

**Report to:** Performance Scrutiny Committee

**Date of Meeting:** 7<sup>th</sup> December 2017

**Lead Member/Officer:** Lead Member for Highways, Planning and Sustainable Transport / Head of Highways and Environmental Services

**Report Author:** Highways Asset and Risk Manager

**Title:** Developing a Highway Maintenance Strategy

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**1. What is the report about?**

The following report is to outline to the Committee how effective the investment in road condition has been in recent years, and what the proposed strategy will be for managing the available funding in future to secure the maximum benefit.

**2. What is the reason for making this report?**

To inform the Performance Scrutiny Committee about trends in road conditions since the start of the previous Corporate Plan (2012 – 2017), and to give an understanding of the way the service proposes to use the available budget during the period of the next Corporate Plan (2017 – 2022).

**3. What are the Recommendations?**

That the Committee:

- 3.1 provides observations on, and supports, the approach being proposed by the Service to balance the risk of deteriorating roads against the available financial resource over the period 2017 – 2022; and
- 3.2 confirms that it has read, understood and taken into account the Well-being Impact Assessment (Appendix 3) as part of its consideration.

**4. Report details**

There are 1,416 kilometres of adopted public highway in Denbighshire, ranging in character and importance from very busy High Streets through to remote stretches of rural road linking to single properties. Regardless of the nature of them, they are all subject to the same statutory duty to keep them safe. Therefore the County Council must take a view as to how it intends to manage this risk.

Since 2012 there has been a commitment within the Corporate Plan to improve the condition of Denbighshire's roads, such that 'Residents and visitors to Denbighshire have access to a well-managed road network', and there has

been significant funding put in place since then in order to fulfil this commitment. Within the new Corporate Plan, under the Connected Communities strategy, there remains a commitment to 'Invest in Roads and Bridges to maintain a viable, sustainable network'.

The network is divided into four classifications of road; A, B, C and Unclassified, with the latter two making up by far the majority of the total with a combined length of 1,142 kilometres. Annually we use an externally assessed, non-invasive survey technique called Scanner to assess the condition of all of the A and B roads and a random fifty per cent sample of the C. The results of these assessments generates the outcomes for the National Performance Indicators on road condition. Since 2011 these indicators have shown an ongoing improvement in all three classes, with only 2.7% of our A roads now being in the Poor category. Notwithstanding this, it is still prudent to note that there are a number of locations where work is needed and some of these are major investment items with no obvious funding source to deliver them. It should also be noted that the National Performance Indicators only cover a total of 32% of the county's highways network.

The remaining 68% of the network is evaluated using a visual inspection methodology carried out by our own inspectors, and since 2011 this has shown a more complex picture. We have tackled over 100 of the worst roads in the county and therefore there should be a noticeable improvement in the overall score. However this is not the case and in fact the score is now 16% worse than six years ago, indicating that the average score per road is now higher, i.e. worse. This shows that we have fewer roads in very poor condition, but a larger number of roads that are deteriorating in quality. Further analysis shows that this deterioration is more localised rather than affecting long stretches of carriageway, and therefore this can help us to develop a strategy going forward as can be noted later in this report.

In terms of funding streams, the improvements to date have been financed primarily from Prudential Borrowing by the County. For three years this was enhanced significantly by the Welsh Government via the Local Government Borrowing Initiative which certainly gave a boost, but is no longer available to us. The County Capital allocation is currently £2.55 million and this results in around £2.3 million actually being spent on funded carriageway works spread across the whole network. This is supplemented by Revenue spending and the breakdown is shown in Appendix 1.

If the current levels of spending are maintained throughout the current Corporate Plan period it is felt that this will result in:-

- a) An increase in the budget allocation needing to be spent on reactive maintenance in order to fulfil our statutory obligations
- b) A moderate deterioration of measured condition
- c) An increased quantity of minor defects
- d) A consequent increase in the potential for 3<sup>rd</sup> Party Claims
- e) A likely decrease in customer satisfaction with the road condition.

A graphical indication of projected future road deterioration based on current funding levels is shown in Appendix 2.

Using software it is possible to analyse the effect of various spending strategies and one option is to seek to achieve a 'steady state' i.e. maintain the carriageway in its present condition. The outcome here is that current resources should suffice as long as every penny is spent in exactly the right place at the right time. However, in practice this is very difficult to achieve.

