

**SCRUTINY REPORT: HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE SCRUTINY REVIEW**

**RESPONSE BY CABINET MEMBER WITH RESPONSIBILITY FOR  
TRANSPORT AND SAFE ENVIRONMENT**

May I start by thanking the members of the Scrutiny Task Group for the thoroughness of work they have done in reviewing this area of the Environmental Services Directorate's work, particularly, given the limited time they had to complete this task. I welcome the conclusion of the report which I believe in general supports the many changes implemented by the Directorate in the period following the completion of the Task Groups original report in March 2007.

It is interesting to see, from this review, how many of the changes to working practices and approaches are beginning to come to fruition although we are far from complacent about the challenges which lie ahead..

I am pleased that many of the recommendations of the Task Group endorse thinking already taking place within the Directorate.

**Recommended Action 1**

- **The Carriageway Lifecycle Plan needs to be finalised and in use to ensure the benefits of an asset management approach can be maximised and for it to act as a management tool to further drive and prioritise highways maintenance.**
- **The original Highway Maintenance Scrutiny made stark statements in relation to the problem of road deterioration: 'Worcestershire is fast approaching, if indeed we have not already reached, the "tsunami" point – where the cost of repairs to the most critical roads overwhelms the available funding - and, without intervention, this situation will continue to develop. It is clear to us that the only solution to the problem of deteriorating road condition in Worcestershire is an additional programme of work requiring an injection of extra funding.'**

**In our view, the 'tsunami' is still there. Although the £15 million capital project of work on unclassified roads has been very effective, it has not addressed the foundation structure of our roads. How to address this, will be an essential task of future Councils.**

- **To do so, the Council will need to raise the budget profile of Highways maintenance, in order to avoid the 'tsunami' happening, and even greater financial input in the future.**

**Response**

The carriageway lifecycle plan has been updated with the latest deterioration rates and will form part of the impending Transport Asset Management Plan (TAMP). The TAMP along with other key data will form an educated

management tool to ensure optimum prioritisation of the County's maintenance requirements.

We allocate our resources to ensure that the bow wave effect on our critical network can be held at bay with existing funding. The latest PI's show no change from last year. However, there are many pressures on the current and foreseeable allocations that will inevitably mean roads in the lower section of hierarchy could be overwhelmed by the bow wave effect if funding is not reviewed on a regular basis.

The investment made in our Urban Unclassified roads was significant and we believe has addressed the issues presented in those instances. Minor estate roads do not require the significantly deeper construction of our Principal and "B" road network.

Environmental Services will continue to seek the most cost effective ways of executing the maintenance needs of the County's network to prevent a bow wave effect in Worcestershire.

### **Recommended Action 2**

- **In the short-term, the Task Group would like the Council's priorities for urban footways to be focused on a selection of 'primary' and 'secondary' routes for each community, based on usage, and their links to key services. This hierarchy should be established through consultations with local and parish members. This will ensure that future maintenance programmes target the most well used, popular routes.**
- **The Directorate discussed with us the possibility of using cluster maps of public complaints as a possible tool in reducing complaint numbers. However, we feel this should not be the only focus for assessing footway condition.**

### **Recommendation**

Improving footway maintenance

### **Response**

As part of the £3m capital investment programme into footways, all County Councillors have been asked to nominate their top five sites requiring attention. Many Councillors have consulted with Parish Councils in order to establish such a list. Councillors' recommendations are being assessed according to priority and an individual action list for each division will be agreed with Members.

The hierarchy of footways is well defined in "Well Maintained Highways". The County's network is continually reviewed in this respect utilising many data sources. The thoughts of the local and parish members will be welcomed.

Cluster maps of Public complaints are just one of the many data sources that are being used to assess the condition of the network. We are continually developing

our intelligence gathering techniques and all useful data will be used to develop the annual maintenance programme.

### **Recommended Action 3**

- **The improved communication brought by the weekly list and monthly newsletter could be increased, by review of the content and target audience.**
- **Review methods used to circulate the Highways Newsletter to Parish Councils, to ensure that both CALC member and non-CALC member parishes receive the information.**

### **Recommendation**

Customer care

### **Response**

It is agreed that the content and target audience of highways newsletters and emails could be reviewed to ensure that it reaches the widest and most appropriate target audience. In the case of Parish Councils, there should be no difference between CALC and non-CALC members.

### **Recommended Action 4**

- **Replies to all letters should be within the designated time agreed by the Directorate of:**
  - **All correspondence that require a response – reply within 7 working days**
  - **If 7 days not possible – acknowledgement within 7 working days plus full reply within 15 working days. Where this is not possible, regular updates should be provided.**
- **It is also crucial that responses to letters are as user-friendly as possible.**
- **Care is needed to ensure contact details quoted in the letters are accurate i.e. is it Highways or the Hub?**
- **'Complete' should mean when the job is completely finished 'on the ground', and not that it has been passed on to another party. Where a job or customer enquiry involves work by another organisation which means it has been handed on, we recommend that there should be a system in place to check that this organisation has completed their element of the work. We feel that clarification on 'completion status' would improve both efficiency and customer satisfaction.**

- **The potential of PEM to generate report information for county divisions, district wards and parishes would be extremely useful, and we recommend the Directorate's development of this facility.**

## **Recommendation**

Performance management

## **Response**

It is agreed that replies to all letters should be within the designated time agreed by the Directorate and that responses are as customer focussed as possible and that contact details are accurate. Regular monitoring will take place to ensure that this is the case.

