

scrutiny

focus on performance

Highways Maintenance Task Group Regeneration and Neighbourhoods Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Executive Member's feedback on last year's recommendations (shown in italics) is as follows:

- 1) *That the Committee acknowledges the difficulties faced by the Executive Member for Regeneration in maintaining and improving the Highways network under challenging circumstances.*
- 2) *That the Committee request the Executive Member for Regeneration to consider a change to the Highways Maintenance cycle to allow Officers to focus on Priority roads under the current Red/Amber/Green system, regardless of location.*

The first change to the Highway Maintenance cycle is the introduction of a revised Highway Safety Inspection Procedure aimed at reducing the proportion of the maintenance budget used for reactive maintenance which is an inefficient use of resources and subsequently allowing a greater proportion of the budget to be used to undertake more planned long term patching maintenance. This work will result in an improvement to the overall network condition and by virtue of its planned more permanent approach will result in more efficiency and a better use of resources. The intention of this procedural change is to refocus spending from reactive to planned maintenance.

Coupled with the above is the introduction of the Network Recovery Programme with increased investment into the highway infrastructure. The programmes being developed for inclusion in the Network Recovery process are based on Priority roads under the current Red/Amber/Green system, regardless of location.

- 3) *That the Regeneration Portfolio look to new technical solutions (Salford Solution) to ensure that the Council's Budget is spent in the most efficient manor.*

An essential element of network recovery is ensuring the best technical solutions are implemented in each case. As a precursor to this there is currently a series of trials being undertaken on new maintenance materials and methods. These focus on novel surfacing techniques and materials on medium to large scale repair work.

- 4) *That consideration is given to reinstating the road surface dressing programme through any save to invest options, as it represents a relatively inexpensive way of prolonging the life of a deteriorating road.*

In line with the previous response on recommendation 3, road surface dressing is one of several technical solutions being considered when preparing the network recovery programmes. Preparatory site work is already underway for next year's surface dressing programme which will commence in the summer months. Framework tenders are in preparation for this work in subsequent financial years.

- 5) *That the Executive Member look to bridge the skills gap in the Regeneration Portfolio's work force to ensure the "up skill" of workers be explored to reduce need for external contractors.*

The investment for network recovery is enabling the DSO workforce to carry out a greater range of work than previously, thus enabling the opportunity for 'up skill' training of the workforce to meet the challenge. To this end a skills and needs analysis is currently being undertaken across the workforce.

- 6) *That the Executive Member continues to look to Invest to save options and explore new opportunities open to the Council through prudential borrowing.*

As members are aware, the review of 'Invest to Save' options culminated in the introduction of the Network Recovery programme with increased investment in the highway network over the next four years that will address the maintenance backlog and lead to a network sustainable with the revenue budget..

- 7) *That the Executive Member gives priority to the quality of highways maintenance than the quantity.*

The quality of highway maintenance work is a key element of both network recovery and the move from reactive to planned maintenance as a result of the Highway Safety Inspection Procedure review. Going forward there is an intention to formally introduce a revised maintenance manual detailing required standards.

- 8) *That the Executive Member encourages the Council's insurers to contest claims below the insurance excess more vigorously and that the savings be used on the highways network.*

The council continue to work with their insurers to vigorously defend all claims against the council. The review of the Highway Safety Inspection Procedure included seeking the views of the Solicitors who represent the council in the defence of any claim to ensure that the new procedure provided a robust Section 58 defence against the claim.

- 9) *That the department ensures the sustainability of its work force, though the creation of apprentices, to help refresh its work force.*

Currently two apprentices have been employed on training programmes to allow for succession planning of an aging workforce. Further apprenticeships are planned as the network recovery programmes gain momentum.

- 10) *That the effects of traffic calming measures be explored to identify if there is a benefit to preserving the Highways network.*

Traffic calming measures have been shown to reduce accidents, especially the severity of accidents between vehicles and pedestrians. They are, however, known to require more maintenance than the adjacent carriageways. This is due to the additional impact they receive and their lower density (as they are hand rather than machine laid) and they tend to be constructed from bitmac rather than asphalt.

The specification of traffic calming measures will be improved during the revision of the maintenance manual noted above in section 7.

It is intended to introduce a 20mph pilot zone in Mill Hill within the next two months, this will see the installation of signs bounding the area without supporting traffic calming measures, the effect of the scheme will be monitored.

- 11) *That the Council continue to work with utility companies to seek ways of better co-ordinating road works and repairs to the network that could include surface dressing.*

On-going. Regular co-ordination meetings reduce the possibility of utilities damaging recently resurfaced roads. Where this is inevitable due to emergency works agreements are being reached with the companies to carry out more substantial repairs than those statutorily required under legislation, e.g. full width reinstatements to the A666 in Darwen as a result of emergency gas works.

Initial discussions with utility companies have shown them willing to adjust their programmes to accommodate our network recovery programme. BT's Roman Road ducting is a good example. We continue to work with utility companies to coordinate our works.

The council also continues its coring programme of utility reinstatements to ensure that repairs are carried out to the correct specifications.

Councillor Maureen Bateson
Executive Member for Regeneration