

CABINET RESPONSE - HIGHWAYS MAINTENANCE MEMBER LED REVIEW – INTERIM REPORT

To: **Cabinet**

Date: **25th October 2011**

From: **Executive Director : Environment Services**

Electoral division(s): **All**

Forward Plan ref: **Not applicable** *Key decision:* **No**

Purpose: **To respond to the findings and recommendations of the highway maintenance Member Led Review – Interim Report**

Recommendation: **Cabinet is recommended to:**

a) Thank the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for its work and advice on this matter.

b) Consider and agree the responses to the recommendations in the interim report.

c) Note that it looks forward to receiving the final report in due course.

<i>Officer contact:</i>		<i>Member contact</i>	
Name:	John Onslow	Name:	Councillor Steve Criswell
Post:	Service Director, Infrastructure Management and Operations	Portfolio:	Community Infrastructure
Email:	john.onslow@cambridgeshire.gov.uk	Email:	steve.criswell@cambridgeshire.gov.uk
Tel:	01223 715663	Tel:	01223 699173

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Cambridgeshire County Council's Enterprise, Growth and Community Infrastructure Overview and Scrutiny Committee has undertaken a member-led review of the highways maintenance service. This review concentrated on roads and footpath maintenance, although its scope has included the wider aspects of the general maintenance of the whole network.
- 1.2 The review has also covered aspects raised from a similar review undertaken by Worcestershire County Council and the latest Audit Commission Guide.
- 1.3 The report from the scrutiny group is an interim report and requests Cabinet's comments on the scope of further work and suggestions for other issues for investigation in order to enable the Group to prepare final recommendations. Officers recommend that the scrutiny working group meets with the Cabinet Member and senior officers to consider the detail of what is a very wide ranging and complex review to enable them to be given full consideration as part of the IPP and the review of future service provision.

2. RESPONSE TO KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 The report is very welcome and contains many constructive suggestions and proposals. Timescales for most of the issues raised by the Overview and Scrutiny Review are linked to those of the Integrated Plan process (IPP). The report is therefore helpful in developing the thinking around the IPP. Issues not covered by the IPP will be addressed through other processes.

Policy

- 2.2 Work is underway, as part of the IPP process, to develop a long term highway maintenance strategy. This covers the points raised by the Review, including:-
 - A shift towards more of a longer term asset management approach, balanced with the need to address immediate concerns.
 - Develop information on expected future conditions of each road type.
 - Review the appropriate and affordable maintenance standard each road type will be maintained to.

Work is also continuing to explore collaborative working with other Authorities to identify any savings in shared processes and procurement costs. A meeting has been arranged with counter parts from Northamptonshire at the end of October building on liaison with this and other authorities.

Performance

- 2.3 The Review's findings relating to the condition of the network and the likely future trend are acknowledged. It is also agreed that the quality and presentation of the data needs to be developed in the future. Further work is underway to strengthen the asset management approach to ensure investment decisions are made based on reliable and repeatable condition data.

- 2.4 The report highlights the need for variable standards, depending upon road classification and traffic flows, will be taken up as part of the work on developing the long term maintenance strategy.

Funding

- 2.5 The Review's recommendation that highways maintenance should be seen as one of the Council's main priorities within the IPP process is noted. Work is being undertaken to consider options and potential for providing extra capital funding to supplement the present capital funds.

Costs

- 2.6 Considering each of the issues raised separately:
- Calculating the long term finance implications for the Council if there is a gradually deteriorating road network is being undertaken as part of the IPP process.
 - Insurance costs are being monitored by the Risk Management Team within the Council, which in time may be able to define trends when more data is available.
 - Officers are working with both national and regional groups to develop good quality benchmarking information. With different sorts of contracts, this is not as easy as it seems, however it is expected that progress can be reported within the next year.
 - There has been some preliminary work undertaken concerning the shape of a future highway services contract beyond the current arrangements, which last until 2016. This work will continue over the next year. Meanwhile, a new approach has been agreed with Atkins, whereby the Council acts as commissioner of services and Atkins act as service provider. This approach is aimed at increasing accountability and clarifying roles to remove any overlapping activity.
 - The Highway Services Contract does have mechanisms to incentivise productivity and quality, which Atkins have committed to. Levels of savings are being challenged and reviewed by the two organisations.
 - The extension of the defect period to 2 years will be a consideration in future contracts, although consideration will need to be made of potentially increased contract costs.
 - The Eastern Highways Alliance will be monitored for its benefits. The Council is actively involved.
 - The meeting with Northamptonshire due to take place later in October will include an exchange of knowledge on each other's ways of working to form a foundation for discussions on any efficiencies and potential joint working. Liaison is also being put in place with other Councils where Atkins are the service provider to compare performance.

