

REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNTY COUNCIL

HIGHWAYS REVIEW

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to:
 - Update Committee on the highway services review which has been taking place following on from the motion agreed at Full Council on 27th May 2021
 - To recommend to Committee that the actions arising from the review are delivered through a Highways Improvement Plan with continuing monitoring from the Highways Review Panel and continued external support and challenge.

Information

2. The Transport and Environment Committee of 15th June 2021 agreed to the commencement of a cross-party highway review. A summary of the agreed scope of the review is set out below:
 - Review of relative performance against national and Council metrics.
 - Practice, policy and guidance
 - Capital maintenance programme including funding allocation methodologies across the County for the annual capital maintenance repair methods, use of technology and innovation.
 - Revenue maintenance programme - highway and associated footway repair treatment - include review of the use of Viafix and use of technology and innovation.
 - Utility works – including coordination, traffic management and damage to infrastructure
 - Work quality and value for money - review processes to ensure good quality work and value for money is delivered
 - Performance management - review of performance management arrangements and contract management of Via
 - Communications
 - Drainage, Tree Maintenance and Verge Maintenance
 - Functions and Leadership – including review of functional split between NCC and Via
3. A cross party highways review panel was established to oversee and direct the review. Its membership comprises:
 - Cllr Neil Clarke OBE (Chairman)
 - Cllr John Ogle
 - Cllr Nigel Turner
 - Cllr Sam Smith
 - Cllr Tom Hollis

- Cllr Penny Gowland
- Cllr Maureen Dobson

Cllr David Martin, Cllr Bruce Laughton and Cllr Matt Barney also participated in some meetings of the review panel as substitutes for panel members who were unable to attend individual meetings.

4. At the 20th October panel, Members were able to bring together the knowledge and inputs from the following:
 - 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 Local Government Association (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, were engaged to provide external sector expertise and input into the review. WSP has many years’ experience of working in the highways sector and currently has clients in over 20 highway authorities providing guidance and support on highways reviews and highway asset management and maintenance practice. Matthew Lugg, the lead consultant, has gathered evidence from Councillors and officers to inform his work.
 - Knowledge from recent Future Highways Research Group membership

Key Issues and Current Situation

5. At the 20th October panel, Members agreed a summary of the key findings and highways issues facing Nottinghamshire:
 - Whilst the condition of the County’s A and B/C roads is good and stable, with the standard of these roads being in the top quartile of all Counties, the unclassified network condition requires improvement. Here, the overall standard of these roads sits within the third quartile of all Counties.
 - Overall national funding levels for highway maintenance have fallen by 40%+ over the last decade. As a result, the long-term deterioration of the condition of roads is an issue for all local authorities. In Nottinghamshire, the backlog of works required to fully address this long-term deterioration would be in the region of £150m.
 - Nottinghamshire faces similar issues in terms of funding, road condition and public perception as other county areas. A particular local factor, however, is the use of Viafix and current practice around pothole/patching repairs.
 - The Council’s highways policy framework is sound overall. However, some aspects of it require updating, including the provision of greater clarity on the funding allocation model in use, and the development of a refreshed approach to asset management that reflects national best practice.

- The current approach to capital/revenue highways programming – based around one-year plans for each - is a barrier to long term planning.
 - The establishment and development of Via as the Council's highways service provider and contractor is seen as a positive vehicle for service delivery overall. However, with the Via contract at its midpoint, and with Via now in the ownership of the Council, there are opportunities to improve and refine the arrangement to benefit highways and residents.
6. At the 17th November Transport and Environment Committee, councillors approved the improvement outcomes and recommendations from the cross-party highways review panel. These are included at Appendix 1 to the report and summarised in para 7 below.

Summary

7. The recommendations can be summarised as follows:

We will:

- *Move to a right first-time approach to our highway maintenance and reduce the need to use reactive short-term maintenance.*
- *Recognise that prevention is better than cure and that whole street approaches are desirable.*
- *Publish a longer-term programme of capital works to support our ability to plan for the long term and keep residents well informed about this.*
- *Maintain our overall network condition and seek to improve it within financial constraints, whilst prioritising local roads (the unclassified network) alongside our footways wherever possible.*
- *Improve our communications, so that residents are better informed about our work, and understand our approaches.*
- *Improve our major capital programme management*
- *Increase our effectiveness and efficiency, maximising the return on our investment in highways by ensuring that our highways policies and strategy drive our maintenance priorities and treatments/techniques, alongside our increased use of innovation and technology.*

Highways Improvement Plan

8. In view of the volume, range, and scope of the panel's recommendations, it is intended to develop a detailed Highways Improvement Plan to support the successful delivery of the recommendations. The Plan will identify responsibility for delivery, sequencing and timelines, and the cost implications for individual actions. In order to develop and implement this significant piece of work, the support of an external partner will be required to provide additional technical expertise and continuing challenge. There are approximately 50 recommendations from the panel and it is envisaged that the Highway Improvement Plan will run for at least 6 months.
9. As part of the development of the Highways Improvement Plan, it is intended to develop business cases for potential additional capital and revenue investment. Additional investment will be considered as part of the new operating model. Areas for consideration are likely to be capital spend on the unclassified network, footways and drainage, and revenue spend on mechanised patching, drainage works and verge/tree maintenance.

10. Monitoring of the Highways Improvement Plan will clearly be important, and it is intended for the cross-party panel to continue to meet on a regular basis to monitor the plan once it is in place, and report progress back to Transport and Environment Committee. It is intended to draft the plan for consideration at a future meeting of the Transport and Environment Committee.

Other Options Considered

11. None

Reasons for Recommendations

12. The recommendations agreed at the 17 November Transport and Environment Committee were developed by a cross-party panel over a series of five meetings, with input from a significant LGA peer review and external input from sector experts WSP and form a 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 as set out in paragraph 7 above.

13. In order for the detailed proposals to be fully implemented, it is important to continue with external technical support and challenge as well as achieve Member oversight of progress through the continuance of the cross-party panel.

Statutory and Policy Implications

14. 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

15. Any financial implications arising from the review outcomes will be considered as part of the Highways Improvement Plan and reported to Transport and Environment Committee. The cost of the continuing external technical support and challenge will be met from existing highway budgets.

Public Sector Equality Duty implications

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

Implications for Sustainability and the Environment

17. 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 Transport and Highways Committee

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

- 1) A Highways Improvement Plan be developed 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.
- 2) Committee approves the continuation of the cross-party highways review panel to effectively monitor the progress of the Highways Improvement Plan

Councillor Ben Bradley
Leader Nottinghamshire County Council

For any enquiries about this report please contact:

Derek Higton – Service Director Place and Communities - 0115 9773498

Gary Wood – Head of Highways and Transport – 0115 9774270

Constitutional Comments (SJE – 03/11/2021)

18. This decision falls within the Terms of Reference of the Policy Committee to whom responsibility for all decisions within the control of the Council, of policy development and approval in relation to all matters (except those reserved for Full Council) and monitoring and review the overall performance of the Council, has been delegated.

Financial Comments (SES 03/11/2021)

19. The financial implications are set out in paragraph 15 of the report.

20. Any financial implications arising from the review outcomes will be considered as part of the Highways Improvement Plan and reported to Transport and Environment Committee. The cost of the continuing external technical support and challenge will be met from existing highway budgets.

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 Committee June to November 2021 – Highways Review

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

- All