

Report to: Communities Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting: 26th June 2014

Lead Member / Officer: Lead Member for Public Realm/
Head of Highways and Environmental Services

Report Author: Asset and Risk Manager

Title: Highways Asset Management Strategy

1. What is the report about?

To outline the latest position regarding to the County road network and to describe how the future condition will be managed.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

To provide information on how reactive and preventative maintenance will be managed on a re-defined prioritisation of the road network. This report is the next stage following discussion with Members at a strategy working group meeting on 10th October 2013 following a report to the Communities Scrutiny Committee in July 2013.

3. What are the Recommendations?

That Members comment on the progress made to date, accept the principles of the prioritisation process, and agree that further workshops would be beneficial.

4. Report details.

4.1 Current Performance

4.1.1 Over the last few years there has been significant investment put into improving the condition of the carriageway and it is important that the benefits of this are properly assessed and evaluated. The two methods for doing this are the Scanner data (which in turn produces the Performance Indicator) and the Road Condition Indicator.

SCANNER (Surface Condition Assessment for the National Network of Roads) started for all classification of roads in 2005 and has been used as a statutory indicator since. The survey is undertaken annually by one surveying contractor for all local authorities but it doesn't cover the whole of network and is particularly poor on C/unclassified roads, the largest part of our network

RCI – (Road Condition Indicator) is a local measure of the visual condition of all the roads in the county. The Council's Highways Supervisors inspect the highway on a regular basis. An example of the inspection regime is attached

as Appendix A. This data was first collected in 2011 and is the best indicator of the condition of our highways as it is frequently updated and covers the entire network.

4.1.2 Appendix A details Denbighshire's overall performance in terms of the Scanner output and, for context, includes the county's relative position with respect to our 'Family Group'. It also shows the ongoing improvement in the RCI i.e. the visual appearance of the carriageway. In both it is pleasing to note that the improvements have been made and sustained.

4.2 Budget Profiles

4.2.1 The improvements outlined in Appendix A are the result of the significant level of capital investment in the highway in recent years. Since identifying roads as a priority for 2009/10 Denbighshire has invested over £18 million. Some of this funding coming from the Welsh Government's Local Government Borrowing Initiative (LGBI) (£1.6 million in the current year) which is in the final year and therefore in the medium to long term it is possible that current levels of funding will not be sustained.

4.2.2 Allocation of this funding, in terms of both geographical location and type of treatment, has been subject to lengthy discussion and consultation every year. This approach in terms of customer engagement has added real value. As borne out by the performance figures, this approach has not been to the detriment of the network as it is underpinned by sound engineering advice.

4.2.3 Going forward, with the potential for reduced budgets, this informed debate becomes even more important and agreement of the Capital Programme to maintain the network properly will be crucial. This report will now look at a number of scenarios that Members may wish to note and also ways that the asset will need to be managed in order to mitigate the risk as it deteriorates.

4.3 Managing the Asset

4.3.1 All Welsh local authorities have been working with consultants to build on best practice. Part of this work has revolved around the ability to project the likely condition of the network over the next twenty years based on a range of spend profiles but all related to its current known condition. Appendix B pulls together a range of likely scenarios and what these may mean in terms of the resultant risk. Again it is pertinent to note that the road condition is always deteriorating and the skill is to find the appropriate time and most prudent way to manage this risk.

4.4 Prioritising the Network

4.4.1 Denbighshire's highway network is 1,416 kilometres long and on the face of it The Highways Act would indicate that we have a legal duty to maintain it all in exactly the same condition, and manage it uniformly. This is not necessarily the case and a Code of Practice exists that allows us to vary the regime and the next step is for Denbighshire to agree what this regime should be in terms

of a prioritised network and how the Highway Authority (i.e. us) should manage it. Members can play a key role here and over the coming months it will be necessary for further workshops to take place so that an agreed approach can be discussed and ratified. This also underpins our defence in any claim we receive for damages. Appendix C gives an example of how the network may be prioritised but there is a danger that too simplistic an approach may not address local needs so consultation is vital.

4.5 Prioritising the work.

4.5.2 The Code of Practice also gives options in terms of the maintenance regime and this falls into three general categories:-

- a) How often should a highway be inspected
- b) What is a 'defect' i.e. how big can a pothole or trip be before it is deemed to be actionable?
- c) How long can it be left until it must be repaired?

Since The Highways Act 1980, case law has gone some way to clarifying some of these points already but there is still some leeway and it is felt that we should now clearly define what Denbighshire's MINIMUM level of maintenance should be. Again Appendix D gives some proposals in this regard but these must be discussed further before we can put together an agreed policy.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

Improving our roads is identified as a priority in the Corporate Plan 2012 – 17.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

The Council has indicated the likely level of investment in roads in the Corporate Plan. This, and any further investment, would be subject to scrutiny by the Strategic Investment Group and be a part of the budget setting process. The purpose of this report is to allow an improved methodology so that the available budget (both Capital and Revenue) can be focussed appropriately

7. What are the main conclusions of the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) undertaken on the decision? The completed EqIA template should be attached as an appendix to the report.

The highways maintenance regime is designed to improve the overall safety of all road users. To support the council's equality objective it is important that physical access to services, transport, the built environment and open spaces improve and any future policy must address these needs.

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

The report identifies the consultation that would take place during the process of developing the capital programme but it is likely that the overall Highway Maintenance Policy will require ratification at Council.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

The financial impact of the changed prioritisation process will have to be assessed in more detail in respect of both revenue and capital funding as this develops.

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

There is a risk to reputation linked with public perception of the condition of the highway linked to not addressing maintenance issues.

The main risk associated with development of the programme is that we fail to identify or tackle safety issues. This risk is minimised by the careful consideration of the various indicators described in the report.

11. Power to make the Decision

- Highways Act 1980
- Article 6.3.3 of the Council's Constitution outlines scrutiny's policy development and review functions

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