

## NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

11 NOVEMBER 2015

**STATEMENT OF THE HIGHWAYS, ROAD SAFETY, ACCESS TO THE COUNTRYSIDE (INCL BROADBAND, MOBILE PHONE COVERAGE) AND PASSENGER TRANSPORT PORTFOLIO HOLDER COUNTY COUNCILLOR DON MACKENZIE****Highways****Winter Service**

The County Council is ready for winter. We have 55,000 tonnes of salt stockpiled ready to be used by our fleet of 89 front-line gritters, backed up by over 130 farmers and other local contractors. When conditions demand, we routinely treat over 50% of the County's roads, one of the highest proportions by any County Council. In the face of budget reductions across the highways service, the commitment to deal with winter conditions remains our highest priority, there has been no lessening of gritting route coverage, whilst our long-term contractor, Ringway, has recently invested in 20 new gritters, which will enhance the reliability of the fleet.

The winter budget was reduced by £750,000 this year as part of the 2020 savings targets. I am pleased to report that this has been achieved with neither changes to policy nor reduction in gritting routes, but was reached through lower cost of the Ringway contract and by bringing consistency to the provision of grit bins.

We are continuing our winter community partnership scheme by giving parish and town councils and community groups the opportunity to support an even higher level of service through volunteers, who are willing to take part in clearing snow and treating roads and footways. We provide health and safety training and advice, and give advance notice of severe weather using a specialist forecasting service.

**The Northern Powerhouse, Transport for the North and our Transport Prospectus**

The Northern Powerhouse is the Chancellor's vision for bringing together the cities of the north to build an economy to rival the dominance of London. Transport for the North (TfN) started out as a loose amalgam of the transport authorities covering the northern city regions. It was announced in the July 2015 Budget that TfN will be given statutory status.

It is expected that TfN will consider road and rail matters of strategic significance to the north of England. Whilst improving east-west connectivity by upgrading the A64/A1237/A59 corridor is likely to be of significant interest to TfN, smaller, local schemes like town bypasses may not be.

The Northern Powerhouse and TfN were originally considered by many to be simply about connecting cities of the north. That is changing thanks to the influence of the County Council, and the concept is becoming much more inclusive of rural areas.

The North Yorkshire Strategic Transport Prospectus, which was endorsed by the Executive in October, is an important document, which sets out the case that we are an integral part of The Northern Powerhouse, with a vital role to play. It is significant that the Leader of this Council has a place on the Board of TfN, whilst the BES Director represents us on the Executive.

**Local Transport Plan 4**

The latest position is that public and stakeholder consultation on the Draft LTP4 started on 2 November and continues until the end of this month. Following the completion of the

consultation the responses will be considered and any necessary amendments made to the draft before LTP4 is considered for adoption by the Executive and Council next February.

### **Access to the Countryside**

#### **Heritage Services**

Our archaeological team has recently given advice to farmers who are applying for the new countryside stewardship funds, a scheme run jointly by Natural England, Forestry Commission England and the Rural Payments Agency on behalf of Defra. Applications are checked against our Historic Environment Records for features that might be sensitive to certain types of farming. So far in this round, the team has processed and will receive income for over 100 applications, which are likely to result in the award of several million pounds of grants.

### **Passenger Transport**

#### **Bus Services**

The TEE Scrutiny Committee has considered the results of consultation on proposals to make £500k savings in our bus subsidy budget, and its conclusions will be included in the report to the Executive when it meets on 8 December. The consultation responses show the importance that people attach to bus services. The Committee noted that 85% of bus journeys are on commercial services and that significant improvements have been made to the original savings proposals, thanks to successful negotiations between our Passenger Transport Team and bus operators, who have cooperated very well with us.

It is timely to report that Arriva Yorkshire, who operate in the Selby area, won the Bus Operator of the Year award, whilst, in Harrogate, Transdev have introduced a brand new commercial service linking Harrogate and Boroughbridge.

#### **Total Transport**

I recently attended a conference at the National Railway Museum which brought together Transport Minister, Andrew Jones MP, and key people from health and local government, with the aim of encouraging a unified transport service for use in health, education and adult services, thereby getting much better value from resources spent on these areas in isolation. I will report at a later date on the success of pilot schemes.

### **Broadband and Mobile Phone Coverage**

The County Council recently agreed to invest an additional £21m in Phase3 of its Superfast North Yorkshire programme, at the conclusion of which in 2019 95% of the county should have access to high quality broadband. Whilst this is very good news and keeps us in the leadership of providing this increasingly important service to rural homes and businesses, we are very mindful that those communities who are likely to be in the unconnected 5% need some certainty about their situation at the earliest date, so that viable alternatives can be explored.

Similarly, whilst phone users in many areas of the county can now receive 4G coverage, remote areas have little or no signal at all. Consideration is being given to the possibility that the County contribute to investment in better mobile phone reception for those areas, which currently have an inadequate service.

DON MACKENZIE