

Minutes of a meeting of the Highways and Transport Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
held at County Hall, Glenfield on Thursday, 5 June 2025.

PRESENT

Mr. B. Piper CC (in the Chair)

Dr. J. Bloxham CC
Mr. S. Bradshaw CC
Mr. G. Cooke CC
Mr. N. Holt CC
Mr. B. Lovegrove CC
Mr. J. McDonald CC

Mr. P. Morris CC
Mr. M. T. Mullaney CC
Mr. O. O'Shea JP CC
Mr. D. Page CC
Mr. B. Walker CC

In Attendance

Mr. C. Whitford CC – Cabinet Lead Member for Highways, Transport and Waste
Mr. A. Tilbury CC – Cabinet Lead Member for Environment and Flooding

1. Appointment of Chairman.

RESOLVED:

That Mr. B. Piper CC be appointed Chairman for the period ending with the date of the Annual Meeting of the County Council in 2026.

Mr. B. Piper CC in the Chair

1. Appointment of Vice Chairman.

RESOLVED:

That Mr. P. Morris CC be elected Deputy Chairman for the period ending with the date of the Annual Meeting of the County Council in 2026.

3. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 March 2025 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

4. Question Time.

The Chief Executive reported that two questions had been received under Standing Order 35.

1. Question asked by Mr. Adam Stares:

In the Highways & Transport Grown & Savings section of the current MTFS (Appendix B, point 44 of this Committee's January meeting) there is a proposal to cut spending on bus

subsidies marked as a “Service Reduction” to save £400,000 each year from 2026/27.

Is the Council still committed to this upcoming spending cut which it has described as a “service reduction” and what does it expect that the impact will be on service users from 2026/27?

[http://cexmodgov01/documents/s187653/MEDIUM%20TERM%20FINANCIAL%20STRATEGY%20202526%20202829.pdf?\\$LO\\$=1](http://cexmodgov01/documents/s187653/MEDIUM%20TERM%20FINANCIAL%20STRATEGY%20202526%20202829.pdf?LO=1)

Reply by the Chairman:

The £400,000 savings requirement to ‘review the application of the subsidised bus policy, post Covid’, was included in the MTFS prior to award of one-off central government funding for 2025/26 for bus services (Bus Grant). Whilst government funding remains in place, budgets will continue to be maintained at pre-grant award levels, with any inflation increases being met by grant funding. As things stand, we currently have a one-year Bus Grant allocation for 2025/26 from the Department for Transport of £8.1m (split between £5.0m revenue and £3.1m capital). No further funding has been announced for future years at this stage.

In terms of impacts on bus users, should there be no further grant funding then savings will be required and proposals to reduce bus services paid for by the County Council would be developed and engagement with the community on those proposals would take place. Community feedback and any changes proposed would be considered by cabinet for approval before any saving is implemented. It may be helpful to note that the County Council’s Medium Term Financial strategy is reviewed annually.

In the meantime, aided by the one off ‘Bus Grant’ funding, the Council is well underway with a comprehensive passenger transport network review to create more travel opportunities for Leicestershire residents in line with its Passenger Transport Policy and Strategy. Full details of the phases of this review and new, amended and improved services including new app based demand responsive transport Foxconnect services are available on the Council’s website here: <https://www.choosehowyoumove.co.uk/public-transport/get-around-by-bus/leicestershire-buses/leicestershire-network-review/> Details of the new services that have been launched this week in the Charnwood, Harborough and South West Leicestershire areas are also available on the website.

Mr. Stares asked the following supplementary question:

“Firstly, thank you for providing the response to my question. It is good to hear that there is grant funding available for this financial year but could I clarify with my question that without the grant the County Council will not be able to maintain the service in the next financial year and if there is a time table for when we might know if there is a grant and what that process of community engagement will look like and then in that engagement process will it be about whether to make those cuts or will it be about which services to cut or not.”

At the invitation of the Chairman, the Director of Environment and Transport stated that the grant came from the Department for Transport (DfT) and its current policy was very supportive of buses which was reflected in this element of funding. However, the funding had only been confirmed for the current financial year and whilst the DfT had indicated that its policy would not change and it was intended that this grant would continue, this was yet to be confirmed through the Government’s spending review.

In response to whether services would need to be cut, if the grant funding did not

continue then, it was noted this was a possibility. The Council's base budgets would not cover the cost of these services. The Director highlighted that the money allocated was significant, more than the County Council's base budgets had been for many years.

The Director advised that the County Council reviewed its MTFS annually, and the Department would, as part of this process if the funding ceased, consider its budgets, along with each community's needs taking account of alternative public transport available, and consult with the public on any proposed changes.

The Director stated that the Department was hopeful the grant funding would continue as it was an extensive task to procure a bus service, and the Council sought to continue these over a long period to achieve best value for money. It was hoped that there would be an announcement of multi-year funding settlements this year to enable the Department to make such long-term plans.

