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| Mr Roger Elkins, Cabinet Member for Highways and Infrastructure | Ref No: H&I17 (19/20) |
| 5 December 2019 | Key Decision: No |
| Response to Mr Jones' Notice of Motion about Highways Maintenance to County Council on 18 October 2019 | Part I |
| Report by Director of Law and Assurance | Electoral Divisions: All |

1. The Chairman of the County Council referred the notice of motion on Highways Maintenance (see Appendix) submitted to the County Council on 18 October 2019, to Mr Roger Elkins, the Cabinet Member for Highways and Infrastructure, for consideration.
2. The motion called on the Cabinet Member for Highways and Infrastructure to reverse the cut to the highways maintenance budget, at least until such time as adequate alternative arrangements for others to cover the reduction in service levels are in place county-wide. The funding for this service to be taken during this transition period from the budget management reserve.
3. The Cabinet Member notes the highways maintenance briefing note circulated with the 18 October 2019 County Council agenda.
4. The Cabinet Member met with Mr Michael Jones on 19 November 2019 to discuss the motion. Mr Matt Davey, Director for Highways, Transport and Planning and Ms Michele Hulme, Head of Local Highway Operations were in attendance.
5. Mr Jones' restated his disagreement with the decision to reduce service levels for highways maintenance across the County as set out in the Cabinet Member decision in July 2019.
6. Mr Elkins explained that a risk-based approach had been taken to the actions endorsed by the decision and that these were in line with actions taken by other local authorities country-wide. Mr Davey confirmed that the actions adhered to the UK Roads Liaison Group's National Code of Practice set out in its document 'Well-managed Highway Infrastructure'.
7. Mr Jones noted that the service had overspent in this area over the past two years and had had to revise service levels in the light of reducing budgets. Mr Davey confirmed that the budget shortfall was circa £1m. Mr Davey further explained that that contracts for service provision would shortly be agreed with contractors with discussions on the details of service provision following in mid-December/January. Mr Elkins confirmed that a clearer overview of service levels could be given to Mr Jones at that time.
8. Mr Jones questioned what work was being done in liaison with partner councils to pick up on additional maintenance. Mr Davey explained that

despite liaison work by the County Council's Communities Team there had been limited take-up across the county.

9. Mr Jones raised concern on bus service requirements for gritted roads. Ms Hulme explained that a routine engagement meeting was to be held with bus companies in early December and that no concerns had been raised by the bus companies at this point.
10. Mr Jones questioned the impact of the decision on the visitor economy. It was explained that this was hard to quantify and that the priority for the service was to maintain a safe highway network.
11. In relation to safety, Mr Jones asked what provision was in place to ensure good line of sight for drivers across verges and safety for pedestrians travelling along the highway. Ms Hulme explained that there was the ability to vary schedules to increase attention to verge maintenance where required.
12. Mr Jones questioned the opportunity to use the County Council's reserves to fund a reverse in the budget cut. Mr Elkins explained that this was possible in theory but could only be done once and would not support the revenue requirement of an on-going service. Mr Elkins assured Mr Jones that once all tenders were in and discussions on service levels were complete he would provide the best service possible within the budget available.
13. Mr Jones requested information on the numbers of vehicle damage claims made to the County Council and numbers receiving compensation. Ms Hulme undertook to send Mr Jones the link to the information on the County Council's website.
14. Mr Jones explained that he remained dissatisfied with the decision to reduce the budget for highways maintenance and confirmed his intention to take his motion to debate at County Council on 17 December.
15. Subsequent to the meeting with Mr Jones, at Cabinet on 3 December 2019, Mr Elkins confirmed that pre-emptive county-wide weed spraying will be undertaken in 2020. The cost will be contained within the overall highways budget.
16. The Cabinet Member is unable to support the Notice of Motion, so will recommend that members do not support it at the County Council meeting on 17 December.

Tony Kershaw

Director of Law and Assurance

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Background papers

None

County Council - 18 October 2019

Notice of Motion from Mr Jones

Highways Maintenance

In July this year the Cabinet Member for Highways and Infrastructure approved a new highway maintenance plan which introduced with immediate effect reduced service levels for highways maintenance across the County. This includes a reduction in the frequency of grass cutting and winter salting routines, repairs to signs, bollards and road markings; the cessation of routine weed spraying; reduced tree investigations and cyclical pollarding and a reduction in the frequency of the emptying of gullies. It is understood that action will be taken where there is a safety concern.

This Council understands that the budget for highways maintenance of this nature in 2018/19 was £9.597m although this was clearly not adequate because there was an overspend. The budget for 2019/20 and the subsequent three years is now £8.707m, an annual budget reduction of almost £900,000.

It is understood that work to encourage town and parish councils and community groups to take on this work has begun.

This Council considers that the County is currently in an appalling state with, in some areas, waist high weeds appearing on roadsides and along pathways. Whilst it accepts the desire to increase pollination to tackle climate change, it considers this should be managed properly. It considers that the reduced service levels will discourage visitors and tourists from returning thereby impacting on the local economy. It considers there is a strong likelihood that parts of the County will be better maintained than others, effectively resulting in a postcode lottery.

This Council calls on the Cabinet Member for Highways and Infrastructure to reverse this cut, at least until such time as adequate alternative arrangements for others to cover the reduction in service levels are in place County-wide. The funding for this service to be taken during this transition period from the budget management reserve.