

HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE



A typical road in Worcestershire

**Response by the Cabinet Member with
Responsibility for the Environment to the
Report of the Highway Maintenance
Scrutiny Task Group**

February 2007

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May I begin my response by thanking the members of the Highway Maintenance Scrutiny Task Group for their work in this Scrutiny. They have diligently explored the subject, found areas of great strength within the maintenance service but also some areas which are not so strong. As a result of their work, Members are probably better informed about the issues surrounding Highway Maintenance than has been the case for very many years. This can only be a very good thing.

Turning to the recommendations made in the report, I will deal with each in turn:

We recommend that the Council adopts a new local performance indicator for footways, which ensures that expenditure can be re-prioritised so that the condition of category 3 footways can be improved.

I agree with this recommendation. It makes no sense at all that the only performance indicator for footways covers a mere 3.77% of the footway network. Indeed, I understand that this shortcoming is nationally recognised but I do not feel we should wait for a national indicator to be developed; we should develop our own immediately.

We recommend the reintroduction of the highway maintenance newsletter to parish councils and councillors.

The highway maintenance newsletter has been, and is being, superseded by greater, more accurate and more current information available on the website. Work is underway to improve the website further and this will be completed by Spring 2007. Until completion of this work a newsletter will be re-introduced.

We recommend that individual relationships be forged via regular meetings between the District Liaison Engineers, other relevant highways officers/engineers, and parishes.

I agree with this recommendation. An important part of the function of the District Liaison Engineers and their colleagues in the Community and Response Unit is to forge relationships with the parishes.

We also recommend that better information for parish clerks should be provided on planned maintenance works and priorities for repair through both the HUB and website, and the creation of a series of information leaflets, which could also be circulated to the public.

As I have stated, work is continuing to improve the website which meets this recommendation. It will never be possible to provide leaflets giving information as current or as good as that on the website but I agree with the principle that general information should be available through leaflets such as that produced annually showing winter gritting routes.

We recommend that there is an audit of our KPIs and possible adjustments, similar to the best practice we saw in Gloucestershire.

Some of my staff are renowned for their ability to “steal with pride” good ideas from others. I am sure they will be only too ready to follow this recommendation both in respect of Gloucestershire and elsewhere.

We recommend that key performance indicators based on quality of work should be introduced at the earliest opportunity. The Council should:

- **devise a system of checks on the quality of ART work . Serious consideration should be given to implementing a small percentage of checks, rising or falling over time depending on levels of concern, the results to feed into key performance indicators;**
- **ensure that ARTs have received adequate training and practice in agreed methods of repairing pot holes and other road defects; and**
- **ensure that ARTs are aware of the requirement to repair other potholes close to those identified for repair and can use their initiative and common sense.**

Work has been underway for some time which covers this recommendation. A company called Penmark has been employed to examine all aspects of ART work at all levels. This initiative has been universally welcomed, particularly by the manual workers. A typical reaction from them is to say that this is the first time for years that anyone has given them support and assistance in improving their performance

We recommend that all defect repairs are logged into the planned maintenance programme properly.

Again, work has been underway for some time which covers this recommendation. It is in fact a requirement of the Highway Maintenance Code of Practice which the authority has adopted.

We recommend that further work is done on whether the additional costs of inspection at the end of two years would outweigh the costs incurred if the county council had to repair a similar percentage of defects on the remaining 90% of utility openings.

I agree that it is worthwhile investigating whether such an approach would in effect be an “investment to save.”

We recommend that the Environmental Services Directorate considers whether examples of best practice in Hertfordshire and Kirklees, through pro-active engagement with the Regional HAUC could lead to improved relationships with utilities in Worcestershire.

It is indeed worthwhile considering this but I would point out that one of the difficulties which Kirklees found was that they were unable to make much progress until the authority were able to provide a long term programme of their own works. The recent reorganisation within the service in Worcestershire enables the production of such a long term programme here for the first time.

We therefore recommend that the Directorate carries out detailed modelling in order to assess the programme of work, and its cost, required to

stabilise the road network and improve the condition of our roads. This modelling should balance the capital sum required against revenue consequences and sustainability of the highways budget, if revenue consequences cannot be funded from elsewhere.

I particularly welcome this final recommendation as it is the only way in which we can determine the optimum investment programme for our road network. I am pleased to say that we are now working with Professor Snaith to develop such a model and even more pleased to be able to say that Professor Snaith is now using in his other work examples of good practice which he has gained from Worcestershire!

This last point illustrates the excellence of the work already underway within the Highway Maintenance service and I would congratulate the staff concerned in this. A vast amount of change has occurred in the service over the past two years and at times this has been painful. However the rate of improvement is now very rapid and I am confident that we shall in due course have one of the very best highway maintenance services in the country. May I thank again the Scrutiny Panel for their work which has contributed to this.

**Derek Proddger MBE
Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Environment**