2. Question asked by Ms. Rachael Wigginton:

"I would like to ask the following question on behalf of the Leicestershire Active Travel Alliance, the Leicestershire arm of the UK's Active Travel Alliance, a national campaigning group to increase investment in active travel for healthier lives and safer, quieter streets.

My question is as follows:

Resident frustration is growing around the significant increase in the volume of traffic and streets completely dominated and overwhelmed by vehicles parked on every spare inch of public space in their local communities. This is massively impacting health and wellbeing. A key part of the solution is increasing the focus and investment in the alternative quieter healthier forms of transport specifically safe cycling routes to local schools, shops and stations/transport hubs.

Leicestershire County Council has received a significant amount of money from Active Travel England to be spent on active travel schemes. Will the Oadby cyclops scheme that was consulted on last year now go ahead? If not, why not and what will happen to the funding? We are concerned that the council will be deemed to lack ambition, as has happened in the past, and will not secure the funding that is likely to be available in the future for Leicestershire."

Reply by the Chairman:

The Council remains committed to delivering high-quality active travel infrastructure that supports healthier, safer, and more sustainable transport choices.

The public engagement for the proposed CYCLOPS scheme at The Parade, Oadby, highlighted a number of issues including concerns around the one-way circulatory layout not aligning with cyclists' natural desire lines, potentially leading to a risk of conflict between different users of the junction. The Council is considering these concerns and discussing options for a way forward with Active Travel England.

The details of the concerns raised during the consultation along with recommended way forward will be fully considered via Council's democratic process. Subject to the outcome, any revisions to the scheme recommended following discussion with ATE, will be subject to further public engagement.

The Council continues to be mindful of the importance of demonstrating ambition and capability in order to maintain future eligibility for external funding, including from Active Travel England.

The Chairman advised that Ms. Wigginton was not in attendance and had not raised any supplementary questions.

The Chairman thanked Mr. Stares and Ms. Wigginton for their questions.

5. Questions asked by members.

The Chief Executive reported that no questions had been received under Standing Order 7(3) and 7(5).

6. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

7. Declarations of interest.

The Chairman invited Members who wished to do so to declare any interest in respect of items on the agenda for the meeting.

Mr. J. McDonald CC declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in agenda item 10 (Home to School Transport Annual Report 2024/25 and Key Priorities for 2025/26) as he held contracts with the County Council to provide bus services to school children. He undertook not to participate in the discussions on this item.

8. Declarations of the Party Whip.

There were no declarations of the party whip.

9. Presentation of Petitions.

The Chief Executive reported that no petitions had been received under Standing Order 36.

10. Home to School Transport Annual Report 2024/2025 and Key Priorities for 2025/2026.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Environment and Transport, the purpose of which was to provide an update on Home to School Transport 2024/25 and Key Priorities for 2025/26. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 10' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were made:

- (i) Members acknowledged the challenges faced by the Service and commended the Department for the transformation work undertaken over the years. Members also recognised the level of effort that went into the delivery of the service and shared their appreciation with the team.
- (ii) Members expressed concerns regarding the continued rise in demand for Special Educational Needs (SEN) Transport. It was noted that there was close work with the Children's and Families Department to understand the level of growth which was not slowing down. Growth was, however, forecast and built into the budget

and ongoing work with commercial operators was in place to help manage this. Indicators from the Department for Education (DfE) suggested that a change in legislation could potentially stem the growth.

(iii) In response to a Member's query regarding eligibility for home to school transport it was noted that the Authority provided what was required by legislation, however it did have some discretion to determine locally how best to deliver this. As a statutory service it had to meet demand and so in previous years there had been an overspend due to a rise in the cost of transport as well as increasing demand for home to school transport. A growth bid had been submitted and there was now greater confidence that going forward the service would be able to deliver within budget.

(iv) It was highlighted that mainstream school transport numbers although not guaranteed were stable and less volatile with bus operators bidding for contracts. SEN transport was costing more due to various factors including the need for specialist provision to meet individual needs which could result in solo transport having to be provided, where service users were being allocated a school place which could be some distance from their home, and the need for medically trained support professionals.

It was acknowledged that there were late applications for SEN transport which limited the ability for the service to plan for this in advance, often resulting in less efficient and cost effective transport options being used. This was unavoidable in such circumstances as the Authority had a statutory duty to provide the transport.

RESOLVED:

That the report on the Home to School Transport Annual Report 2024/2025 and Key Priorities for 2025/2026 be noted.

