

Environment and Transport Committee
Remote Link via MS Teams
Tuesday 1 September 2020 at 2pm

Present:

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| P Campbell | S Coutts |
| C Hughson | S Leask |
| A Manson | R McGregor |
| A Priest | D Sandison |
| G Smith | R Thomson |

Apologies:

None

In Attendance (Officers):

J Smith, Director of Infrastructure Services
D Coupe, Executive Manager – Roads
J Manson, Executive Manager - Finance
C Symons, Executive Manager – Environmental Services and Estate Operations
K Main, Team Leader – Port & Marine Operations
A Cogle, Team Leader - Administration
P Wishart, Solicitor
B Kerr, Communications Officer
L Malcolmson, Committee Officer

Chair:

Mr Thomson, Chair of the Committee, presided.

Circular:

The circular calling the meeting was held as read.

The Chair advised that whilst the public are excluded from attendance at this meeting under the **terms of the Coronavirus (Scotland) Act 2020**, Members of the local media were in attendance via remote link. He also advised that this meeting was being recorded and would be published online for public access after the meeting.

Declarations of Interests

None

Minutes

The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 21 January 2020 on the motion of Mr Sandison, seconded by Mr McGregor.

The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 9 March 2020 on the motion of Mr Leask, seconded by Ms Manson, with the exception of the following:

- “Sederunt” – Ms Manson had been presented and should be recorded as such.

The Committee considered a report by the Director of Infrastructure Services (ISD-10-20-F) that summarised the activity and performance of the Infrastructure Directorate most relevant to the Environment & Transport Committee during Quarter 1, 2020/21.

The Director of Infrastructure Services introduced the report in detail, referring to each heading in section 4 of the report. He commented on the work undertaken to ensure that essential services were covered and continued to be delivered as safely as possible in order to keep Shetland's society functioning during the pandemic, and he reported that many services are now returning to more normal levels of activity. He also advised on staffing changes within these services as staff have moved on. The Director of Infrastructure Services highlighted a number of risks and challenges faced in the operational and financial delivery of services going forward and that services may be interrupted again should further outbreaks of COVID-19 occur.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair paid tribute to staff across the wide range of services provided by the department for their dedication in providing these services during COVID-19, often whilst trying to maintain their normal duties.

During questions, the Director of Infrastructure acknowledged that in terms of producing business cases for roads projects, the recent focus had been on the Cullivoe Road. He said that there is a commitment to provide an annual update on the Strategic Road Network and that business programmes were targeted for the November 2020 or January 2021 cycles of meetings. He said that the annual update would include timescales for other roads on the priority list.

An update was sought on the progress made with the Scottish Government in terms of the Fair Isle ferry replacement, where it was noted that there were currently challenges to address passenger safety on the existing ferry during the COVID-19 outbreak. The Leader advised that since last year there had been no response on the matter from the Scottish Government and that he was still waiting for an answer on the lifeline link and that this position was unacceptable. He said that ultimately the Scottish Government need to come true to their word and provide a fair resolution for a remote community that desperately needs this service. Further comment was made that once a resolution is agreed it would then take time to implement that resolution. The Director of Infrastructure Services was asked if consideration had been given to chartering a suitable vessel in light of the downturn in shipping business. The Director of Infrastructure Services said that he would not rule that out but any vessel would need a Document of Compliance to demonstrate that the vessel meets statutory requirements. He said that the solution for Fair Isle was bespoke in the first place and would continue to need to be bespoke. The Director of Infrastructure was urged to carry out investigations given the changes in the shipping market.

Reference was made to the last bullet in paragraph 4.13.1 on Fixed Links and comment was made on the Cullivoe Road's potential tie in with Unst. The Director of Infrastructure Services was asked if there was any agreement with Transport Scotland on plans to survey all the options. The Director of Infrastructure services said that he would take this question to Transport Planning, when the Executive Manager returns from leave and ask him to share what he knows to date. He added that the update to the Transport Strategy and key issues was expected to be presented to Committee in November 2020.

In responding to concerns regarding the withdrawal of additional bins following the reinstatement of refuse collections, the Executive Manager - Environmental Services and Estate Operations said that he would investigate and report back to Councillor Theo Smith on this specific concern.

The Executive Manager – Roads responded to a query on the part night lighting and advised that the reinstatement to full night lighting, following the installation of new LED units, had been delayed by COVID-19 restrictions on contractors. However, he advised that the majority of lighting would be instigated next week.

