

9 February 2022**Agenda Item: 4****REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR, PLACE****HIGHWAYS IMPROVEMENT PLAN****Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to:
 - Update Committee on the Highways Improvement Plan which flows from the highways review undertaken as a result of the motion agreed at Full Council on 27th May 2021.
 - Set out the governance arrangements for monitoring the implementation of the activities in the Plan.
 - Recommend that aspects of road safety including 20mph speed limits are reviewed by a cross-party highways panel following the motion to Full Council on 20th January 2022

Information

2. The Transport and Environment Committee of 17th November 2021 agreed the outputs and recommendations of the cross party highways review. Policy Committee, on 2nd December 2021, approved the development of a Highways Improvement Plan to deliver the review recommendations, with the detailed Plan, and proposals for continuing external support, to be considered at a forthcoming Transport and Environment Committee. Policy Committee also agreed the continuation of the cross-party highways review panel to effectively monitor the progress of the Highways Improvement Plan.

External Support and Cross Party Panel

3. Following the successful engagement of WSP to support the Highways Review process, WSP has been re-engaged to provide technical and project management capability for the initial implementation of the Plan. The engagement is from January 2022 for 6 months. This will be reviewed at the end of that period
4. The cross party highways review panel will continue, with membership as before and suitable substitution arrangements. Meetings are being arranged for March and June 2022 to enable members to review progress with the Improvement Plan.
5. Following the motion to full Council on 20th January 2022, it is recommended that the cross party panel also considers speed limits and other measures that could improve road safety in line with the agreed motion. Resulting recommendations from this work will come to a future Committee for further consideration.

Highways Improvement Plan

6. A draft Highways Improvement Plan is included at Appendix A. This shows the start dates, and interdependencies for each of the actions previously agreed by Committee. As previously reported, these actions came from the work of:

- The 5 cross-party panel meetings.
- 3 additional “fact finding” panel meetings with highways lead members and officers from Derbyshire, Staffordshire and Hertfordshire County Councils.
- The outcomes from an LGA Peer Review of highways services, conducted between 21-23 September, and involving members and officers from Kent, Cumbria, Oxfordshire, Warwickshire and Wiltshire County Councils. The focus of the Peer Review was to consider the progress made and emerging outputs from the highways review work. A significant part of the LGA Review was interviews with stakeholders including Councillors and external partners. In total 40 people were interviewed as part of the LGA review and information was gathered from 33 meetings, with a total of 230 hours spent to determine the Review findings. This work complemented the call for evidence issued to all County Councillors.
- WSP, an international highways and engineering consultancy, which provided external sector expertise and input into the review. WSP has many years’ experience of working in the highways sector and works with over 20 highway authorities providing guidance and support on highways reviews, highway asset management and maintenance practice. Matthew Lugg, the lead consultant, gathered evidence from Councilors and officers to inform his work.
- Knowledge from recent Future Highways Research Group membership

7. An officer project board has been set up to ensure delivery of the actions. This will provide progress reports to the cross party panel. It is intended that the panel meeting in March will consider the plan in detail and consider the ordering and priority of individual elements of the plan and success criteria.

8. However, following Committee approval of the review recommendations, work has already commenced on a number of the key actions in the Plan. These are set out below:

a. Capital Programme

A three year rolling capital maintenance programme will be presented to Committee in March for consideration. The capital programme will support long term planning, scheduling and delivery and will continue to incorporate the annual member request process. The capital programme will place emphasis on the unclassified network and footways. Work has commenced on developing and implementing a “cross asset” prioritisation process to improve targeting of investment and maintenance treatments for all highways assets including drainage. Within this, the process will incorporate the prioritisation of footways, the unclassified network (with weighting to reflect both highway hierarchy and condition) and drainage.

b. Revenue Maintenance Programme

In order to move to a right repair, right first time, approach that delivers permanent repairs whenever possible, consideration is being given to increasing the number of structural patching gangs that operate on the Nottinghamshire’s highways network. This will allow more work to be done to tackle the areas of the highway most affected by repeat visit pothole repairs, and support the adoption of a right repair, right first time approach, whilst also enabling repairs to remain

within standard response times for Category 2 and 3 highway defects. For emergency Category 1 highway defects, the use of cold lay treatments to protect the safety of road users will continue, though the additional capacity provided by the patching gangs will enable follow up permanent repairs to be undertaken more frequently.

c. Functional Split and Leadership

A detailed review has commenced covering the division of responsibility between the Council and Via in key areas, including:

- Highways policy and strategy,
- Highways core asset management and works/scheme/treatment prioritisation
- Highways major capital programme management
- the interface with members and residents

As a result of the review it is intended that greater control and direction setting for the above functions will return to the Council. A further report will come to Committee setting out a revised set of arrangements and proposed structure. There will be a shift in responsibilities so that the Council will lead on the key areas identified above.

