

TRAFFIC, ENVIRONMENT & COMMUNITY SAFETY SCRUTINY PANEL

Minutes of the meeting of the Traffic, Environment & Community Safety Scrutiny Panel held on Wednesday, 12 February 2020 at 4pm at the Civic Offices, Portsmouth

Present

Councillor Simon Boshier (in the Chair)
Chris Attwell
Jo Hooper
Robert New

21. **Apologies for Absence. (AI 1)**
Apologies were received from Councillor Judith Smyth.
22. **Declarations of Members' Interests (AI 2)**
No interests were declared.
23. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting. (AI 3)**
RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 4 October be agreed as a correct record.
24. **Review into the accessibility of the transport network. (AI 4)**
Michelle Love, Safer Travel Manager gave an overview of the **Home to School Transport service:**

The Home to School Transport Service budget is held by the Education department which is also responsible for determining who is eligible. £1.9m is allocated but it often overspends. It is currently overspent by £300,000. The Education Act 1980 requires that a degree of separation between this department and the service provider.

Approximately 654 children have a statutory entitlement to this service because of physical, emotional or mental health needs which prevent them from travelling to school without assistance. The pupils travel primarily by taxi and some by minibus.

A survey of disabled young service users indicated that most would like to be able to travel independently. The **Independent Travel Training** aims to give them their independence and to streamline the budget.

The Road Safety team monitors casualty rates and try to keep them as low as possible.

The aim is to also offer this training to pupils who attend mainstream schools. However, the Academy Trust has declined the offer as they feel that the council should provide secure transport.

The team is currently talking with the Harbour School which is just outside of the island about the possibility of providing pupils from the city with Park &

Ride bus passes because they will be on buses that are fairly quiet as commuters will be going in the opposite direction.

There is an expectation that the young people upon leaving school will seek work so independent travel for those who can is important.

The bus companies provide training at schools on how to buy tickets, read a timetable etc.

In response to questions from the panel, the following points were clarified:

- It is important to involve the pupils' parents so that they can be confident their children are ready to travel independently.
- If children are having a bad day there can be violent incidents between pupils, directed against their travelling companion or staff. There are approximately 86 individual taxi journeys a week and on average 3 violent incidents are reported.
- Providing more taxi journeys is not compatible with the council's other agendas e.g. the climate emergency and improving air quality.
- 10-15% of the 654 children who use the home to school transport scheme travel do not travel with other pupils. The children have increasingly complex needs. Many are ill-equipped to sit on a minibus with other pupils.
- Road safety education has always been provided to primary mainstream pupils. The education provided to special school pupils is 1:1 and more intensive.
- Passenger assistants are employed by the council to accompany pupils to and from school.
- The Independent Travel Training was set up six months ago so post-training evaluation is not yet available. Success is measured mostly anecdotally.
- Casualty figures are reported to Governance and Audit.
- Clifdale School takes pupils until the age of 11, Redwood School from 11 and the Mary Rose School from 5 to 19.
- The lines of communication with the Academy Trust will be kept open as much as possible regarding independent travel training for their pupils. However, it is Education's responsibility as the overseer and commissioner of the service. That department is taking a harder line now, keeping pupils at schools so the pupils leave at the same time and there are fewer journeys.

Members' comments

Historically schools were more mixed and it was great. New school builds should be more accessible and inclusive. It is important that people are able to go about their day to day lives with as few obstacles as possible.

Buses

Gina Perryman, Access & Equality Advisor reported that disabled people have reported that there have been incidents reported where drivers have:

- Not stopped at the bus stop where they had been waiting.
- Refused to put the ramp down.

- Not been polite.
 - Not told blind people when the bus is approaching their stop,
 - Refused to allow wheelchair users on to the bus even when there are no other wheelchair users or people with buggies on the bus.
 - Put the ramp down very noisily on purpose and scared a guide dog.
- There are more complaints about First Bus drivers than Stagecoach.

Drivers tell parents with buggies and pushchairs to fold them up when a wheelchair user gets on the bus.

Felicity Tidbury, Acting Assistant Director informed the panel that:

- She regularly meets the Managing Director of First Bus and finds the company very proactive.
- The bus operators report all delays to the Traffic Commissioner. The buses are not allowed to leave a stop early or be 10 minutes late. For every minute after 10 minutes, they are fined.
- The real time information on the display at stops comes from the ticket machines. Visually impaired people can use key fobs to access the audio arrivals information.

Members' Comments

The bus operators are judged by the Traffic Commissioner by their adherence to the timetables. Whereas, passengers go by the live arrivals board. The seating configuration on buses could be more flexible to create more space when needed with seats on the side that flip up when not in use.

Electric buses would not be able to travel on one charge from Havant to South Parade.

If there is already a bus at a stop, the second one pulling in behind should wait to stop at the dropped kerb.

Michelle Love gave an overview of the **Routes4U app** that was launched in April 2019:

Users enter their starting point and destination to see the most accessible route. They can report any obstacles they encounter on the route so the council will investigate.

One option for the future to reduce the amount of traffic in the city would be to set up a freight hub outside the city and have eco bikes transports around.

