

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR COMMUNITIES

COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT AND LEISURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

20 OCTOBER 2016

HIGHWAY SERVICES REVIEW

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise Scrutiny Members of the impact of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy on Highway Services.

2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Plan/ Other Priorities

- 2.1 The report supports the Council's corporate priority of making smarter use of resources.

3. Background

- 3.1 Over past several years the Council has been introducing measures to reduce its revenue spending in line with reductions in its settlement from Welsh Government.
- 3.2 Between 2011/12 and 2015/16 there has been an ongoing programme of financial savings implemented by the Council to meet reductions in public funding which to date have meant a reduction in the Highways and Transportation services budget in the order of £2.5 million over this time period. Amongst these savings have been measures that have seen a reduction in staff and service levels, at varying levels, to meet advised savings in the following sections.

Traffic and Transportation:

- Highway Development Control
- Road Safety
- Public Transport
- Road Safety and SCP
- Client and Business (Parking)
- Traffic Management

Rights of Way:

- Maintenance of Rights of Way Network
- Enforcement of Rights of Way Network
- Determination of Modification Orders

Network Management:

- Winter Maintenance
- Highway Maintenance

- Asset management
- Invasive species and Weed control

Direct Labour Organisation (DLO):

- Hazzarding (overgrowth, sign, maintenance)
- Street Lighting (part-nighting, dimming, energy)
- Winter Maintenance (gritter reduction)
- Sign Maintenance
- Pot Holes repair times

3.3 The impact of the reductions to both staff and service levels varies subject to the specific level of financial saving and to the viewpoint of the recipient of the service who may be either internal or external to the authority.

Whilst the majority of services specified are statutory provision the exact level of service or standard is not usually specified within the statute and based around sector guidance as to service delivery. Where the function is not statutory such as school crossing patrols, these are for individual authorities to determine if they wish to support such provision and determine the service level to be provided.

Reduction in staffing has meant that teams are more reliant upon individual officers, with the requisite knowledge and experience to deal with specific requests for service. The implication of this is in the event of the officers not being in work through leave, sickness or other commitments then the service may be unable to respond or deal with specific issues until their return, as either more senior or junior members of staff may not have the knowledge base to fully deal with the matter. This 'single point of failure' means there is less resilience in the service and may impact upon the ability of the service not only to deal with service requests but also in Freedom of Information requests, and correspondence.

3.4 Examples of specific service or budget changes that members may be aware of during the period include.

3.4.1 **Reduction to bus subsidy:**

12 services removed including supported Sunday services, rationalisation of 5 local services and the rail link service from Caerau to Maesteg rail station. The services removed are identified in the following table:

CONTRACT No.	OPERATOR	ROUTE
210-210A	FIRST CYMRU	Bridgend to Betws, Evenings (Monday to Saturday)
305-210	EASYWAY	Betws to Nantymoel, Daytime (Monday to Friday)
152-210	TRAVELFINAL	Sarn to Aberkenfig Schools, (Schooldays Only)
DC810-210	EASYWAY	Bridgend to Pen-y-Fai via Brackla & Coity Morning & Afternoon (Monday to Friday)
DC607-210*	FIRST CYMRU	Porthcawl Local / Brynteg Sch / Additional Penyfai
DC815-210	FIRST CYMRU	Bridgend to Sarn, Mon-Sat, Mornings & Evenings
062-220	FIRST CYMRU	Bridgend to Pencoed - Sundays
100-220A	FIRST CYMRU	Bridgend to Maesteg, Maesteg to Maesteg Parc, Evening (Sunday)
200-220A	FIRST CYMRU	Bridgend to Blaengarw (Sunday)
300-220A	FIRST CYMRU	Bridgend to Nantymoel (Sunday)

500-220A	FIRST CYMRU	Bridgend to Porthcawl, Daytime and Evening, (Sunday)
600-220	FIRST CYMRU	Bridgend to Cefn Glas - Sundays
904-210	Llynfi Coaches	Caerau – Maesteg Railway Station, Daytime, (Monday to Saturday)

* Contract No. DC607-210 cancelled, but retendered the Porthcawl Local Bus (Service No. 61) - July 2015

3.4.2 **Review of School Crossing Patrol Provision:**

Each site is assessed as to its priority if it becomes vacant. To date the authority has not discussed the matter with schools directly regarding paying for SCP's but has begun conversations with some Town and Community Councils.

3.4.3 **Reduction in Hazarding gangs:**

Reduction of staff engaged on removal of overgrowth from pathways - this has increased the waiting list of requests received from both the public and Members. Currently we have in excess of 200 Hazarding job tickets outstanding; this equates to about 10 to 12 weeks work assuming no new job tickets arise.

3.4.4 **Winter Maintenance:**

A review of the winter maintenance routes has resulted in a reduction of one mainline gritter - coastal routes have been amalgamated with some of the inland low routes. This allowed for a reduction in the total number of routes and allowed us to go to 3 units rather than 4. . This arrangement no longer provides us with any slack to add any additional routes, but does mean that a saving can be achieved on both the item of plant as well as the number of drivers that need to be available on standby and overtime over the winter months. In the event of severe weather the authority does have arrangements to hire in specialised plant/vehicles or contract staff to assist with the event.