d. Communications

In order to move to a communications model that is led and directed by the Council to better support communication and engagement with residents – strategic, operational and campaigns - a review of the Council's current capacity has taken place. This has shown the need for an additional resource, and this is currently being designed with corporate communications colleagues. Further communications development activity is included in the Highways Improvement Plan to develop and deliver a refreshed comms and engagement plan, including the development of a single revised approach to communication for all highways related activity. The plan will incorporate:-

- Greater use of the MyNotts app and digital tools such as push notification
- Better information for Members' related to highways activity in their wards.
- The wider use of video explainers – with greater involvement of Members and operatives to better explain highways works
- Improved correspondence (including web based automatically generated responses) approaches to reflect a more, personalised and plain-English approach for residents with queries/concerns.
- Closer links with community influencers such as Parish Councils, to ensure that communities are better informed about local works.
- Updating and refreshing scheme information/signage to better promote the benefits of highways works.

e. Operational Improvements – Via

Via have commenced work on the following operational improvements:

- Work is ongoing to establish the Via operational Hub for coordinating maintenance works to improve efficiency and productivity and ensuring a whole street approach to highway maintenance is provided. System awareness, process development and delivery planning including workshops with staff have been carried out, which will ensure the smooth transition to this coordinated approach.

- Further staff training programmes in Via have been established to strengthen the focus on customer care, work quality and performance. The Via communications team working with the District Managers have developed a customer focused approach to enquiries and interactions with the public which is currently being embedded across Via. To further improve the professionalism and quality of scheme delivery, leadership and operative training has been carried out across the front-line operational areas.
- With the requirement to significantly reduce the use of Viafix for road repairs, improvements to the delivery methods, plant and materials are being investigated to improve the quality and efficiency of highway maintenance. A change in the equipment used for preventative maintenance will be piloted this quarter, to ensure the anticipated levels of increased productivity are achieved, and the current small-scale trial for the replacement of Viafix will be extended and trialled more widely.

Other Options Considered

9. None

Reason for Recommendations

10. The Highways Improvement Plan has been formulated based on the agreed recommendations developed by the cross-party panel. These were developed over a series of five meetings, with input from a significant LGA peer review and external input from sector experts WSP and a form comprehensive list of activities to now be shaped into a Highways Improvement Plan. From a resident perspective they are designed to improve the Council's highway maintenance offer and provide an opportunity to

- Move to a right first time approach to highway maintenance and reduce the need to use reactive short term maintenance
- Publish a longer term programme of capital works to keep residents informed of future plans
- Maintain network condition and seek to improve it within financial constraints
- Prioritise local roads and footways
- Work with communities alongside improving communications, so that residents understand our approaches and are better informed about future plans
- Increase our effectiveness and efficiency, maximising return on investment by ensuring that our highways maintenance and management works are driven by our policies and strategy.

Statutory and Policy Implications

11. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Financial Implications

12. Any financial implications arising from the review outcomes will be considered as part of the Highways Improvement Plan and reported to Committee.

Public Sector Equality Duty implications

13. Any public sector equality duty implications arising from the review will be considered as part of the Highways Improvement Plan and subsequent reports to Committee.

Implications for Sustainability and the Environment

14. Effective highway maintenance approaches can reduce congestion, its knock-on effects on air quality and its impacts on local communities. The recycling of materials and aggregates is also considered when delivering highways schemes. Any specific implications for sustainability and the environment will be considered as part of the Highways Improvement Plan and subsequent reports to Committee

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

- 1) Committee approves the draft Highways Improvement Plan attached at Appendix A, subject to progress against it being reviewed by the cross-party panel.
- 2) Committee approves the governance arrangements for monitoring the implementation of the activities in the plan.
- 3) Committee tasks the cross-party panel to review aspects of road safety including 20mph speed limits following the motion to Full Council on 20th January 2022 and report back to Committee.
- 4) Committee approves the production of a Committee report to outline the outputs of the review of the functional split between the Council and Via, returning key strategic functions to the Council as well as a proposed new staffing structure.
- 5) Committee endorses the work on communications to consider a refreshed comms and engagement plan with suitable capacity.

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Constitutional Comments (SJE – 12/01/2022)

15. This decision falls within the Terms of Reference of the Transport & Environment Committee to whom responsibility for the exercise of the Authority's functions relating a) to the planning, management and maintenance of highways and pavements; and b) for policy development and approval, in relation to matters within its remit and subject to any necessary approval by Policy Committee or Full Council, has been delegated. If Committee resolves that any actions are required, it must be satisfied that such actions are within the Committee's Terms of Reference.

Financial Comments (GB 17/01/2022)

16. There are no financial implications arising directly as a result of this report.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

- Reports to Transport and Environment and Policy Committees June to December 2021 – Highways Review

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

- All