

Scrutiny Committee

3 November 2016

Highways Infrastructure Asset Management

Summary

1. The highways infrastructure is the most valuable asset owned and managed by any local authority. It is vitally important for the economy and the quality of life of Suffolk's residents and road users. However, there are increasing financial pressures on local authorities and a drive for more efficient use of limited resources.
2. The Highways Infrastructure Asset Management Plan sets out how the County Council seeks to obtain best value from the highways infrastructure and meets the needs of Suffolk's residents and road users, in an environment of reducing resources. Highways assets include all the things which make up the highway infrastructure – not just roads and pavements but, for example, bridges, traffic management signals and signs and street lights, drainage and fences.
3. This report provides the Committee with information about the County Council's developing approach to Highways Asset Management.

Objective of Scrutiny

4. The objective of this item is to provide the Committee with an opportunity to consider progress towards developing an asset management approach to the upkeep of the County's highways infrastructure.

Scrutiny Focus

5. The scope of this scrutiny has been developed to provide the Committee with information to come to a view on the following key questions:
 - a) How has consultation on the Highways Asset Management Plan and Highways Maintenance Operational Plan been undertaken?
 - b) What were the results of the consultation and how is this being taken into account?
 - c) How is information about highways infrastructure being gathered and analysed and what further work is required?
 - d) When will any changes be implemented as a result of the new approach?
 - e) What will be the impact on Suffolk's residents?
 - f) How are changes being communicated?

- g) Is SCC on track to receive maximum “Incentive Fund” returns for the period to 2021?

How does this relate to County Council priorities?

6. This scrutiny is linked to the County Council’s corporate priorities as indicated below. All scrutiny items should consider how well they are delivering against the County Council priorities and Suffolk’s Community Strategy.

Suffolk County Council’s Corporate Priorities	Link to this Scrutiny
Raise educational attainment and skill levels	
Support the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) to increase economic growth	
Maintain roads and developing Suffolk’s infrastructure	✓
Support those most vulnerable in our communities	
Empower local communities	

7. Having considered the information, the Committee may wish to:
- make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport;
 - make recommendations to the Assistant Director for Operational Highways;
 - identify issues which would warrant further scrutiny;
 - request further information.

Contact details

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Background

8. Suffolk County Council is the local highway authority for all non-trunk roads maintainable at public expense within Suffolk. As the local highway authority, the County Council has to fulfil a number a number of statutory duties, many of which are contained in the Highways Act 1980. National recommendations for the provision of the highways maintenance service have previously been defined in three specific Codes of Practice – Well-Maintained Highways, Well-Lit Highways and the Management of Highway Structures. The content of these three Codes of Practice is being reviewed and brought together under a new overarching Code of Practice entitled Well-Managed Highway Infrastructure. The review started in autumn 2014 and a revised Code is due to be published at the end of October 2016. The new Code encourages the development of a locally determined risk-based approach to highway maintenance, aligned to central government’s expectation that local highway authorities will adopt appropriate asset management.

9. From the 2015/16 financial year, highways maintenance funding has included an Incentive Fund, which is planned to increase over the period 2015/16 to 2020/21, with a corresponding reduction in the highways capital maintenance indicative needs formula allocation over the same time period. The Incentive Fund is based on performance, evaluated using a self-assessment questionnaire, one of the qualifying requirements being evidence of progress in relation to asset management.
10. Accordingly, on 10 November 2015, Cabinet approved a new Highways Infrastructure Asset Management (HIAM) Policy and associated Strategy documents. Members heard that, upon endorsement of these documents, work would commence on developing a Highways Infrastructure Asset Management Plan (HIAMP), and also a communication plan to enable consultation and to broaden the understanding and application of HIAM documentation. The Cabinet was informed that the draft HIAMP would be ready for full public consultation by Summer 2016, with a view to approval and publishing in the Autumn. Members also heard that, during this period, many other low level activities would need to be completed, including revisions to the Highways Maintenance Operations Plan to align it to the risk based approach advocated in the new Code.
11. The highway infrastructure assets covered by the approach are the elements that make up the highway in the broadest sense. This includes (but is not restricted to) roads, pavements, public rights of way, cycleways, bridges, highway structures, lighting, traffic signals, drainage, signs and roadmarkings, fences and bollards, hedges trees and verges, weather stations and bus stops/shelters.
12. In order to secure best value for money, asset management planning considers the whole-life cost of providing, maintaining, operating and replacing the assets. This includes maintenance treatments, at the most appropriate time to minimise the whole of life cost. Far greater consideration also needs to be given to the revenue impact of a capital investment in new infrastructure.
13. On 12 July 2016, Cabinet approved revisions to the existing Highway Maintenance Operational Plan to formally enable Suffolk Highways to move towards more risk-based preventative highway maintenance, thereby providing a more cost-effective approach than the existing reactive maintenance approach. The revised plan came into immediate effect but was also subject to formal public consultation, alongside the HIAMP. Cabinet delegated responsibility to the Assistant Director Operational Highways to consider the public consultation responses and determine the final version of the Highway Maintenance Operational Plan by no later than the end of November 2016. The consultation closed on 15 September 2016.
14. In order to develop a maintenance regime that applies risk management to decision making about the upkeep of the highways asset, a set of maintenance response matrices have been developed. The matrices provide guidance on the timescales for repair, dependent upon the severity of a defect and its relative location within Suffolk's highway network.
15. Since 9 May 2016, all defects identified either by the highway inspection process or reported through the highways online reporting tool or direct contact with the customer service centre have been assessed on a trial basis against these matrices, and the matrices have been updated in light of the information gathered through the trial. Repair response times have been standardised into categories

1-8, ranging from Category 1 (emergency 2 hour response) to Category 8 (planned works defined annually as part of the asset management approach). All identified defects are assigned to one of these categories.

16. Further information about the Council's proposals to implement an asset management approach to the upkeep of Suffolk's highways can be found on the Council's website at:

<https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/consultations-petitions-and-elections/consultations/highways-asset-management/>

17. A copy of the full Highway Maintenance Operational Plan, including the matrices for decision making can be found at:

http://committeeminutes.suffolk.gov.uk/LoadDocument.aspx?rID=0900271181cbcd9e&qry=c_committee%7e%7eThe+Cabinet

Main body of evidence

Evidence Set 1 has been provided by the Assistant Director, Operational Highways and is attached to this report

Supporting information

Cabinet (10 November 2015); Agenda Item 7 and Appendices A to C "Adoption of Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Policy and Strategy Documents":

Available from:

<http://committeeminutes.suffolk.gov.uk/meeting.aspx?d=10/Nov/2015&c=The+Cabinet>

Cabinet (12 July 2016); Agenda Item 8 Highways Maintenance Operational Plan; Available from:

http://committeeminutes.suffolk.gov.uk/LoadDocument.aspx?rID=0900271181cbcd9d&qry=c_committee%7e%7eThe+Cabinet and Appendix; Available from: http://committeeminutes.suffolk.gov.uk/LoadDocument.aspx?rID=0900271181cbcd9e&qry=c_committee%7e%7eThe+Cabinet

Suffolk County Council's Highways Infrastructure Asset Management Policy; Available from: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/assets/council-and-democracy/consultations-petitions-and-elections/Highways-Asset-Management-Summary.pdf>

Glossary

ADOH	Assistant Director of Operational Highways
HIAM	Highways Infrastructure Asset Management
HIAMP	Highways Infrastructure Asset Management Plan
HMOP	Highways Maintenance Operational Plan
SALC	Suffolk Association of Local Councils