Members briefly discussed incidents in their areas including damage to pavements caused by cars parked on paths, potholes and obstacles.

Michelle Love explained that near miss reporting app for pedestrians similar to the cycling one would be developed shortly.

In response to a question from members, she explained that the Routes4U app would probably need a further publicity push. Members suggested that

an advert for it could be displayed on the information boards at the Hard Interchange.

Taxis

Gina Perryman gave an overview of the feedback she had received from disabled people with regard to taxis:

- It is very difficult for wheelchair users to get a taxi during the school run times because they are all used for the Home to School Transport Service.
- Uber does not have any wheelchair accessible taxis.
- Some 7 seater taxi drivers refuse to take wheelchair users in the evening because they would possibly miss out on fares with multiple drop offs.
- The taxi rank in Gunwharf is not accessible.

In response to questions, Felicity Tidbury explained that:

86 of the 234 licensed hackney carriages are wheelchair accessible and 32 of the 962 of the licensed public hire vehicles i.e. 118 out of 1,196 vehicles.

Aqua is the only taxi company in Portsmouth apart from Uber.

Taxis cannot always park next to a dropped kerb that would make it easier for a disabled person to get out.

Trains

Gina Perryman explained that wheelchair users must book journeys 24 hours in advance if they will require assistance. If their train does not have a guard and there is no staff at the destination station, they are obliged to get off at the next manned station. The train company will pay for them to take a taxi back to the station where they wanted to alight.

Councillor Robert New left the meeting.

Crossings.

Gina Perryman explained that people who have a weak side sometimes have to turn completely around in order to press the buttons at crossings because these are only located on one side. When the crossings are staggered, often the button is on a plinth and therefore out of reach for wheelchair users who have to wait for someone to arrive to press it for them. Visually impaired people use the cones under the buttons to identify when the lights change; sometimes these do not work.

Wheelchair users find it difficult to cross **textile paving** as it is uncomfortable to cross but they recognise that this does potentially save the lives of visually impaired people. Removing **kerbs** can cause difficulties for people who use sticks to identify kerbs and for blind people as guide dogs are trained to stop at vertical edges.

Michael McLaughlin, Highways PFI Commercial Manager added that the raised bumps line up to give visually impaired people a sense of direction. Upstanding on kerbs is required to keep pooling rainwater off the pavement.

Felicity Tidbury explained that the buttons at crossing are positioned on one side to encourage people to look at oncoming traffic and see when it stops.

Pavements.

Gina Perryman explained that amenities on pavements can be a hazard to people with reduced mobility and or vision.

Members expressed concern with the area on Isambard Brunel Road where pedestrians often think they have the right of way particularly because the road is narrower there, one line of traffic stops to give way to ongoing vehicles and the crossing point is a different colour. Vehicles coming from Commercial Road

May not be able to see the pedestrians at the kerb particularly wheelchair users.

Felicity Tidbury explained that the ambiguity works well as a traffic calming measure; drivers slow down as they are unsure of what they will encounter after the bend in the road.

Michael McLaughlin asked the panel to note the following points:

Trees

The council has pledged to plant 80,000 trees; 50,000 of these will probably be in the new Country Park. It is important to consider the following issues before new trees are planted:

- The species in terms of bark width, the height, whether it is fruiting.
- The right location - proximity to houses, pavement width.
- The soil characteristics.

Some people requested that trees be removed simply because they wanted to install a dropped kerb.

Sometimes tree roots can lift the pavement. Root containment systems can be used to direct the roots downwards as roots underneath and along can cause problems. These can cost as much as the tree: £750,000.

Roadworks

Later this year the council will become a permit authority rather than a licensing authority following an instruction by the Secretary of State. This is a mechanism to coordinate and monitor roadworks activities on the public highway in order to minimise their impact on highway users.

Utility companies have the right of access to maintain their assets.

The council receives 3,416 applications for roadworks per year for 12,434 working days under section 65 Code of Practice guide in the new Roads and Streets Act. The code stipulates that there must be a degree of separation between the works, traffic and pedestrians. The emphasis is on the safety of pedestrians with an alternative route with a minimum of 1m width of footway.

In response to questions from the panel, he explained that:

Colas has delegated enforcement powers and inspects 10% of each category of works (A, B & C). The number inspected is probably not adequate. Colas can issue fines for noncompliance. The fining system is a not for profit.

Colas: works with Hampshire County Council and Southampton City Council to compare inspection results, identify trends and also to carry out inspections for each other.

There are 12 statutory utility companies active in the city plus sub-contractors and sometimes their sub-contractors. They have the right of access to maintain their assets.

The council is usually given two weeks' notice for works unless it's an emergency.

ACTIONS

Include questions on experiences of public transport and wheelchair accessible taxis in the survey that is due to be launched in July.

The following information be brought to the next meeting:

- The number of wheelchair users who use the home to school transport service.
- Details of how Colas selects the 10% of works in each category to be inspected.

The transport service informs Julie Duffy of any road/ traffic works that are coming up so notice of these can be included in the audio newsletter.

Councillor Simon Boshier
Chair