

Report To: Communities Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting: 4th July 2013

Lead/Officer: Head of Highways and Environmental Services

Report Author: Strategic Highways Manager

Title: Condition of the County's Highways

1. What is the report about?

To outline the present condition of the County's highways network and identify areas which require maintenance work including the parameters and methodology for developing a three year draft programme of works.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

To provide information regarding the process for developing a prioritised work programme for highways maintenance and the appropriate timing of that work to enable it to be built into future service plans and budget setting processes.

3. What are the Recommendations?

That Members note the progress made to date, provide observations, and support the process for determining the future prioritisation of work.

4. Report details

4.1 How do we develop the programme?

During recent years the development of the programme has become more evidence based and inclusive. The process is based on a number of condition indicators, views of the Network Manager and Area Engineers, consultation with Town and Community Councils, and discussion and agreement at Member Area Groups (MAGs).

4.2 What are the condition indicators?

4.2.1 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.

4.2.2 SCRIM (Sideway-force Coefficient Routine Investigation Machine)

Measures the wet skidding resistance and profile of the road surface and has similar coverage to the SCANNER survey. Due to the significance of this data it underpins the decisions on which roads to maintain.

4.2.3 RCI – (Road Condition Indicator)

This 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.

4.3 What are the steps in preparing the programme?

4.3.1 The Town and Community Councils are requested to identify any potential maintenance schemes in their areas

4.3.2 Following review of the condition indicators the Network Manager and Area Engineers debate the potential programme and, taking account of the type of work required and the budget available will prioritise the potential works.

4.3.3 The programme is then reviewed with the information received from Town and Community Councils and presented to Members at the MAG Meetings.

4.3.4 The finalised programme is communicated widely and publicised in the local press and on the website. Regular updates are sent to Members and Town and Community Councils as works progress.

4.4 What have we done in the last few years?

4.4.1 Since identifying Roads as a priority for 2009/10 Denbighshire has invested over £15 million in capital maintenance alone. The table in Appendix B analyses this investment over the main processes that are used.

4.4.2 In 2012/13 the Welsh Government announced the Local Government Borrowing Initiative (LGBI). Additional funding for infrastructure was provided for three years which increased the Council's investment in roads in 2012/13 by £1.9m (included above).

4.4.3 Denbighshire continues to recognise roads as a priority in the Corporate Plan 2012-17. Over £3.2 million (£1.3 million LGBI) is already earmarked for capital investment in roads in 2013/14 and the Council is anticipating a total investment of up to £10.4 million during the life of the plan.

4.5 What is the current state of the highway?

4.5.1 The tables in Appendix C show the change in the SCANNER and SCRIM data between 2009 and 2013. Whilst the roads in poor condition (Plan Maintenance Soon) are on a downward trend on all road classifications it is very difficult to draw conclusions from the data. The survey does not cover unclassified roads or C roads that are less than 3.2 metres wide.

4.5.2 The gross replacement cost for the Council's carriageways alone is over £1 billion. The asset is always deteriorating due to traffic and weather and Denbighshire is not alone in facing the challenges of matching budgets to a

deteriorating network. In fact, in a national survey published in March this year the average length of time before roads are resurfaced in Wales is 107 years.

- 4.5.3 Fluctuations need to be viewed in comparison with other Councils to allow for the impact of the severe weather and levels of investment. Table 1 attached in Appendix D lists rural Local Authorities in Wales that are used by Denbighshire to compare performance for the Corporate Plan.
- 4.5.4 Table 2 in Appendix D details the changes in the Road Condition Indicator (RCI) from first data collection in 2011 to date. The index covers the entire network and is becoming the focus for development of the capital programme.

4.6 What next?

- 4.6.1 The draft programme will be developed for 2014/15 as previously. This will be presented to Members and be subject to consultation during the Autumn such that a finalised programme can be agreed early in 2014. This will allow adequate time for the procurement and forward planning of the work.
- 4.6.2 Subject to agreement, a strategy will be presented to a working group of Members detailing our future approach to Highways Asset Management. The Strategy will identify our approach to lifecycle planning, whole life costing, data management, and risk assessments.
- 4.6.3 A Policy document is already drafted which proposes significant changes to our response to potholes and other defects. It will also detail our inspection regimes and other minimum levels of service across a range of activities. This document will be consulted with Members during Autumn 2013
- 4.6.4 During the first quarter of 2014/15 the entire network will be prioritised based on the established principles. This document will identify the current state of each section of highway, proposed remedial work where necessary, and estimated costs.
- 4.6.5 The level of current backlog identified will form the basis of prioritised spend for 2015/16 and, together with sophisticated modelling techniques that demonstrates the impact of any investment or lack of investment, will form the basis of future funding decisions by Council.

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.

Asset management and revenue highway maintenance processes are currently being reviewed and may release cashable savings which could be invested in roads through prudential borrowing.

7. What are the main conclusions of the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) undertaken on the decision?

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. On-going consultation with older and disabled people has highlighted the lack of dropped kerbs as an issue that may have a disproportionate impact in relation to safety and accessibility for people with a physical impairment including mobility scooter and wheelchair users and lack of tactile paving for people with a visual impairment. We will develop and equality impact assess a programme of work and thus identify priority areas for dropped kerbs through continued consultation.

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.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

Investment in highways has been included as a corporate priority for several years and funded accordingly. The Corporate Plan aims to continue this and assumes funds will be made available for future years.

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.

The risks associated with delivery of the programme are linked to contractor availability and quality of the works. These risks are mitigated by early procurement through framework agreements and the employment of suitably qualified and experienced officers dedicated to delivering the programme.

11. Power to make the Decision

Highways Act 1980
Article 6 of the Council's Constitution

Contact Officer:
Strategic Highways Manager
Tel: 01824 706980