

## Cabinet

<b>Report Title:</b>	Highway Maintenance Operational Plan
<b>Meeting Date:</b>	12 July 2016
<b>Lead Councillor(s):</b>	Councillor James Finch, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport
<b>Local Councillor(s):</b>	All Councillors
<b>Director:</b>	Geoff Dobson, Director of Resource Management
<b>Assistant Director or Head of Service:</b>	Mark Stevens, Assistant Director Operational Highways
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### Brief summary of report

1. This report describes the changes being made to the existing Highway Maintenance Operational Plan.

### What is Cabinet being asked to decide?

2. To approve the proposed revision to the existing Highway Maintenance Operational Plan set out in Appendix A to formally enable Suffolk Highways to move towards more risk-based preventative highway maintenance, thereby providing a more cost-effective approach than the current reactive maintenance approach
3. To approve that the revised Highway Maintenance Operational Plan come into immediate effect but be the subject of formal public consultation.
4. To delegate responsibility to the Assistant Director Operational Highways to consider the public consultation responses, amend the proposed revision and determine any final version of the Highway Maintenance Operational Plan by no later than the end of November 2016 and, from time to time, make such minor changes to that document as are deemed necessary for the effective delivery of the Council's highway maintenance function.

### Reason for recommendation

5. The current Highway Maintenance Operational Plan does not encourage early intervention when defects begin to materialise on the local highway network. In order to more cost effectively maintain highway infrastructure assets, earlier intervention is necessary and the revised Highway Maintenance Operational Plan provides the framework to achieve this.

### What are the key issues to consider?

6. Due to local highway authorities responding to financial pressure by increasingly digressing from the guidance provided in codes of practice such as

'Well-Maintained Highways', central government is now endorsing alternative approaches. This endorsement is through 'Well-Managed Highway Infrastructure', an overarching document to the current codes of practice that focuses on the application of risk management. Each local highway authority is therefore at liberty to consider finance and other constraints when determining its approach to maintenance.

### **What are the resource and risk implications?**

7. By making a sudden switch from responding to significant highway infrastructure defects to less significant defects, there will be a short-term escalation in the number of defects that need to be tackled. Whilst this requires additional funding initially, the financial impact in the medium to longer term is lessened as defects are tackled earlier in the degeneration process. This therefore has the potential to accrue savings in highway maintenance costs.
8. Adopting a risk-based approach enables better prioritisation of repair works. For example, there is a greater risk from not attending to a pothole on a busy A-road than not attending to the same size of pothole in a residential cul-de-sac. The risk is higher on the A-road because, with the higher volume of traffic, the chance of an incident occurring or vehicle damage arising is greater - and the extra traffic means that the pothole will worsen at a faster rate.
9. As the proposed Highway Maintenance Operational Plan seeks to address defects at an earlier stage and enables a general assessment of the condition of highway infrastructure assets, the Council's defence against insurance claims (including in court appearances) is strengthened and has the potential to reduce the amount paid out in settlements and annual insurance premiums.
10. The current mechanism for tackling identified defects is heavily geared towards temporary repairs with small workforce gangs. By identifying defects earlier, more time is available to correct the defects so works can be programmed and be undertaken on a right first time permanent repair basis. This also enables a more comprehensive approach so that a cluster of repairs of defects at varying stages of degeneration can be tackled at the same time.
11. An Equality Impact Assessment is not required as the changes to the Highway Maintenance Operational Plan, as a result of the review, are only of a technical and procedural nature.

### **What are the timescales associated with this decision?**

12. In order to best ensure that the intervention levels for varying types of highway infrastructure are appropriate, a trial of the proposed Highway Maintenance Operational Plan has been in place since 9 May 2016. However, as the current Highway Maintenance Operational Plan is the one that is formally approved, the Council's defence against insurance claims is weaker than it should be but this can be instantly corrected through approval of the proposed newer version.

### **Alternative options**

13. The Council could continue to retain the existing Highway Maintenance Operational Plan but this does not meet central government's new approach nor does it sufficiently safeguard the Council against current insurance claims or secure a more cost-effective highway maintenance service.

## **Who will be affected by this decision?**

14. As the vast majority of residents, businesses and visitors in Suffolk use the local highway network on foot, bicycle, motorbike, public transport or private vehicle, each will have the opportunity to use a safer, better maintained highway infrastructure than in the past through the formal adoption of the proposed new Highway Maintenance Operational Plan.

