

30 July 2014		ITEM: 6
Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Local Highways Infrastructure (including public transport)		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: No	
Report of: Ann Osola, Head of Transportation & Highways		
Accountable Head of Service: Ann Osola, Head of Transportation & Highways		
Accountable Director: David Bull, Director of Planning & Transportation		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

As a Unitary Borough, Thurrock Council is responsible for maintaining local highways infrastructure such as roads, footpaths, street lights, signs, traffic lights, bollards and gullies. It is also responsible for trying to ensure that all communities across the Borough retain a basic public transport service, and remain accessible for people who do not have the use of private cars. In recent years, the amount of money available to spend on discharging these responsibilities has reduced and will continue to reduce further, as set out in the budget paper set to be discussed later in this meeting. This report sets out the actions being taken by the Transportation & Highways Team to ensure that we get the best possible value from the money we have available to spend, and, as far as possible within budget constraints, retain accessibility for local communities. In times of reduced budgets, clear priority setting is essential, and the input of Planning, Transportation & Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee is sought in establishing these priorities.

1. Recommendation(s)

That the Committee:

- 1.1 Supports ongoing work to improve value for money in relation to local highways infrastructure maintenance and support for local bus services.**
- 1.2 Agrees to participate in the stakeholder activities which will be organised during the autumn to agree a way forward on how we make the best use of the resources we have for the benefit of communities in Thurrock.**

2. Introduction and Background

Local Highways Infrastructure

- 2.1 Local highways infrastructure is the term used for the roads, footways, crossings, street lights, traffic lights, signs, bollards and gullies which the Council maintains for the safety and amenity of local communities, businesses and visitors. It is one of the few Council services which has a direct impact on almost everyone in the Borough, from parents with pushchairs, through to businesses relying on deliveries, to commuters relying on cars to get them to work.
- 2.2 The Council is responsible for maintaining:
- 560km of carriageway
 - 1000km of footway
 - 133 structures
 - 168 roundabouts
 - 50 traffic signals
 - 1,750 lighting columns
 - 3,500 illuminated signs
 - 1,500 illuminated bollards
 - 30,000 signs and
 - 20,000 gullies
- 2.3 Current budget savings proposals are £250K efficiency savings by 2017, delivered through more targeted investment, less fire-fighting and more streamlined supply chains.

Public Transport

- 2.4 Thurrock Council oversees bus services running in the Borough, and has a responsibility for seeking to ensure that, as far as possible, communities can access basic amenities such as schools, jobs, health care and larger town centres without relying on access to private cars.
- 2.5 Where there is a need for a bus service, but providing the service is not commercially viable for operators, the Council can provide subsidies to ensure that residents in isolated areas have basic provision. There are two types of subsidy:
- Services such as the 11, 374 and 201 which are fully funded by the Council, and
 - De Minimus payments where operators receive smaller payments to arrange commercial services such that they make diversions, operate later in to the evening or at weekends, in ways which provide basic amenity to local people, but which would not be commercially viable. Department for Transport guidelines state that, for Authorities such as Thurrock, where the annual bus subsidy budget is less than £600,000 per

year, no operator can be paid more than £29,999 per route for a de minimus payment per year.

- 2.6 In 2014/15, Thurrock spent £585K on bus subsidies, of which £190K came from the Transportation & Highways Service Budget. This budget is set to be reduced to zero in 2016/17.
- 2.7 Appendix A shows the Thurrock Public Transport Map, which illustrates the current level of provision.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

