

12 February 2015

Highway Maintenance and Asset Management Strategy 2015-18

Ward(s) All

Portfolios: Councillor Lee Jeavons, Environment and Transport

Executive Summary:

This report brings the principal issues around the forthcoming Highway Maintenance Strategy and Highway Maintenance Asset Management Plan to the attention of the Panel prior to its consideration at Cabinet in March 2015.

The detailed draft documents and the complete list of proposed maintenance schemes do not form part of this report, however the intention is to gain the Panel's views on the proposed approaches in order to pass comment to the forthcoming Cabinet meeting.

Reason for scrutiny:

It is known that the Council does not have access to sufficient funds to address all roads and footways that need attention across the borough. The way in which maintenance schemes are selected and prioritised is therefore an essential element in ensuring that these scarce resources are used in the most effective manner.

The new strategies introduce a more objective and transparent method of prioritising Planned Highway Maintenance schemes.

Recommendations:

That:

The Panel note the intended methods of highway maintenance prioritisation for the forthcoming three years and confirm comments that they wish Cabinet to consider in formally adopting this new approach.

Background papers:

Walsall Council Highway Maintenance Strategy 2012-2015
Walsall Council Asset Management Plan 2006-2011

Resource and legal considerations:

Walsall's highway network is its most valuable asset with a total estimated value of £1.2 Billion. At current levels of investment its overall condition will continue to decline. As Highway Authority the Council has a legal duty to maintain the Highway in a reasonably safe condition.

Citizen impact:

Highway condition is a constant high priority in customer and public surveys. Every single citizen is a user of the highway to some degree.

Environmental impact:

N/A

Performance management:

The maintenance programme will impact on National and Local Performance Indicator outturns and Whole of Government Accounts valuations. The highway condition has a direct effect on the safety and sustainability of our communities. Our asset management planning and efficiency measures will directly affect our ability to access certain maintenance grants in the future.


Equality Implications:

The maintenance of the highway in a reasonable manner affects all users of the highway network equally. It is in everyone's interest to ensure the borough's roads are in as safe a condition as practically possible although there is potential for those with vision or mobility issues to be disproportionately affected by poor highway conditions.

Consultation:

Further consultation is necessary following this Panel's observations on this report, including Area Partnerships, Risk and Insurance, Legal Services.

Contact Officer:

John Roseblade
Group Manager – Highways and Environment
 01922 654391
rosebladej@walsall.gov.uk

1. Report

- 1.1 Walsall's highway network is the largest and most visible community asset for which the authority is responsible. It is in constant use by both the public and commerce; it is fundamental to economic sustainability and growth and is key to the social and environmental vitality of the borough. In order to serve the needs of our highway users, it is crucial that the highway network is properly maintained and managed.
- 1.2 The Highway Authority is responsible for a road network of 528 miles (850km) as well as footways, footpaths, public rights of way and cycle ways and associated highway elements such as bridges, traffic signals, drainage systems, street lighting, road signs, etc. Walsall Council recognises the importance of the highway network and the vital service that these combined assets provide.
- 1.3 The Code of Practice for Highway Maintenance Management, 'Well Maintained Highways', recommends that highway authorities 'should ensure that policies, priorities and programmes are formally adopted by the authority and published. They should also be incorporated into the Highway Asset Management Plan (HAMP). The approval and adoption process should involve the authority's Executive and be explicit, transparent and inclusive.
- 1.4 Both the Highway Maintenance Strategy (HMS) and the Highway Asset Management Plan 2015-18 are direct replacements for their predecessors. In summary, the HMS provides information on Walsall's highway maintenance service including its purpose, scope, policy, legal framework, systems for inspections etc. The Highway Asset Management Plan (HAMP) sets out the longer term approach for maintaining the highway network using actual inventories and lifecycle planning methods which inform investment decisions.

2.0 Highway Maintenance Strategy/Programme

- 2.1 In order to introduce more transparency as to how roads are selected for maintenance, engineers are proposing to introduce a scoring system that is driven by the factors normally considered when putting together the Highway Maintenance Programme.
- 2.2 These criteria are presented in Appendix 1 together with their weighting scores. Once all identified roads are assessed against this matrix engineers will be able to publish a prioritised list of maintenance schemes which are ranked according to their overall score.
- 2.3 It should be noted that current budgets will not finance the resurfacing of all roads and footways in need of attention and there will inevitably be a backlog of schemes that cannot be delivered. The matrix does take account of these locations, allocating a score for delayed/deferred schemes from previous programmes.

