Highways Maintenance

1. Purpose

1.1 To inform the panel about the council’s responsibilities as the Highway Authority for Highway maintenance, current operating and potential future developments.

2. Recommendation

2.1 That the panel consider the report and submit suggestions regarding future developments of the service.

3. Background

3.1 The UK Road Liaison group produced a document entitled ‘Well Managed Highway Infrastructure – A code of Practice (WMHI). This code applies across the UK and has recommendations for highway maintenance that all highway authorities should implement. The code is designed to promote the establishment of an asset-managed risk approach to the highway infrastructure. Highway Maintenance is governed primarily by the Highways Act (1980) though the Traffic Management Act (2004) is an important legislation to govern the delivery of the service.

3.2 As the Highway Authority, the Council must ensure that the requirements of the National Code of Practice are achieved.

3.3 A working group of highway managers and insurance colleagues developed the St Helens Highway Code of Practice (HCoP) using the requirements of the Code of Practice for highway inspections and repairs taking into account best practice, contractual requirements and the ability to deliver a risk based approach.

3.4 The highway network is St Helens largest asset and includes approximately 2600 roads totalling 781km in length and 1048km of footway.

3.5 The Highway Network in St Helens comprises of;
- 83km of Principal Roads;
- 58km of Non-principal Roads (B and C roads);
- 577km of unclassified Road (Local Roads);
- 1048km of footway;
- 186km of Public Right of Way;
- 162 Bridges and Structure;
- 3800 Street Trees;
- 492,000m² of grassed areas;
- 23,854 lighting columns ; and
- 34,000 Gullies.

St Helens Council maintains the following assets
a) Carriageways;
b) Footways;
c) Special Surfaces;
d) Road Markings, signs and street nameplates;
e) Street Furniture;
f) Street Lighting and traffic signals;
g) Drainage;
h) Bridges and Structures;
i) Public Rights of Way; and
j) Trees, Grass and Shrubs.

3.6 There is currently a significant backlog of structural maintenance and it is therefore very important to make best use of the resources available to the council for repairs and maintenance to ensure the network remains in a serviceable condition for all road users. The council has put in place a system for reviewing and prioritising all highway maintenance defects to ensure resources are used in the most effective way through three main areas of work.

- Reactive maintenance which deal with immediate risks to the public from minor (actionable) defects;
- Structural maintenance which addresses large scale refurbishment due to significant decoration of the highway structure.
- Preventative maintenance which is a planned strategy of cost – effective treatments to a road/ footway that extend its life by treating at its optimum time by sealing to prevent water infiltration and stabilise loose surface materials.

3.7 The findings from the St Helens National Highway and Transport (NHT) Public Satisfaction Survey in 2019.

The headlines figures from the survey show:
- Overall satisfaction of 54% (1% above the NHT national average and the same as in 2018).
- Improved satisfaction in the condition of highways of 41% (7% increase from 2018 and 7% above the NHT national average of 36%)
- Same level of satisfaction with traffic levels and congestion as last year of 46% (3% above the NHT national average of 43%)
- A reduction in satisfaction with management of roadworks to 47% from 49% in 2018 (This is 5% below the NHT national average of 52% and may be the result of the major schemes at Windle Island and Elton Head Road).

3.8 The schedule of planned highway maintenance works is set out into two different categories; reactive repair works, structural and preventative maintenance.

**Reactive repair works**
All footways and carriageways in the borough are regularly inspected by the council’s highway inspectors. Localised minor works and repairs are then implemented where a defect exceeds the council’s intervention level and is considered a potential hazard to pedestrians or vehicles, ensuring that highway assets comply with the ‘Well Managed Infrastructure Code of Practice’. The public can also report defects that they see and the highway inspectors will carry out additional safety inspections to investigate those reports and implement repairs where the intervention levels are exceeded.

**Structural and Preventative programmes**
Major work programmes are produced and developed on the basis of annual condition surveys undertaken to an agreed UK pavement management assessment system (UKPMS), carried out by specialised highway consultants either by machine or trained highway condition Engineers. These surveys are then reviewed in line with the principles of the council’s highway asset management strategy to determine the maintenance priorities for the year. The council then produces a targeted whole life costed programme of work that includes a risk assessment, condition surveys, traffic usage, reactive maintenance history and engineering judgement are analysed. The overall goal is to achieve maximum benefit from the resources available so that the longevity of the highway is maximised and the speed of deterioration and any future maintenance costs are minimised. Priorities are driven
on an annual basis in accordance with the allocated budgets and therefore coordination of works reflects this cycle. The cost of works is also considered, for example, if a road needs a lot of reactive work it may be better to put repairs into planned works.

3.9 In December 2014, the government announced that £6.6 billion was being made available between 2015/16 and 2020/21 for total highway maintenance funding. From that funding £578 million has been set aside for an incentive fund scheme, to reward councils who demonstrate they are delivering value for money in carrying out cost effective treatments. Each authority will score themselves against 22 questions, and place themselves into one of 3 bands on the basis of evidence available. The Department for Transport will not necessarily want to see the supporting evidence from every local authority, although it does reserve the right to undertake sample audits. St Helens are at a high level band 2 with the intention to be band 3 (the highest) by 2020/21.

