

Highways Operational Standards 2023/24

To: Highways and Transport Committee

Meeting Date: 7th March 2023

From: Executive Director for Place and Sustainability

Electoral division(s): All

Key decision: Yes

Forward Plan ref: 2023/029

Outcome: To Approve the updates to the County Council's Highway Operational Standards document.

Recommendation: To approve updates to 9 sections of the Highway Operational Standards. These are highlighted in yellow in Appendix A to this report.

Officer contact:
Name: Mike Atkins
Post: Highways Asset Manager
Email: mike.atkins@cambridgeshire.gov.uk
Tel: 07881 332 792

Member contacts:
Names: Cllr Alex Beckett/Cllr Neil Shailer
Post: Chair/Vice-Chair of Highways and Transport Committee
Email: alex.beckett@cambridgeshire.gov.uk
neil.shailer@cambridgeshire.gov.uk
Tel: 01223 706398

1. Background

- 1.1 The County Council has a suite of highway asset management documents. This suite of documents comprises: the Highways Asset Management Policy, Highways Asset Management Strategy and the Highway Operational Standards (HOS).
- 1.2 This report seeks the committee's approval for a number of policy updates within the Highways Operational Standards. There are no substantive changes to the other documents

2. Main Issues

- 2.1 The suite of highways asset management documents sets out the Authority's approach to managing and maintaining the highways (including public rights of way) in Cambridgeshire. The documents support officers in operational decision making to help ensure a long-term approach to highways maintenance and optimum use of the funds available to the Authority. They also ensure a consistent approach to the management of assets and provide clarification and definition of standards delivered through highway maintenance.
- 2.2 The Authority's approach to highways asset management is aligned with national guidance, codes of practice and Central Government policy. Central Government's commitment to highway asset management has been demonstrated via the incentive funding mechanism. The amount of funding that the Council has received in recent years from the Department for Transport (DfT) has depended upon the extent that the Council can evidence it has implemented and maintained highway asset management strategies and policies. It is anticipated that this funding mechanism will continue for year 2023-24. The Council receives £2,082,000 via the Incentive Fund. The incentive funding process requires us to adopt a culture of continuous improvement in our highways asset management approach in order to secure funding in the future. The maximum level of incentive funding is assumed within the Business Plan for 2023-24.
- 2.3 Authorities are assessed for Incentive Funding based upon their responses to a broad range of questions regarding highways asset management. DfT assesses these responses and places authorities within one of three bands. To achieve maximum funding, an authority must be placed within Band 3. The Council has previously achieved Band 3 status. It is therefore important that the Authority continues with its implementation of the asset management approach and that the key documents are updated to reflect best practice.
- 2.4 A number of key updates have been made to the HOS, as highlighted in Appendix A. Statistics and financial figures have also been updated to reflect the ever-growing nature of the highways network and assets, together with the outcomes of the 2023/24 business planning processes.

Updates to the HOS

Please see Appendix A to this report. This is the HOS document, with the below key changes highlighted.

- 2.5 Update 1: Section 3.14. The County Council assesses the condition of its roads via annual programmes of condition surveys. This objective condition data is a key factor in formulating forward programmes of work. The data is also used to calculate key performance indicators regarding the condition of the highways network.

For 'A', 'B' and 'C' class roads these surveys have previously been undertaken using a SCANNER machine. For unclassified roads, a coarse visual assessment (CVI) has been undertaken. High-definition AI video surveys have been used in 2022/23 in the assessment of the county's road condition. From 2023-24, this will become our main condition assessment method. This survey method provides succinct wide-ranging condition data and ratings which are then reviewed in an office environment supporting better programme decision making. The inspection frequency will remain the same.

The images provided will also enable officers to make assessment of some highways issues remotely, obviating the need for some site visits. This will increase efficiency; help reduce the carbon emissions associated with the highways maintenance service and reduce the safety risks associated with site visits.

- 2.6 Update 2: Section 9.4: Further to the business planning processes for 2023-24, some savings are to be made via amendments to weed killing standards. These changes are now proposing a risk-based approach rather than a set number of treatments per year.
- 2.7 Update 3: Appendix F, item 17: The policy regarding roadside memorials has been changed. The revised wording was proposed by the Vision Zero Partnership for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough and was developed by officers from Road Safety, highways maintenance and the police. The proposed wording will provide greater clarity to highways officers and families.
- 2.8 Update 4: Appendix F, item 29: The speed limits policy has been amended to reflect the new 20 mph limit policy, as approved by this committee at its meeting held 6 December 2022.
- 2.9 Update 5: Principally section 7: All references to commuted sums have been removed from the HOS. A separate report and proposed commuted sums policy is being considered by this meeting of the Highways and Transport Committee.
- 2.10 Update 6: Appendix J: The County Council is responsible for holding and maintaining the definitive record of rights of way in the county. This is the Definitive Map and Statement. The Council receives applications to amend these records and also proactively identifies anomalies in the records that might require rectification.

Changes are proposed to the way that these applications and proactive orders are prioritised for processing. A system of prioritisation is needed due to a high influx of applications during 2022 on top of an existing backlog of cases, resulting in a volume of cases that is significantly above the capacity of staff to process them. The limitations of the existing Statement of Priority means that, whilst some cases are prioritised, there is no differentiation between the rest apart from the year of application. A scoring system has been developed to ensure a consistent and justifiable prioritisation process is used. This revised Statement of Priorities and scoring system has been developed following consultation with the Local Access Forum (LAF) and has been tested with sample cases.

- 2.11 Update 7: Appendix T: The Council receives requests for alterations to the surfacing types of rights of way. Such requests might be associated with planning applications, requests from landowners or other interested parties.