3.4.5 **Overtime and Standby:**

The levels of overtime and standby have been reviewed over the past few years and changes implemented to both working custom and practice to minimise its need. Changes in this regard have been to refer all calls to the main call centre rather than specific highways out of hours contact, and in the main deal with issues within normal office hours. However, there remains an operational requirement for overtime to deal with out of hours events such as road traffic accidents (RTA), winter maintenance, sink holes, dangerous structures, potholes, flooding and work on time restricted roads. In some circumstances such as RTAs certain costs can be recovered.

3.4.6 **Reduction in Road Safety Funding:**

The reduction in funding places a greater emphasis on scheme support from Welsh Government for road safety initiatives of locally promoted road safety schemes.

3.4.7 **Reduction in Highway Development control officers and budget:**

Reduction in number of officers impacts upon the time lines of responses able to be provided for planning purposes, with the reduction in supporting budget impacting upon the level of supporting information able to be provided.

3.4.8 **Street lighting energy consumption:**

The County Borough has in the order of 20,000 street lights - the changes in management of street lighting to achieve energy savings has been made by the use of part-nighting, dimming and by the introduction of 7,500 LED units from Local Government Borrowing Initiative (LGBI) funding, provided by Welsh Government This funding ended in 2014/15.

3.4.9 **Parking:**

In relation to the MTFS the provision of parking has been reviewed and the overall level of subsidy provided for in the budget reduced.. However, the ability to achieve the necessary increase in income required is not within the sole control of the parking management team due to car parking not being the attractor for the journey. The utilisation being at the behest of the individual towns economic prosperity and offer, weather, employment trends and alternative parking offered by the private sector. Also the proposal to increase parking charges for staff was deferred following advice that it would not be advisable to pass on the increase whilst Job Evaluation (JE) and office accommodation changes were taking place. However the overall cost was still attributed to the parking account with no additional significant increase made to staff at this stage. However it is proposed that a full review of car parking is carried out and implemented in 2017/18.

3.5 During the period 2012 - 2015 the Council benefitted from a Local Government Borrowing Initiative that permitted investment of around £6m in the highway asset and street lighting. This initiative has now ended and the repayments are ring fenced within the highway services budget for the next 20 years. The benefits of this investment related to LED programme of street lighting, bridge repairs and highway surfacing contracts.

3.6 The ending of the LGBI investment programme linked with further budget reductions is likely to result in a deteriorating highway which could be subject to an increased level of ad hoc repair / patching on a risk basis. The rate at which this deterioration will occur is predicted to return to a pre LGBI investment within 8-9 years. However, this prediction was considered against current levels of maintenance, and if these are impacted upon by further financial savings, the rate at which our roads deteriorate may significantly shorten this estimate.

3.7 The long term cumulative impact of the already implemented reductions will become more noticeable over time. Even in the comparatively simple area of weed control this has the potential for more complaints to be received in regard to the proliferation of overgrowth affecting signage as well as weed control on streets and verges. In regard to long term issues associated with reduced weed control it is not only on the visual effect but also on the root bowl of the substructure of the pavement and water ingress.

4. **Current Situation**

4.1 Future reductions in local authority budget settlements suggests that further reductions to Highway Services budgets will have to be considered by the Council to both statutory and non-statutory services which may include proposals for measures such as:

- Switching off significant amount of street lighting on residential estates, streets and towns
- Further reductions in subsidised bus services
- Review of drainage maintenance
- Reduction of weed spraying to once a year
- Review of winter maintenance/routes
- Staffing re-structures to front line services
- Further reductions in highways maintenance budget
- Response times to members and public
- Capability to respond to out of hours disruption

The suggested likelihood is that this will impact upon:

- Service satisfaction levels
- Communities with no commercial or subsidised bus services
- Increase in insurance claims
- Level of complaints
- Ombudsman complaints
- Sickness levels
- Increase use of agency to backfill sickness absence
- Cost of highway repairs being more substantial as more potholes need to be addressed
- Response times for implementing repairs
- Levels of claims received
- Time to respond on issues addressed to the Council
- Staff turnover/retention and ability to retain and employ staff in some specialist areas

4.2 In the case of some of these proposals there may be public engagement/ consultation in seeking their views but may still result in a reduction or removal of service. Until a detailed consideration is made into any one proposal the full impact may not be initially known or the extent to which it could be applied. An example of this would be reduction in bus services whereby it would be unknown whether a bus operator may wish to trial a replacement commercial service or if the affected community could utilise community transport.

4.3 With regard to the officers required to deliver services on behalf of the authority there may be a case to consider collaboration with adjoining or city region authorities to combine resources for provision over a wider geographical area.

4.4 For those skill sets that are periodically required, then these could be procured as at present through either contracted consultancy services or joint ventures similar to the current Capita Glamorgan consultancy arrangement. This may provide:

- More resilient structure
- Wider level of knowledge and experience

- Greater Pool of resources
- Rapid engagement of resources
- No need for lots of smaller procurements saving time and money

5. Effect Upon Policy Framework & Procedure Rules

None

6. Equality Impact Assessment

Nothing directly related to this report, although individual equality impact screening and assessments are carried out for each individual savings proposal.

7. Financial Implications

7.1 The Highways and Transportation Budgets have seen a reduction of £2.5 million as part of the MTFS between 2011/12 and 2015/16.

7.2 A further reduction of £417,000 was included in the MTFS against Highways for 2016/17. This primarily related to staffing restructures, some of which are still in the process of being implemented.

7.3 The 2016/17 Highways and Transportation net budget of £6.8 million will be subject to further reductions as part of the MTFS 2017/18 to 2020/21.

8. Recommendation:

8.1 That the content of the report is noted.

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