



Briefing 20 -20

March 2020

Local authority responses to COVID-19 in relation to Fleet services.

This briefing is provided to all APSE member authorities but will be of particular interest to those officers responsible for transport services including maintenance and SEN Transport.

Key Issues:

With the onset of ever more stringent measures to control the spread of the corona virus, local authorities are having to implement pre-prepared business continuity plans and prioritise the level of services they provide.

- Determine those service areas that are regarded as essential and arrange the maintenance and repair regime to support those vehicles. These include Waste collection & Social Care.
- Review arrangements for the safety of staff as well as covering staff absence
- Where prudent look at the redeployment and re-training of staff

Background

APSE sent out a survey which asked how local authority fleet services are being affected by the COVID-19 outbreak. The survey asked member authorities for information as to how they plan to deliver services in light of the impact of the virus.

In addition, the Government is issuing guidance that directly affects transport. The DVSA has suspended testing of HGV and PSV vehicles for a period of 3 months <https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/UKDVSA/bulletins/281af11>. Similarly, all schools have been closed, so few, if any, school transport requirements remain.

From the responses APSE has received to date, It is apparent that the majority are referring to pre-prepared Business Continuity Plans (BCP's) and there is a good deal of commonality across the UK, with regards to the changes to delivery either implemented or ready to be implemented, should the need arise.

Generally, authorities appear to be prioritising their services based on resident needs, one such example received is a good example of this (services relevant to fleet maintenance are highlighted):

PRIMARY SERVICES:

(essential services – all staff redeployed to ensure service delivery)

Meals at Home (including shopping service).

Waste Collection (agreed collections priorities to focus on noxious wastes).

Cemetery – grave provision.

Transport administration, compliance and contract delivery.

Day Centre kitchen.

SECONDARY SERVICES:

(medium priority – redeploy staff in phase 2 to ensure primary service delivery)

Street Cleansing -scheduled cleansing.

Playground checks.

Street Cleaning - reactive cleansing.

Accessible minibuses for elderly and disabled.

Telecare services and social prescribing.

Day Centre – non kitchen use.

Highways & Street Lighting

TERTIARY SERVICES:

(non-essential – redeploy staff in phase 1 to ensure primary and secondary service delivery)

Road/pavement sweeping.

Locking parks and general parks duties.

Grounds Maintenance.

Bin deliveries.

Allotments.

Abandoned cars.

Market management.

Countryside .

Sports centre and bookings

Fleet Services are required to ensure the continued operation of many important services, they are seen by all local authorities as a priority service and what follows is a brief summary of the approaches taken.

Operational changes

Fleet maintenance services

Most have reviewed and updated their Business Continuity Plans, where outsourced with their service provider prioritised fleet servicing arrangements.

Many are considering suspending taxi and MOT testing to avoid unnecessary contact with the public. They are also enforcing policy on DVSA MOT testing with a view to mirroring their processes for Taxi Testing. Taxi operators have been sent national guidance with regard to car cleanliness and have been told stations will refuse to test if they are not up to standard.

Contingency planning is ongoing with user services such as Roads and Grounds training to take over Refuse Collection and Disposal duties should they be required. Many authorities have already made sure all their HGV drivers have been trained to drive refuse collection vehicles for such an event such as this. Workshops will be able to create better distance working arrangement should this occur and user services are stood down.

Workshop cleanliness is being enhanced, with regular cleans of hard surfaces and additional handwashing facilities and provision of sanitiser.

Given the longer survival of Covid-19 on metals and plastics, some depots are seeking to quarantine vehicles for up to 48/72 hours prior to technicians commencing repairs / maintenance. Similarly some are using spare keys to minimise contact between maintenance staff and clients

If there is a reduction in technical personnel and subject to the number missing, the following protocols would be implemented:

- Advise customers of possible service disruption and the need to plan for this internally, can the individual service areas reprioritise and/or postpone non-essential work to reduce pressures on front-line fleet?
- Keep customers informed of the situation and be realistic on what can be achieved.
- Utilise Overtime - wherever possible, request the remaining personnel to do additional overtime if needed
- If required, recall personnel from holiday and allow carry overs
- Shorten the working day length if insufficient level to cover for a full 'shift' day
- Consider postponing non-essential repairs until future recovery
- Consider delaying some lesser 'non critical' scheduled maintenance and focus on essential assets
- Utilise external contractors and other local service agents for repairs and maintenance
- Where shortfall still exist, utilise hire vehicles and equipment from external providers.

One authority has provided the following:

The priority for vehicles being repaired or having defects rectified will be:

- 1st. O licence vehicles, gritters and large sweepers;
- 2nd. Light goods vehicles not on O licence, minibuses and small vans;
- 3rd. Plant.

Several have prioritised ensuring that all fuel tanks are maintained at capacity, mainly as a precaution against future disruption

Protection of staff

Some of the considerations being made included:

Most support staff and non-essential managers/supervisors are now working from home.

Staggering clocking on time for crews visiting the depot, i.e. 15 minute spaces between when drivers collected keys in order to reduce the number of crews congregating in depots.

It is felt that social distancing is a key requirement, not only to ensure the health of staff but also to take into account the number of staff who may have underlying health conditions. One authority is actively exploring changes to shift patterns to minimise the number of fleet maintenance staff at any one time, making social distancing more achievable. Enhanced cleaning regimes are being implemented in all premises.

APSE Comment

The UK and local authority services are certainly facing difficult times. Not only are local authorities dealing with austerity measures and changing public demands, but we now face the biggest challenge since the Second World War in relation to meeting public need.

From the responses received it is apparent that local authorities have been planning for an incident such as this but perhaps the sheer speed and scale of the pandemic has taken many by surprise. Nevertheless local authorities are clearly implementing their business continuity plans and have in place services which will continue to meet public need even in these strange times.

APSE will continue to support its members through daily monitoring and disseminating information as it becomes available.

APSE's network query service will still be operational and advice will be forthcoming as and when it is received.

Members should look out for regular updates either via the APSE website or through short briefings such as these. You can access up-to-date information through the [APSE COVID 19 web hub](#). You can also sign up to the [APSE Covid 19 support networks](#) for rapid information through our dedicated WhatsApp Groups and email services.

Undoubtedly, there will be significant changes and demands being placed on local authorities but through the sharing of information and experiences we will undoubtedly rise to the challenge and meet the needs of our public and customers.

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