them permanent, and embedding a long-term shift to active travel as part of the passage from restart to recovery.

Resolved -

(1) That scheme and spend approval be granted for the following short-term projects, as set out in Section 5 of the report:

- **Gosbrook Road;**
- **Sidmouth Street;**
- **Reading Bridge;**
- **Cycle and bus lanes on Oxford Road;**
- **Whitley Street Local Centre;**
- **Southampton Street / Silver Street;**

- Redlands Road;
- (2) That, subject to Government funding as part of the £250m active travel pack being available, the Executive Director for Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services be granted delegated authority for scheme and spend approval, in consultation with the Leader, Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport and the Chair of the Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport Committee, to approve further schemes set out in this report, as follows:

Medium-Term Projects

- Blagrove Street;
- Basingstoke Road;
- London Road;
- 20mph speed limit review;

Long-Term Projects

- Scheme from the Centre to East Reading through a joined-up approach to the provision of sustainable transport facilities on Kings Road and London Road;
 - Enhancements in West Reading including on Bath Road and further opportunities along the Oxford Road to deliver the new sections of bus lane as a part of the agreed corridor study and enhance and complement the current scheme;
 - Opportunities in North Reading, including improved access to Christchurch Bridge alongside walking and cycling enhancements in Caversham local centre and on Caversham Bridge;
 - Progression of measures in South Reading including on Basingstoke Road as referenced above, Shinfield Road and the A33 public transport scheme;
 - Enhancements to walking and cycling routes to/from and through the town centre alongside improving the quality of the urban realm;
- (3) That a further report be submitted to a future Traffic Management Sub-Committee or Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport Committee on additional active travel initiatives in due course noting the criteria set out in this report;
- (4) That, a further report be submitted to Policy Committee on the funding of these schemes, grant applications and possible amendments to the Capital Programme as soon as further details from Government had been published;

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- (5) That the Executive Director of Economic Growth & Neighbourhoods and other appropriate officers be authorised to bid for all funding opportunities in order to support this initiative.**

(The meeting started at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.30 pm)