- 2.4 It may not always be possible to undertake high priority maintenance schemes due to activities beyond the control of the Council such as utility company activities, major developments, scheduled diversions and extended periods of severe weather.
- 2.5 There will also be occasions where the prioritised programme will need to be overridden to take account of strategic, national and local events such as the Olympics Torch Relay, veteran's parades, and local and community infrastructure projects. There is an established delegation whereby the Head of Engineering and Transportation, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder, can amend the programme. It is recommended that this arrangement continues.
- 2.6 The proposed matrix incorporates the ability for the Area Partnerships to influence the ranking of schemes and further consultation with Partnership Chairs and Managers will take place in March/early April. One proposal is to give the partnerships the ability to credit up to 100 points either to a single scheme or divide the 100 points across a number of schemes identified for their areas.
- 2.7 In putting together a programme of planned maintenance schemes it is important to ensure that it considers the reactive maintenance activities. Whilst lots of repairs can indicate that reconstruction of a road is necessary, sound localised repairs such as those being delivered through our planned inlaid patching programme, or use of the Velocity Patcher or Road Mender can extend the useful life of a road.
- 2.8 Another confounding factor is that certain funding streams are confined to given hierarchies of roads. For example, the so-called Maintenance Block (see section 4 below) has been specifically restricted to use on the classified (or strategic) road network.
- 2.9 In addition to the traditional reconstruction activities there is a clear expectation from government that Councils will make the most of preventative maintenance treatments designed to economically extend the useful life of roads. These are techniques such as micro asphalt surfacing or surface dressing which are essentially products which seal surfaces to prevent water ingress. Works of this nature generate a lot of complaints as they are seen as a cheap alternative and the loose chippings given off before they settle down are particularly unpopular.

3.0 Highway Asset Management Plan

- 3.1 The value of the highway is determined annually within the asset management planning process and is declared through the Council's Whole of Government Accounts (WGA) financial reporting. The current gross replacement cost of Walsall's carriageway and footway network is £1.2 billion.
- 3.2 Deterioration of the highway is measured for this purpose using accredited survey techniques and must also form part of the WGA reporting process. The

current level of damage and decline across the entire highway network has been calculated at £89 million.

- 3.3 Whilst it is acknowledged that this level of investment is unrealistic it is estimated that it would require an initial investment of £16.5 million to bring the condition of the carriageways alone back to an industry recognised standard of 5% deterioration.

4.0 Financial Considerations

- 4.1 The Council has been setting future revenue and capital budgets and this report does not repeat that information which will have been considered as part of the budget setting process.
- 4.2 The Council's works budgets (including revenue and mainstream capital) for planned highway maintenance in 2015/16 will be £2.5million.
- 4.3 Funding is also secured from external capital sources. In December 2014 government announced future Maintenance Block allocations as part of a £6billion investment in Highways. Walsall's allocation is set out below.

				Data refresh will change allocations		
	Total allocation (£) 2015/16	Total allocation (£) 2016/17	Total allocation (£) 2017/18	Indicative allocation (£) 2018/19	Indicative allocation (£) 2019/20	Indicative allocation (£) 2020/21
Walsall	2,415,000	2,214,000	2,147,000	1,943,000	1,943,000	1,943,000
Reduction compared with year 1	0	201,000	268,000	472,000	472,000	472,000

- 4.4 An incentive element to the funding is to be introduced from 2016/17. Local Authorities will be assessed in terms of efficiency and Asset Management which will determine what percentage of the allocation deficit they will receive (see table above).
- 4.5 In 2014/15 Walsall Council received £1.8m Maintenance Block and additional funding in the form of £188k additional local highway maintenance grant and £700k severe weather and pothole fund allocations (Total = £2.68m).
- 4.6 In the new Maintenance Block allocations, government will not be reserving money for contingencies such as severe weather payments. DfT recommend that authorities make their own arrangements reserving contingency funds for circumstances such as extreme weather.

- 4.7 It is important to note that, in the absence of additional maintenance funding, severe weather payments and pothole grants, the total new allocation for Walsall is an effective reduction when compared with total budget in 2014/15 (£2.68m in 2014/15 compared with £2.4m for 2015/16). This would be compounded in future years should Walsall not be rated in the highest category when assessed as part of the Incentive element in years 2-6 hence the importance of sound strategy and planning.
- 4.8 On 23 December 2014 DfT also announced details of £575m available nationally over the next 6 years for authorities to bid for through the “Challenge Fund”. At the time of writing this report a regional application is being finalised through the West Midlands Highway Infrastructure Managers Group (HIMG).
- 4.9 In the absence of any Challenge Fund allocation total revenue, Council Mainstream Capital and Maintenance Block funding for 2015/16 will be circa £5million.