Deep concern was expressed in regard to the lack of reporting on Road Safety after a report had been deferred at the last Council, which sought a speed limit from Sound Brae to the Black Gaet. It was noted that there had been an undertaking by the Chief Executive for this to be reported in this cycle of meetings and reassurance was sought that the matter would be reported to Council on 9 September 2020. The Director of Infrastructure Services advised that he had sought a shift in the schedule, as there are strong overlaps with active travel and he looked to have that joined up approach with roads safety and active travel. He advised that there would be no report to Council on 9 September, but that it would be reported during the following cycle of meetings. In response to further assertions that road safety should override active travel, the Chair said that he had agreed that the two areas were linked and that although road safety took priority, there needed to be evidence based data before any decision could be taken. Disappointment was further expressed and assurance was given by the Chair that he would discuss further with the Chief Executive, following the meeting.

Reference was made to amenity areas and grass cutting, and Officers were asked if any thought had been given to rolling grass cutting into one service area. The Director of Infrastructure Services advised that these matters are kept under review for more efficient ways of doing things and there had been adjustments over the years. The Executive Manager - Environmental Services and Estate Operations explained how the grass cutting services were currently arranged within the specific services/departments. He was however unsure whether further merging of areas was possible, but he could discuss this with Executive Managers in those areas, and update Members. He advised that there would be an update due in January 2021 on the enhanced regime and whether gathering cuttings would be a requirement.

In response to a query regarding the road markings and plans to reschedule works, the Executive Manager – Roads explained that the markers had been laid down for jet patching. He explained that the list of work had been larger than what the machine was capable to do, and therefore it had not been possible for all the patching to be undertaken. He said that the patching works would continue to be done on a priority basis. The Executive Manager – Roads said that no edging would be done this year but patching would continue, weather permitting, following the schedule and catching up following COVID-19 restrictions.

Reference was made to the need for contactless payments particularly should there be a second wave of COVID-19 and Officers were asked if the correct priority was given to that. The Director of Infrastructure said that he shared the sense of priority expressed, and advised that he would keep Members apprised of the timetable and progress for contactless payments on ferries.

In responding to a question raised in respect of paragraph 4.7.1, the Director of Infrastructure Services advised that changes in practices continued to be a challenge

for the Environmental Health Service and Trading Standards but Officers continued to keep a check on Brexit and the impacts on the service. In terms of concerns over hygiene rules following Brexit, the Director of Infrastructure Services assured that there would be many frontline checks undertaken on imported produce before it arrives in Shetland. In addressing the issue of adequate resources, the Leader added that it would be necessary to understand the demands on the resources the Council has but that would need to be taken up at a political level.

In responding to a comment regarding the reduced income for the Scord Quarry, the Executive Manager – Roads said that it was hoped that material would be required for the Viking Energy Project but any gains would only partially offset the deficit.

In responding to a query regarding the resurfacing and repairing of Main Street, the Executive Manager – Roads said that there was no specific programme of works for Scalloway but the service was working through the risk assessments in regard to where the team can and cannot work. The Executive Manager – Roads advised that a number of capital projects had been shelved due to the time of year and other projects in urban areas had been shelved due to difficulties around social distancing. It was suggested that if the works at Scalloway is delayed a temporary fix would be required.

A further question was raised in regard to another Scottish Transport infrastructure review, and in referring to fixed links, the Director of Infrastructure Services explained that Officers had participated in early aspects of the review but it was difficult to comment with confidence on any outcome. He said that these were opportunities to marshal our thoughts, to work with partners, to describe priorities and reflect community needs as well as to make the case. In that regard, he said that it was important to make as good a case as possible but if that is not taken to a satisfactory conclusion through the channels available at that time at least a good case has been made. He added that it is difficult to see where these areas can be made easier as money gets tighter, however there is a need to think more creatively on how to bring things forward and have contingency plans in place.