'Complete' on the customer service record should mean that the job is completely finished 'on the ground'. In the case of a customer enquiry being passed on to another party, this will be investigated to ensure opportunities for improvement are addressed.

The potential of the PEMs system to generate report information based upon County Divisions, District Wards and Parishes is useful. The effectiveness of this, however, needs to be based on the correct input of information at first point of contact and we will continue to work with colleagues at the Worcestershire Hub in this regard.

## **Recommended Action 5**

- **We continue to endorse the approach of Gloucestershire County Council, where the contractor's profit is based on quality and public satisfaction. We recommend that the revised KPIs include the issues of quality and public satisfaction.**
- **As part of scrutiny's future performance management sessions with each Directorate area, we recommend review of the new key performance indicators, including their impact and how they are monitored.**

## **Recommendation**

Maximising the asset management approach for highways maintenance

## **Response**

The contract extension KPIs were developed, in place and operating from April 2009 to measure specific deliverables, cost reductions and service improvements that were agreed with Ringway and the second year of extension is conditional upon their satisfactory performance. Whilst they are essentially management tools used to track and control progress, some are directly related to service satisfaction. For example, KPI 1.2 the random audit of ART works (reactive repairs such as potholes) measures compliance with the specification, and KPI 6.2 tracks the level of silt found in gullies and therefore their effectiveness. This is related to optimising the frequency of emptying. KPIs are reported monthly and

progress on contract extension deliverables and KPIs is discussed and scrutinised fortnightly in joint meetings with Ringway.

The potential for linking payments to the contractor and public satisfaction with relevant aspects of highway services, where these are predominantly influenced by the performance of the contractor should be explored further. Officers will consider the merits of this approach as a part of future contract revisions.

The KPIs referred to above are not the only ones used to monitor the contractor's performance. All contractors, including Ringway, are measured and challenged on a suite of 11 KPIs including start and finish on time, build quality, post completion defects and the cost and effect of changes. The suite is continually reviewed for relevance and effectiveness in driving service improvements from our suppliers.

### **Recommended Action 6**

- **We recommend that County Council officers have a direct role in post inspection and monitoring of the contractor's work, as we believe this to be crucial to improving the quality of repairs. We suggest this could be achieved in a light touch way, through routine sampling, or through checking audit samples. If necessary this could be funded by diverting funds from pre-inspection work.**
- **We recommend that the Directorate gains clarification on the obstacles to using edge sealing and its use within the County.**
- **We recommend a 29-day post repair check by county council staff should be carried out, to gauge whether the repair was still deemed temporary, or whether it had been replaced by a '29 day' permanent repair within the proposed targeted time-frame.**
- **It may be that ART gangs working to target 10 will be inclined to carry out just the 'marked defect' as instructed on their Works Order, and then move on to the next job. We therefore recommend this issue could be addressed by training inspectors to take a broader view of general road condition which may not have yet reached intervention level status, but where preventative action could avoid this and provide improved public perception and satisfaction.**

### **Recommendation**

Contract monitoring and inspection

### **Response**

Highways officers hold regular reviews of sampled works completed by our contractor on reactive repairs, which includes before and after completed) photos of defects, which are monitored weekly and monthly. This work is completed within existing resources.

Edge sealing (or overbanding) of 'type one' pothole repairs has now been implemented (a type one pothole repair, being where it is possible to break out to a sound edge, to secure a more permanent repair). Planned patching is currently being reviewed and it is hoped that overbanding will also be incorporated into larger scale road patching at the end of this review, which will be completed shortly.

Where we affect an emergency/temporary repair, we are taking steps to ensure that a permanent repair is put in place as soon as practicable.

Further training of Inspectors has been completed to improve the marking of defects, which includes consideration of surrounding condition of the road surface and the best method for repairing any problems which are found.

### **Recommended Action 7**

- **We recommend that the Directorate continues to maximise the numbers of inspections made nearing the end of the guarantee period.**
- **We recommend that the Council continues to monitor the inspection results and develop closer working with the utility companies.**

### **Recommendation**

Closer working with utility companies

### **Response**

These recommendations are agreed and the Council will continue its good practice in these areas. We have increased the number of inspections of reinstatements nearing the end of the guarantee period.

Closer working relations with utility companies is continuing through regular performance meetings. Action Plans are in place with the main Utilities to ensure that any issues are dealt with effectively