Local Highways Infrastructure

- 3.1 In recent years, Thurrock, like all Local Highway Authorities, has faced dwindling maintenance budgets, and has struggled to invest in a way which maintains the condition and value of its Highways Asset. As road conditions deteriorated and complaints/service requests rose, Thurrock has spent more and more of its maintenance allocation on reactive maintenance, leaving less money to spend on strategic interventions and approaches which would prolong the life of the assets and allow the service to be delivered more efficiently. Top up funds from Government have provided additional investment, but have not allowed Thurrock to break out of a culture of short-termism.
- 3.2 The Department for Transport has recognised that Local Highway Authorities are being asked to do more with less, and have funded a programme (the Highways Maintenance Efficiency Programme) to provide advice and resource to help them do this. In the coming months, Thurrock will be working with this Programme with the aim of delivering a better highways maintenance service at reduced cost for the people of Thurrock.
- 3.3 Key areas of work will be:
- Making better use of information technology to improve our understanding of the overall condition of our highways assets, and sharing this information with local communities
 - Linking in with the next phase of development for Thurrock on line so that service requests can be made and tracked through the Council website
 - Working with both existing and potential delivery partners to develop better and more cost-effective ways of delivering work
 - Taking a more strategic view of 'whole life asset management', and developing pro-active programmes in the knowledge that intervening at the right time will prevent bigger problems later on
 - Sharing more information online, so that people know the work programme and when it will be delivered, and also the principles we are applying in deciding how money will be spent.

- Converting our illuminated street furniture to low emission diode (LED) operation to reduce energy bills and reduce our carbon footprint.
- 3.4 Work has already begun to deliver this programme. Stakeholder engagement on detailed proposals is due to take place late autumn 2014. A detailed proposal is being developed which allows up front capital investment in highways assets which will generate revenue budget savings in future years. This will be brought to Planning, Transportation & Regeneration Scrutiny in September.
- 3.5 Planning, Transportation and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Members are further invited to be involved in a Local Government Association Strategic review of Highways Maintenance in Thurrock, which is scheduled for later in the autumn. This will provide Peer Challenge to refine the delivery programme and possibly identify further areas for savings.

Public Transport

- 3.6 As the Council is faced with increasing pressures on its revenue budgets, it becomes increasingly difficult to afford to subsidise bus services. However, for non-car drivers, bus services play a vital role in giving access to basic amenities. In the coming months, discussions will take place with bus operators, Council Directorates such as Adults, Health & Commissioning, and Housing, and with major employers across the Borough to explore new ways of retaining basic services within increased budget constraints. As proposals are developed, we would propose to bring these back to Planning, Transportation & Regeneration Scrutiny Committee for consideration.

Conclusions and Next Steps

- 3.7 The Council's Transportation & Highways is committed to delivering the best possible services for the people of Thurrock with limited and shrinking budgets. It seeks the support of PTR O & S for the programmes of work outlined above and the active involvement of Committee Members in the development of detailed proposals for implementation.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 It is believed that the objectives set out above are shared by all political parties in the Borough and PTR O & S Committee provides the opportunity to engage in developing a shared and agreed way forward.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 This report is being brought to Overview and Scrutiny at the start of the project development and engagement process. Once developed, detailed proposals will be the subject of formal consultation.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 6.1 Ensuring physical access to jobs, education, healthcare and other local amenities contributes to a positive sense of place and community. It also supports the Council objectives of creating a great place for learning and opportunity, encouraging and promoting job creation and economic prosperity, and protecting and promoting our clean and green environment.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Mike Jones**
Management Accountant

There are no financial implications of the current report. Further financial assessment will be undertaken once detailed proposals have been developed.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Fiona Taylor**
Head of Legal and Democratic Services

There are no legal implications as a result of this report, however, any implications of specific savings proposals will be set out in future business cases to inform consultation and final decision making.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Price**
Community Development Officer

Changes to access and amenity have the potential to impact upon our communities, particularly those that are vulnerable. To mitigate the risk of negative outcomes, individual Equality Impact Assessments will be undertaken from the development stage for each new proposal.

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

There are no other significant implications of this report.

8. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

None

9. **Appendices to the report**

- Appendix 1 – Thurrock Public Transport Map

Report Author:

Ann Osola

Head of Transportation & Highways

Transportation & Highways