It is important that such proposals are considered in the light of the preferences of all interested parties and that there is a defined, transparent process for such decisions being made. The proposed authorisation procedure is set out at Appendix T of the HOS. Further to consultation, including with the Local Access Forum (LAF), it is proposed that the final decision on significant changes to rights of way surfacing be made by the Assistant Director (Highways Maintenance). Decisions on surfacing types will have due regard to the Draft Cambridgeshire Active Travel Design Guide.

- 2.12 Update 8: Appendix F, item 44: The guidance on community verges has been updated to ensure that the consideration of applications to plant trees, shrubs and the like in the highway has due regard to the needs of biodiversity and carbon capture.
- 2.13 Update 9: Appendix H: The Skid Resistance Policy has been amended to remove references to texture depths, as measured by SCANNER. This is because we will no longer be undertaking SCANNER surveys (please see paragraph 2.5).

3. Alignment with corporate priorities

3.1 Environment and Sustainability

The following bullet points set out details of implications identified by officers:

- The asset management approach to highway maintenance is the basis for many of the operational policies and standards contained within the HOS. This approach is predicated upon preventative maintenance treatments being applied to highways at the appropriate points in their lifecycles. Such preventative maintenance minimises the need for deeper, more expensive treatments to be applied at later dates.
- It is these deeper treatments that are the most environmentally harmful since they require greater use of materials (including virgin aggregates) and associated transport. These carbon emissions are exacerbated by road users having to travel further via diversion routes and having to wait at traffic control, such as traffic signals.
- Given the above, the over-arching principles of the HOS are a key factor in minimising the environmental effects and carbon footprint of the highways maintenance service.

3.2 Health and Care

There are no significant implications for this priority.

3.3 Places and Communities

The following bullet points set out details of implications identified by officers:

- Our Highways are the conduits supporting and connecting communities and businesses across Cambridgeshire and beyond. Well managed and maintained highway infrastructure supports the local and national economy providing a safe environment for public travel and the movement of goods.

3.4 Children and Young People
There are no significant implications for this priority.

3.5 Transport
The following bullet points set out details of implications identified by officers:

- The HOS is a key document in enabling the transport of goods and passengers across the county and beyond.
- The policies in the HOS and the updates set out in this report are instrumental in facilitating all relevant modes of travel on the county's highways, with due regard to the prioritisation of active travel. The policies and updates concerning the county's rights of way are particularly relevant in this respect.

4. Significant Implications

4.1 Resource Implications
The report above sets out details of significant implications in paragraphs 2.2 to 2.3 regarding the Incentive Fund and its relationship to the adoption and implementation of highway asset management principles.

4.2 Procurement/Contractual/Council Contract Procedure Rules Implications
There are no significant implications within this category.

4.3 Statutory, Legal and Risk Implications
There are no significant implications within this category

4.4 Equality and Diversity Implications
Equality and Diversity Impact Assessments have been carried out for the following updates to the HOS and are provided as Appendix B to this report:

- Memorials and Floral Tributes on the Highway
- Weed killing
- Definitive Map Modification Order Applications Statement of Priorities
- PROW Change of Surface authorisation

4.5 Engagement and Communications Implications
There are no significant implications within this category

4.6 Localism and Local Member Involvement
There are no significant implications within this category

4.7 Public Health Implications
There are no significant implications within this category

4.8 Environment and Climate Change Implications on Priority Areas

4.8.1 Implication 1: Energy efficient, low carbon buildings.
Positive/**neutral**/negative Status:
There are no significant implications within this category

4.8.2 Implication 2: Low carbon transport.

Positive/neutral/negative Status:

The proposed changes to the HOS will help facilitate all forms of transport on the county's highways. The changes concerning rights of way will have particular regard to the requirements for active transport.

4.8.3 Implication 3: Green spaces, peatland, afforestation, habitats and land management.

Positive/neutral/negative Status:

There are no significant implications within this category

4.8.4 Implication 4: Waste Management and Tackling Plastic Pollution.

Positive/neutral/negative Status:

There are no significant implications within this category

4.8.5 Implication 5: Water use, availability and management:

Positive/neutral/negative Status:

There are no significant implications within this category

4.8.6 Implication 6: Air Pollution.

Positive/neutral/negative Status:

The HOS seeks to provide a safe and serviceable network for all modes of transport, including facilities for pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians. The proposed changes regarding rights of way will help ensure that all these modes of transport receive due consideration.

4.8.7 Implication 7: Resilience of our services and infrastructure, and supporting vulnerable people to cope with climate change.

Positive/neutral/negative Status:

There are no significant implications within this category

Have the resource implications been cleared by Finance? Yes

Name of Financial Officer: Sarah Heywood

Have the procurement/contractual/ Council Contract Procedure Rules implications been cleared by the Head of Procurement? Yes

Name of Officer: Clare Ellis

Has the impact on statutory, legal and risk implications been cleared by the Council's Monitoring Officer or Pathfinder Law? Yes

Name of Legal Officer: Linda Walker

Have the equality and diversity implications been cleared by your EqIA Super User?

Yes

Name of Officer: Jon Munslow

Have any engagement and communication implications been cleared by Communications?

Yes

Name of Officer: Sarah Silk

Have any localism and Local Member involvement issues been cleared by your Service Contact? Yes

Name of Officer: Jon Munslow

Have any Public Health implications been cleared by Public Health?

Yes

Name of Officer: Iain Green

If a Key decision, have any Climate Change and Environment implications been cleared by the Climate Change Officer?

Yes

Name of Officer: Emily Bolton

5. Source documents guidance

5.1 Source documents

None