Management

- 2.7 Many of the recent Audit Commission Report on Highways Maintenance recommendations have already been included within the improvements to the Highway Services activities. This is being strengthened through the present IPP to ensure they are properly embedded in the highways maintenance service. A culture change programme is being rolled out as part of

transformation of Environment Services. Issues regarding funding priorities will be considered as part of the IPP.

Working with Local People to Find Solutions

- 2.8 The recommendation to develop a strategy to manage public and Members expectations with respect to changing more of an asset management approach is noted. As part of the transformation of Environment Services and the highways service in particular, a programme of work has been instigated to address localism, governance and communications with local representatives and communities. The development of the Highway Warden scheme, developing the role of local people to act as a channel to local members and the area officers has been trialled and widely welcomed by many parishes. This work is due to be rolled out further and considered as part of the wider review of localism and governance relating to highway matters.

Options for Increasing Highways Funding

- 2.9 The Committee's view that various ways need to be considered to increase funding for capital and revenue are welcomed and as a result, this work is being undertaken as part of the IPP process.
- 2.10 The report requests Cabinet's comments on the scope of further work and suggestions for other issues for investigation. Further work by the O&S Committee, as suggested in the report, would be welcomed. It is suggested that the working group meets with the Cabinet Member and senior officers, to consider this further in the context of the IPP and future service provision.

3. ALIGNMENT WITH PRIORITIES AND WAYS OF WORKING

Supporting and protecting vulnerable people when they need it most Helping people live healthy and independent lives in their communities

- Improving the conditions of roads and footpaths across the County would make them safer to use by everybody.

Helping people live healthy and independent lives in their communities

- Better maintained roads and footpaths increase accessibility for all users.

Developing the local economy for the benefit of all

- Better maintained highways will help encourage economic growth and increased investment, and help people move around the County more easily.

Ways of Working

- There are a variety of methods for the public to raise highways issues with the Council.

- However, a new communications strategy will be required if the Council does move to a more comprehensive asset management approach, as recommended by the Audit Commission and the review group. It will be necessary to explain to the public why some roads that do not appear to be in poor condition are in some instances treated before those that are in poor condition.
- Improved communications with the public and members are also needed to explain the challenges highways face, the constraints officers work under, particularly with regard to budgets, to help manage people's expectations, to encourage them to continue to report concerns and to use the network responsibly.

4. SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Resource and Performance Implications

The transformation of the service is being managed proactively as a change programme, supported by the Transformation Team. While resources have reduced, consideration is being given to additional investment being made in maintenance work. Efficiencies have already been made and further work is being undertaken to explore the potential for greater efficiencies. Performance indicators are being reviewed as part of the shift to a Commissioner / Service Provider relationship with greater emphasis on cost and programme delivery.

4.2 Statutory, Risk and Legal Implications

There are no significant implications for any of the recommendations within this category

4.3 Equality and Diversity Implications

Highways are maintained to ensure they are fit for purpose and provide routes for movement away from the County and routes for access to communities. It is likely that road conditions will vary as a result of funding, traffic flows and soil conditions.

4.4 Engagement and Consultation

The Highway Service is developing numerous methods with an aim to improve its communications with Members, other elected councils and the public in general to ensure that those managing the service are providing what is needed by the respected communities whilst managing expectations of what can actually be provided within the funding constraints.

Source Documents	Location
Review report and minutes of Enterprise, Growth and Community Infrastructure Overview and Scrutiny Committee 26 th September 2011	Robert Jakeman Room 221, Shire Hall Cambridge