11. Flood Risk Management.

The Committee considered a presentation by the Director of Environment and Transport, which provided an update on ongoing Flood Risk Management activity and work undertaken to focus on flood preparedness, response and recovery. A copy of the presentation marked 'Agenda Item 11' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from the discussion, the following points were made:

- (i) Members recognised that conducting flood exercises and building flood resilience would be critical for the future and commended the Department for the ongoing awareness work undertaken including planned information drop-in sessions which the public could attend.
- (ii) It was highlighted that there were a number of factors that could cause flooding, and a blocked gully was only one possibility. There were over 130,000 local gully assets which were part of a complex system which the County Council had responsibility for maintaining to minimise risks of flooding. The authority's previous gully cleansing cycle operated under a standard schedule. That this had been reviewed to prioritise those gullies that needed clearing more frequently, using data collected from a range of sources which helped provide for a more efficient targeted approach. At the request of a Member, the Director undertook to provide more information regarding the Council's gully cleaning cycles.

- (iii) Members raised concerns regarding the impact of development proposals within district council local plans and whether ongoing Section 19 investigations in previously effected areas had to be completed before proceeding with those plans. It was noted that these were separate processes, and there was no requirement for a Section 19 investigation to be completed before a development plan could be progressed. It was suggested that the available evidence and data should, however, inform the development of a district council local plan and that the County Council when consulted as the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) and Highways Authority would also feed into that process based on the most up to date information it had available.
- (iv) A Member raised specific concerns about Harborough District Council's Local Plan proposals and the increased risk this could pose to flooding in the area. The Director reported that as a consultee, the Council as the LLFA was considering taking a policy position in the Local Plan that would require improvement to address flood risk. The statutory minimum requirement was that a development should cause no detriment in the situation prior to that development.
- (v) It was highlighted that if there were findings from a Section 19 investigation relevant to a local plan, then there was scope for interim action to be taken rather than having to wait for the investigation to be completed. Funding any remediation works would vary depending on the source of the problem and ownership of the land concerned. As part of the planning process, the County Council would be consulted and would comment depending on the differing needs and circumstances for different areas.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the presentation on Flood Risk Management be noted;
- (b) That the Director of Environment and Transport be requested to provide more information on the Council's gully cleaning regime.

12. Draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2025-2035.

The Committee considered a presentation by the Director of Environment and Transport, which provided an update on the development of the Council's draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan for 2025-2035. The report sought the Committee's views on the Plan and the actions identified, as part of the public consultation process to manage and improve Leicestershire's rights of way network for its current and future users. A copy of the presentation marked 'Agenda Item 12' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from the discussion, the following points were made:

- (i) It was highlighted that, of those that said they used the rights of way network, over 85% said this was for health and fitness purposes. Members suggested that the Authority should be encouraging local residents to make use of this resource.
- (ii) It was noted that the Local Transport Fund had been allocated for one year and would deliver some of the maintenance work required on the network. Although a very small budget, this was considered a local priority and a shared asset. It was recognised that local people were keen on supporting this based on the noticeable improvement work already carried out so far.

- (iii) Members supported the idea of community activities being held to support the delivery of improvement plans. It was suggested that there were communities within rural areas that would and could support these initiatives. However, it was also noted that this was a complex situation, the Council having legal duties and only a small budget which would not support the entire network.
- (iv) It was noted that, as with cutting grass verges, the Authority, would always provide the core service to keep rights of way accessible. However, there were communities that had the capacity to maintain these over and above what the Council was able to provide. The Director emphasised that there were practical constraints on what the Council could enable and encourage the public to do.
- (v) A Member suggested that maintenance of the rights of way network could be delivered by those sentenced to community service orders and that this might be a better use of their time. It was suggested that this option could be explored but that this would come with associated costs.
- (vi) Members acknowledged the importance of maintaining historic footpaths across the County but raised concerns about the increase in byways open to all traffic which were being abused and left impassable. It was suggested that this was due to the behaviours of some and although there were sensitive issues and strong feelings by different parties, the overall impact on the Highways Authority responsible for maintaining the byways was becoming problematic.
- (vii) Members shared their frustrations with signage being left behind upon the completion of road work carried out in the highway, noting that this often ended up in hedge rows and waterways. It was noted that the Council shared in residents' frustrations and the Director highlighted the difficulties faced by the Council in being able to address this. It was noted that companies carrying out works on the highway now used multiple contractors each carrying out specific works and who were responsible for putting up and taking down all signage. The Authority could seek to encourage the behaviour of companies to act on this more quickly and the Director asked that any signage left behind after completed works be reported to the Department.

RESOLVED:

- a. That the report on the Draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan be noted;
- b. That the comments made by the Committee be considered as part of the consultation process and presented to the Cabinet for consideration in due course;
- c. That the Director of Environment and Transport be requested to investigate concerns raised by a Member regarding the footpath running alongside Gartree prison which was severely overgrown.

13. Date of next meeting.

RESOLVED:

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on 4 September 2025 at 2.00pm.

2.00pm – 3.46pm
05 June 2025

CHAIRMAN