## **Main body of report**

### **Background**

15. A report on the current Highway Maintenance Operational Plan (HMOP) was presented to the Cabinet on 24 March 2015. The general thrust of the report was to extend the time allowed to effect repairs to certain types of highway infrastructure defects. The review of the HMOP was therefore a 'light touch' review and the changes came into effect on 1 July 2015.
16. However, this 'current HMOP' sets out levels of operational highway maintenance that are not being delivered (such as frequency of inspections and condition assessments) and could not be regarded as realistic. In that respect, the current HMOP sets out unrealistic maintenance expectations.
17. The extension of time allowed to effect repairs as endorsed by the Cabinet on 24 March 2015 is typical of the national picture. The original Code of Practice for Highway Maintenance Management developed by central government in conjunction with the old 'County Surveyors' Society' essentially became three documents – Well-Maintained Highways, Well-Lit Highways and Management of Highway Structures – during 2004 and 2005. However, local highway authorities have progressively moved further and further away from these codes of practice as financial pressures tended to result in lessening standards – with the original standards increasingly being regarded as unaffordable.
18. In 2013, central government (through the Department for Transport) commissioned consultants to review these three guidance documents. It was soon established that these documents might be better served if an overarching document was created that provided better context for future decision making. This overarching document – called Well-Managed Highway Infrastructure – has undergone a number of iterations but is due to be finally published in Autumn 2016. Although this publication has not yet occurred, it is known that it's primary focus is to apply the principle of risk management to highway maintenance practices.
19. The existing HMOP already partially addresses the subject of risk management insofar as safety inspections of the existing highway infrastructure are conducted at differing frequencies linked either to the road category (varying from strategic routes such as A-roads to unsurfaced unclassified roads) or footway category (varying from prestige walking zones through to local access footways). However, there is then little differentiation regarding the severity of the defect in the context of this hierarchical approach.
20. In order to develop a highway maintenance regime that considers the application of risk management to the network classification for a range of highway infrastructure assets, a set of maintenance response matrices were

developed under the Programme Management work stream of the Highways Transformation Programme. These matrices provide guidance on the timescales for repair dependent upon the severity of a defect and its relative location within Suffolk's highway network.

21. Since 9 May 2016, all defects identified either by the highway inspection process or reported to the County Council through either the highways online reporting tool or direct contact with the customer service centre at Stowmarket have been assessed on a trial basis against these matrices. The repair response times have been standardised into consistent timescales as follows:
  - Category 1 – emergency 2 hour response (generally a temporary repair/make safe)
  - Category 2 – 48 hour response (generally a temporary repair/make safe)
  - Category 3 – 5 working day response
  - Category 4 – 10 working day response
  - Category 5 – 20 working day response
  - Category 6 – 14 week response
  - Category 7 – potential future works (if funding is available and forming part of larger planned maintenance or improvement works)
  - Category 8 – planned works (which are defined annually, in accordance with the Council's asset management approach)
22. All identified defects are assigned to one of these categories. The time allowance for repair of any defect identified to be Category 2 through to Category 6 commences at midnight on the day that the defect is categorised and ordered. This allows better forward programming of resource allocation to particularly tackle reactive maintenance repairs (i.e. Category 2 to Category 5) so as to optimise workforce performance and effectiveness. Apart from a defect defined as falling in Categories 1 or 2, the expectation is that all other defects are the subject of a right first time permanent repair, thereby moving away from the current high cost reactive maintenance regime towards a preventative maintenance approach.
23. With the present HMOP, a substantial proportion of defects do not generate a repair because of the intervention level. For example, if a carriageway pothole is measured on an A-road as smaller than 300mm x 300mm x 50mm depth at the time of inspection, it is unlikely to be recorded as a defect in the highway management system ('Insight') and thus no repair is put into effect. With the new HMOP, an A-road carriageway pothole as small as 100mm in diameter and between 25mm and 50mm deep will generate a repair.
24. For defects that are identified as being Category 7, the intention is that these are collectively used to inform future programmes of preventative works (such as surface dressing or footway slurry sealing). The mere fact that such defects are being identified in this way (over and above the fact that smaller scale defects will be generating a maintenance response) is regarded as a positive measure by the Council's Insurance Team. At present, use of the current HMOP is not providing sufficient information for the defence of insurance claims.

25. As of 14 June 2016, there have been 12 iterations of the new HMOP matrices as a consequence of recommendations arising from their use 'in the field' through the highway inspection process. The trial of these matrices in this way has thus been of significant benefit in ensuring that the proposed HMOP is robust at this stage and fit for formal implementation.
26. Given this shift towards a risk-based approach to asset management-led highways maintenance, there is an expectation that changes of this nature are the subject of public consultation. It is intended that consultation on the new HMOP will be combined with the consultation on the Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Plan.
27. Rather than present a subsequent report to the Cabinet on HMOP consultation responses, it is recommended that the Assistant Director Operational Highways (ADOH) reviews such responses and makes any adjustments to the HMOP as necessary by the end of November 2016. This timing is to coincide with the next submission of the self-assessment questionnaire for the Department for Transport Incentive Funding allocation process.
28. Over the passage of time, minor adjustments may be identified as being necessary. Under such circumstances, it would be prudent to authorise the ADOH to make such minor changes and issue any formal replacement HMOP deemed necessary. However, if more substantive changes are required, a further report shall be presented to the Cabinet.
29. The above-described change in defect categorisation is to be reflected with how the status of customer enquiries is shown on the highways online reporting tool. Discussions are being held with Symology (the software owner of the Insight system) to ensure that the new HMOP approach is properly reflected on the Council's website.

#### **Sources of further information**

- a) Appendix A Highway Maintenance Operational Plan July 2016  
No other documents have been relied on to a material extent in preparing this report.