4. Co-ordination of Council highway planned works with Utility and Developer works

4.1 Every authority is required to coordinate the works on the network. Every quarter the street works team chair a co-ordination meeting with utility companies and St Helens Highway teams to co-ordinate all major planned works. At these meetings utility companies and the council share forward plans which are used to schedule works and events.

5. Permit for Works

5.1 St Helens and many other Highway Authorities across England operate a permit scheme to manage co-ordination of works. Works promoters (mainly utility companies) apply and pay for permits to occupy road space to carry out works. The Highway Authority are also required to be granted a permit to undertake works on the highway.

5.2 The Streetworks team can refuse permits, challenge timings and also impose conditions to permits to better manage the works undertaken. All granted permit variations aside from those issued to the Highway Authority must be paid and are dependent on the category of works being proposed and the category of road on which is to be excavated. One permit is issued per road for a set of works or phase of works.

5.3 Under the New Road and Street Works Act 1991, local authorities are empowered to charge statutory undertakers for processing permits, undertaking sample inspections of works and issuing penalties for non-compliance with permit conditions or codes of practice. This income is ring fenced to fund the streetworks team as intended by the legislation. All street works are regulated and St Helens coordinates around 10,873 works per year. Approximately £600,000 p/a is brought into the borough issuing these permits. The street works team coordinates the works ensuring that the least amount of disruption is caused, for example trying to coordinate gas, water and highway works not to conflict.

5.4 Elgin website – The council use one.network website which is one platform to plan, monitor, communicate and analyse traffic disruption – from road closures and diversion routes, to public events and incidents – anything that has potential to cause issues on the road network.

5.5 A government led central notification network called Street Manager is being introduced from April 2020.

6. Innovative Practices
The council has undertaken successfully a number of innovative practices to repair roads/footways in the most cost effective way.

a) Multi Hog – the council has purchased a multi hog machine to tackle reactive repairs. The machine has the ability to move quickly from one location to another and to plane to an
accurate depth as opposed to breaking out inaccurately with a jackhammer. The benefits are savings in increased productivity, risk of operatives having health issues as a result of overexposure to vibrations, noise and dust are eliminated entirely and recycling of the material planned out avoiding paying disposal costs as well as reducing disruption to the public. Since its acquisition in July 2016 savings of £120,000 have been achieved with over 4500 actionable carriageway repairs being undertaken.

b) Texband – is a single pass screed-applied system for the permanent repairs of open seams, joints and cracks used as a treatment for early stage road failures and are a highly economical means to prevent further deterioration to the road surface.

c) Micro Asphalt – is a thin surface treatment for roads/footways which is laid over the top of an existing surface to seal and protect it. It can take out minor dips and bumps, restore grip and texture and create a new quickly applied waterproof surface. It is not suitable for sites that have major structural unevenness or high-stress sites though has been used extensively throughout the borough to restore the roads at low costs compared with traditional resurfacing.

7. **Highway Maintenance Funding**

7.1 To set the budgeting context, the value of St Helens highway asset (Whole Government Accounts Gross Replacement Cost) is £1,872,701,000 and the annual maintenance budget for planned road resurfacing is around £1.5 Million. In identifying the biggest priorities for the upkeep of our highway asset, inspections help identify actions that will slow down, arrest or improve the condition of the asset.

7.2 With funding being squeezed, as well as an increasing expectation from residents of well-maintained roads, it makes it harder for the Council to improve roads and highways to meet demands of residents. It is also worth noting the impact of other external factors alongside funding, such as climate change leading to more extreme weather conditions and more vehicles on the road.

8.0 **Budget – 2019/20 – Planned Highway Maintenance**

8.1 City Region Investment (Capital) - £1.9 million- Street lighting/ Structures/ Carriageway Improvements
Council Investment (Council/ Balances) - £750K – Footway Improvements

8.2 In April 2016, the government confirmed the level of transport capital funding that would be allocated to the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA) between 2016/17 and 2020/21 for transport funding. Traditionally the funding for road maintenance for the LCRCA has been made on a historic formula split for the Liverpool City Region local authorities. The LCRCA are now targeting this funding towards locally significant roads in the City Region known as the Key Route Network (KRN) which will inevitably reduce the funding available for the remaining local network as this is the only guaranteed source of capital available to the Council for maintenance schemes.

8.3 The funding allocated for planned highway maintenance works resulted in 2% of the road network (carriageway) actually being repaired/maintained and 0.5 % of the footway during 2019/20.

9.0 **Performance Management**

9.1 The Council has a number of mechanisms it currently uses or could seek to employ to ensure that utilities, developers and contractors are meeting set performance standards and targets.
10. **Performance Indicators**

10.1 The Council are responsible for reporting a number of Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPI’s) relating to the condition of principal roads, non-principal classified roads and unclassified roads and footway surface condition.

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