We also ran the software so as to calculate how much would it cost over the term of the new Corporate Plan to achieve the 4% average improvement we got during the last Corporate Plan period, and that equates to a requirement for a £2.7 million year-on-year investment (compared to the current £2.3m), on the assumption that the existing revenue allocation remains unchanged. As the road network naturally forms the infrastructure across the whole county, it is more than likely that other works being carried out will involve affecting the highway. As a result, with proper planning, we aim to link into as many other sources of funding as possible to provide mutual benefit. We are already working with Housing on a shared strategy to gain maximum mutual benefit, and we will continue to improve communication with officers in Planning so that we can gain an insight into how new developments can assist in boosting our own budget, i.e. via Section 278 Agreements. The Local Development Plan (LDP) will also help to inform our thinking here. Naturally we already work closely with Utility companies to make best use of the legislation covering Streetworks, and for certain schemes we will chase grant funding where appropriate. In short, we will do our utmost to draw on as many funding opportunities as are available and ensure they are used as prudently as possible.

Going back to the maintenance strategy and the information derived from the Road Condition Indicator it has become clear that, other than the large scale schemes, there are now very few roads in the County that can be classed as having totally failed structurally, and it is now much more common to have localised failures. Indeed many of our carriageways are in quite a reasonable condition, and it is therefore prudent to retain them in that state by Surface Dressing them. Where appropriate we will patch them one year and Dress them the following spring.

The Road Condition data indicates that, for the bulk of the network, it makes sense to put in place a programme of patching and smaller scale surfacing / overlay as we have done this year, and we believe that this focussed work will make the best use of our resources and minimise the risk to users. As far as possible this programme will be agreed with Members against managed criteria to ensure that a consistent approach is achieved right across the county. Risk reduction will be the main driver but this will also be aligned to local usage requirements.

However it is not all about surface treatments. By noticing locations where joints are opening up, we can cost effectively seal these up to stop deterioration. If the damage relates to a Utility installation then we will continue to be proactive in getting these corrected. Finally, we will also use our revenue budget to sweep

roads and remove debris; open up drainage ditches and also ensure the highway gullies are working efficiently. Water on the carriageway is the real culprit when it comes to carriageway deterioration so its elimination must be a priority.

- a) We will focus on a prevention strategy and use available funding to protect as many roads as possible that are still in relatively good condition.
- b) It represents better value for money to protect/prevent than it is to repair.
- c) We will prioritise surface treatments to seal up existing roads to keep them in good condition.
- d) Smaller scale patching/overlay work will continue to have a fundamental place in the programme.
- e) We will identify sites where joint sealing will be sufficient to prevent any large scale deterioration.
- f) We will utilise revenue budgets effectively such that drainage systems work efficiently to keep as much water off the carriageway as possibly.
- g) We will target Jetpacher work to treat rural deterioration.
- h) We will work with other services to achieve the most potential value from available funding.
- i) We will seek funding from Welsh Government to address significant issues that we are unable to fund.

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

This work contributes directly to the Connected Communities priority but in addition to this we will also link into the Resilient Communities agenda by extending the dropped kerb provision thus allowing greater mobility. We will particularly aim to do this along strategic routes where there is an enhanced mutual benefit rather than for the needs of individuals. Over the next few years we will set targets for recycling materials which will in turn link into the council's goal to reduce carbon emissions. In order to set challenging targets we need to make a baseline assessment, and this will be done shortly.

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

Budgetary considerations are contained in the main body of the report.

**7. What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment?**

This proposal is basically offering a like for like outcome and therefore would not be expected to add significantly to the aims of the Wellbeing and Future Generations Act however it will also have very little negative effect too.

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

Consultation with Members, Town and Community Councils and other interested third parties are an ongoing process when prioritising the work

**9. Chief Finance Officer Statement**

The report sets out the estimated capital requirements to support the highway maintenance strategy. The Council's capital plan for 2018/19 is currently being developed and will go through the usual formal decision making processes. The process of prioritisation and distribution of funds to support the new corporate plan has yet to be determined and will also be subject to a formal decision. All investment decisions must be seen in the context of a challenging financial position with funding reducing year-on-year.

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

So as not to lead the Council open to litigation due to a failure to maintain the roads, we need a robust methodology to determine scheme prioritisation and this needs to be under-pinned with good inspection procedures and a suitable Code of Practice – all of which are achievable.

The other risk relates to contractor availability to undertake the necessary work, but this can be mitigated by good planning and procurement processes and these are already in place.

**11. Power to make the Decision**

The Highways Act 1980

Section 7.2.3 of the Council's Constitution states that Scrutiny can consider any matter which affects the Council's area or its inhabitants.

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