

Capital Investment in School Route Planning Software

Decision maker: Corporate Director – Economy & Environment

Decision date: 11 April 2025

Report by: Danielle Pyemont, Senior Project Manager

Classification

Open

Decision type

Non-key

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose

To authorise the spend/investment of a new School Route Planning Software to support home to school, SEN (Special Educational Needs) and college transportation in Herefordshire. This decision follows the council's resolution at the full council budget meeting on 7 February 2025 to approve the Capital Programme for 2025/26.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- a) The Capital Investment of £50,000 in 2025/26 be utilised for investment in a new School Route Planning Software system to support home to school, SEN and college transportation in Herefordshire;**
- b) Authority be delegated to Head of Transport and Access Services to take all operational decisions in delivering recommendation (a).**

Alternative options

1. Not to invest has been discounted. The current contract is due to expire and without the transport planning software the service cannot operate. There is a statutory duty to transport school-aged children and SEN children to educational establishments, as long as they meet our eligibility criteria. The risk to the service is significant, and the legal challenges Herefordshire Council would face for not delivering our statutory function would be immense.

Key considerations

2. Herefordshire Council has a statutory duty to transport school-aged children and SEN children to educational establishments, as long as they meet our eligibility criteria.
3. Herefordshire Council provides home to school and college transport to approximately 4,500 students daily. A total of 1.7 million journeys are made annually to approximately 120 establishments throughout Herefordshire and neighbouring counties. The complexity of travel needs across the county means we require equally advanced and dynamic software to meet our planning needs.
4. Optimised route planning software is required to support home to school, and college transportation. The current contract for the route planning and management system is scheduled to expire in September 2025 and a procurement process is required to award a new contract. The total cost of the contract will be funded through capital budget for the implementation of the software and revenue budget for the ongoing hosting and maintenance costs. The funding agreed is based on a 5-year contract.
5. To improve the service offering and create efficiencies within the department, a system that provides a comprehensive, user-friendly, software solution specifically designed for school, college, and SEN transport and travel management, including integrated map-based route planning functionality is required to aid efficient transport planning and management.
6. The benefit of having an optimised route planning software system means that the service can function efficiently within the limitations of having a fully contracted out transport service. The complexities of planning transport routes for all students, college students and SEN children across the county, to locations inside and outside the county is vast.
7. Improved transport route planning software will support ways of working, meet needs of staff, to enable the provision of a quality service for users that minimizes environmental impact.
8. Improved software will inform better understanding of demand, usage and forecasting through performance reporting that will advance budget setting goals.
9. The service is coordinated by Herefordshire Council's Passenger Transport team based at Plough Lane, Hereford.

Community impact

10. The project aligns with the priorities and objectives of the Council Plan 2024-2028
 - a) Transformation - We will be an efficient council that embraces best practice, delivers innovation through technology and demonstrates value for money.
 - b) People - We will enable residents to realise their potential, to be healthy and to be part of great communities that support each other. We want all children to have the best start in life.

Environmental Impact

11. Whilst this is a decision for a back-office function, the environmental impact of having a new optimised route planning software system means that the software can compare the best routes to help reduce emissions and minimise mileage when planning transport. Some transport planning software enables CO₂ reporting and can prioritise lowering emissions when planning transport

Equality duty

12. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to –

- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations and demonstrate that we are paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services. As this is a decision on back-office functions, we do not believe that it will have an impact on our equality duty.

Resource implications

13. A capital bid (£50k) for transport planning software was approved at Council on 7 February 2025. There is an approved revenue budget of £45k per annum included in the Economy and Environment Directorate 2025/26 base budget which funds the hosting and maintenance of the systems software. The proposed contract period is 5-years.

Capital cost of project	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Future Years	Total
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Purchase of software system	50	-	-	-	50
TOTAL	50				50

Funding streams (indicate whether base budget / external / grant / capital borrowing)	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Future Years	Total
Corporate Funded Borrowing	50	£000	£000	£000	50
TOTAL	50				50

Revenue Budget Implications	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Future Years	Total
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Ongoing hosting and maintenance of software system	45	45	45	90	225
TOTAL	45	45	45	90	225

Legal implications

14. There are no specific legal implications.

Risk management

15.

Risk / opportunity	Mitigation
<p>The procurement of a new school transport planning software system will aid efficient transport planning and management that will inform better understanding of demand, usage and forecasting through performance reporting is an opportunity.</p>	
<p>There is a risk of the supplier not fulfilling the contract as part of the contract agreement.</p>	<p>As part of the contract agreement it will include provision and acceptable service for ongoing support following the implementation of the system. The Head of Service (or delegated officer) will hold regular contract meetings with the provider as part of the contract management process.</p>
<p>There is a risk of not getting a software system that meets our needs.</p>	<p>Ensure there is a robust tender specification that fulfils all necessary requirements from the supplier.</p>
<p>Risk: Data migration and integration challenges - Ensuring existing transport data is accurately migrated to the new system and integrates effectively with current Council systems.</p>	<p>Conduct thorough data validation, testing, and phased implementation to address potential compatibility issues.</p>
<p>Risk: User adoption and training - Staff may require time to adapt to the New system, potentially impacting service efficiency during the transition.</p>	<p>Provide comprehensive training and phased onboarding to ensure a smooth transition and ongoing system proficiency.</p>

‘The risks identified in this report have been appropriately recorded on the relevant risk register and escalated in line with the Council’s Risk Management Strategy. Governance and monitoring arrangements are in place to ensure these risks are actively managed throughout the programme’s delivery.’

Consultees

Member Briefing 17 January 2025 with some Cabinet Members

Appendices

None

Background papers

None Identified

Report Reviewers Used for appraising this report:

Please note this section must be completed before the report can be published

Governance	John Coleman	Date 21/03/2025
Finance	Karen Morris	Date 19/03/2025
Legal	Sean O'Connor	Date 17/03/2025
Communications	Luenne Featherstone	Date 17/03/2025
Equality Duty	Harriet Yellin	Date 17/03/2025
Procurement	Claire Powell	Date 14/03/2025
Risk	Paige McInerney	Date 21/03/2025

Approved by **Ross Cook** **Date 01/04/2025**

Please include a glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.