In response to questions, the Director of Infrastructure Services confirmed that following representations by the public, baby changing and disabled changing facilities at ferry waiting rooms was now being looked at. A number of proposals were also highlighted to the Director of Infrastructure Services within the North Ward that may be considered under Active Travel/Road Safety/Community Council work. These include a cycle path between the Hillswick Shop and the school and to the Council houses at the Clave, to make it safe as it is currently single track with no speed limits. In Brae, the road between South Brae and Sparl, which now has many more houses, it is very fast with children not able to walk or cycle to school. This has been on the Community Council list for a long time, and could be considered by Active Travel. It was also noted that there was a shortage of lairs at the Laxobiggin graveyard which covers Mossbank, Firth and Scatsta areas, and that something urgent would be required to address that problem. The Director of Infrastructure Services said that in terms of Active Travel and Road Safety he would make it a priority to come back with an update on proposals going forward. He commented that he would expect these active travel/road safety matters to be a theme for years to come given the shift in travel and changes to road network layouts/arrangements. The Director of Infrastructure Services acknowledged that this would need a programme to be developed, be led by the Council, with significant Community Council consultation in order to make useful progress.

The Executive Manager – Roads responded to a final question in regard to gritting materials, and advised that the carryover of materials was no more than been in the previous year. He said that the gritting service had not been affected by the pandemic and advised that while there was sufficient stock for the start of the gritting season more material would need to be brought in.

During debate, comment was made in regard to Brexit and how the Council can influence the Scottish Government in terms of freight services, transportation of fish and animal welfare. It was noted that it was worthwhile to keep up standards in Shetland and the high quality of services.

In referring to the problems this Council has around funding, the Vice-chair commented that much of these issues are blamed on the Scottish Government but the Scottish Government do not have control over all the financial levers, so in fairness Westminster should share some of the responsibility as well. In response, a question was posed on what power the Scottish Government would need in order to have fair ferry funding for Shetland and in particular the Good Shepherd ferry replacement. The Vice-chair said that the Scottish Government needs full control over all the tax raising powers to get the economy of Scotland on the right track and he would be asking that question of the Finance Minister at the first opportunity. It was further suggested however that, in terms of the amount of money available to the Scottish Government, the funds required to deliver on fair ferry funding for Shetland would be minimal.

The Chair agreed, and said that had been clear for several years now that the fair ferry funding has nothing to do with finances but is purely a political argument, and purely a political point at this time. He went on to say that officers continue to work on this and continue on an annual basis to give the Transport Scotland Officials the figures required to deliver full and fair ferry funding services, not to the Council but to the people of Shetland. He said that what also happens annually, for what is now approaching a decade, is failure to deliver. The Chair said that he failed to see how this was anything other than a political decision from the Scottish Government, not to fully and fairly fund our ferries. He said that this matter has come up at every meeting, but it had to so that the people of Shetland realise and understand what a significant impact not receiving full and fair funding has, not just on our internal ferry service but, across all budgets and all Committees and services across Shetland. The Chair went on to say that the Council would continue to be led by the Leader on this matter, and he continued to do all that can possibly be done, and it was important for the public to know who is responsible for the decision making on this matter.

In support of the Chair, comment was made that the Council could not give up on this and should continue to step up vocal disapproval at every opportunity. It was suggested that the Council was being played for fools but it was important to ensure that no one was in any doubt that a lot of the problems suffered by the Council, in terms of its overall ability to deliver the level and quality of services, are affected by this particular issue, and this matter is at the forefront of the risks that the Council faces.

In terms of the Transport Infrastructure Review, it was recognised that the more Shetland's needs can be embedded into the strategic level of discussion will help towards fixed link solutions. It was noted that again Transport Scotland continues to hold review after review, however it was acknowledged that this allowed another opportunity to influence the outcomes.

The Leader said that he welcomed the comments made by Mr McGregor, and he looked forward to the feedback with the Finance Minister, and said that this afternoon the First Minister had outlined the programme for Government for next year. He said that at page 49 of that document she highlights the need to produce and maintain a long term plan and investment programme for new ferries. The Leader said that the Council had produced the case, which had been signed off by Transport Scotland official. He said that it is clear what the most remote inhabited Island in Scotland needs are, therefore it is time to move beyond the words in documents and just deliver funding to move it forward. He said there was no need for more words, just deliver

Decision:

The Committee:

- NOTED the updates on activity in Quarter 1, 2020/21; and
- DISCUSSED and COMMENTED ON forward plans and priorities to help inform the prioritisation of activity and associated Business Programming

11/20 **Environment and Transport Committee Business Programme – 2020/21**

The Committee considered a report by the Director of Infrastructure Services (ISD-11-20-F) that provided information on the business planned for Environment & Transport Committee for the remainder of the financial year 2020/21.

The Director of Infrastructure Services introduced the report. There being no questions or debate, the Committee noted the report.

Decision:

The Committee NOTED the report and Appendix.

The meeting concluded at 3.40pm

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Chair