

**Report to Communities, Highways and Environment Scrutiny
Committee**

20 September 2023

Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Policy and Strategy

Report by Assistant Director (Highways, Transport and Planning)

Electoral division(s): All Divisions

Summary

The West Sussex Highway network is perhaps one of the single most valuable publicly owned assets in the county. With the Highway network being used daily by residents, businesses, visitors it provides an ongoing and vital contribution to the growth of the county, whilst meeting the economic, social and environment needs of our communities.

Central government has strengthened its prioritisation towards ensuring local authorities continually assess their performance and good practice of accepted asset management principles and have linked this performance to funding.

This paper describes the current progress and plan to review the authorities approach to highway asset management for the county.

Focus for Scrutiny

- Scrutinise current thinking and direction of travel regarding the asset management review to ensure alignment with the Council Plan and the County Council's responsibilities as the Highways Authority for West Sussex.
 - Consider the format and timing of scrutiny engagement as the review work is taken forward.
 - The extent to which the local and national drivers will be accommodated.
 - How the Strategy will seek to balance the competing demands faced by the Service.
 - How well the Strategy will address network resilience in the face of climate change and forecast changes in the national fleet.
 - How well the Strategy will address the needs of those with mobility issues accessing urban areas.
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1 Background and context

- 1.1 The highway infrastructure in West Sussex provides an important and vital contribution in creating a county of growth and opportunity whilst maintaining and improving the quality of life for all those who live, work and visit West Sussex. Good roads are a vital part of West Sussex's infrastructure and are essential for the county's economic progress and future prosperity.
- 1.2 Asset management is widely accepted as a means to effectively deliver efficiencies when managing highway infrastructure assets through longer term planning and ensuring that levels of service are defined and achievable for available budgets. A coherent asset management approach helps to more accurately identify the level of investment required to maintain highway assets to a standard commensurate with County Council priorities and public demand.
- 1.3 The approach supports the case for investment and funding, and better communication with stakeholders. It facilitates a greater understanding of the contribution the highway infrastructure makes to economic growth and social well-being of local communities.
- 1.4 The cornerstone of an effective asset management approach is strong leadership and an asset management culture that runs throughout the authority. This has been recognised within key national guidance and codes of practice documents published by the UK Roads Liaison Group:
 - Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Guidance
 - Well Managed Highway Infrastructure Assets – Code of Practice
- 1.5 As part of the Department of Transport Local Highway Maintenance Block Funding, local authorities have been incentivised to demonstrate good practices and an asset management approach. The approved and published Asset Management Policy and Strategy documents have been a mandatory requirement to enable an authority to maximise the value of the Local Highway Maintenance Block Funding received.

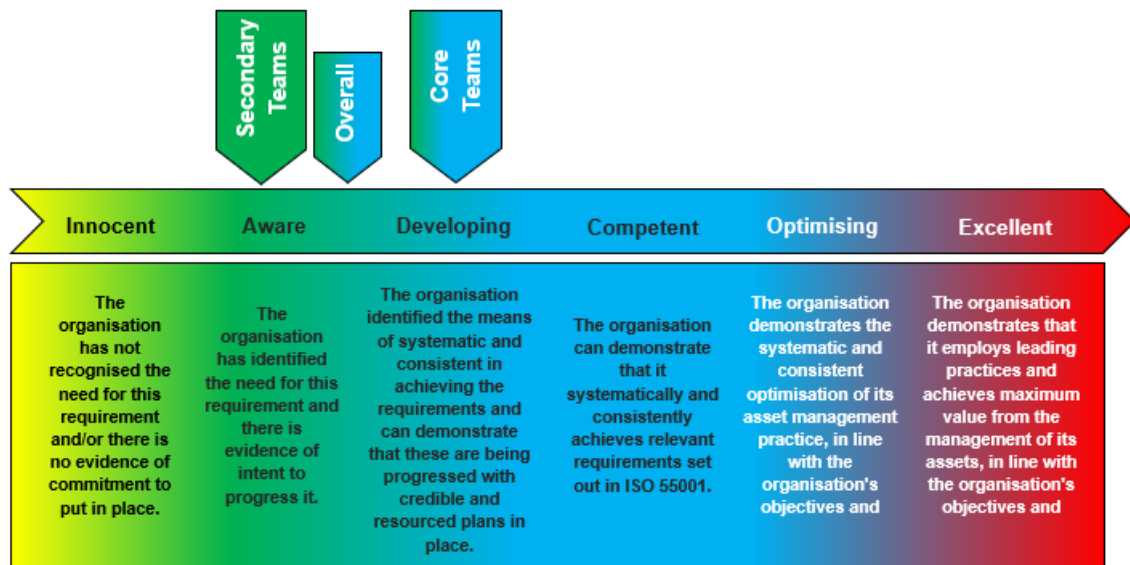
2 Approach

- 2.1 The service is committed to reviewing its approach to highway infrastructure asset management, considering the policy and strategy approach. Ensuring it considers key drivers such as climate change, sustainability and budget, resource constraints currently being experienced.
- 2.2 The purpose of the activity is to:
 - Maintain a safe and serviceable highway network within West Sussex.
 - Deliver a consistent Asset Management approach across all asset groups enabling communication to Customers and Stakeholders.
 - Support business cases for investment and funding needs through clear strategies and data led informed decisions.
 - Use national and local best practice to ensure that risks are managed, and opportunities realised.
 - Fulfil the DfT requirements relating to the Local Highway Maintenance Block Funding.

- Embed Sustainability at the core of every decision and activity undertaken on the asset.
- Objectively assess the performance of the assets ensuring they are meeting the corporate needs.

- 2.3 The Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Policy, Strategy and Plan describes the County Council's commitment to highway infrastructure asset management. It demonstrates to senior decision makers, stakeholders and the public, how the highway service supports and delivers the authority's corporate vision, within the Highways Service.
- 2.4 **The Policy** harnesses the organisational corporate objectives and frames them within the context of what the Highway Service delivers.
- 2.5 **The Strategy** looks at optimising the performance of the assets by defining and utilising a suite of maintenance options based around the assets needs derived from key asset data collection and analysis.
- 2.6 **The Plan** sets out how the operational activities will be delivered to ensure that the asset are delivering against the required levels of service. The Plan takes into consideration the full Lifecycle of the assets from creation to disposal.
- 2.7 The key drivers are:
- Climate Change / Sustainability
 - Inclusion and Accessibility
 - Funding Pressures
 - Delivering an achievable service
 - Customer Engagement
 - National and Local Benchmarking
 - Regional Collaboration and sharing Best Practice
- 2.8 The service has already begun the review via an internal Maturity Assessment approach directed at all staff in the Highways Planned Delivery Service – the service is mainly responsible for the capital maintenance of the highway assets.
- 2.9 The Maturity Assessment process has been supported by WSP Ltd as part of the partnership working via the Professional Services Support Contract.
- 2.10 The Maturity Assessment results provide a benchmark to assess future progress. The core service teams scored in the Developing Stage which is a sound foundation to build future improvement. The secondary teams were in the Aware Stage, which is as expected given the exposure to asset management directly in their roles.

2.11 From the results several recommendations have been provided to assist the development pathway.



2.12 Following this activity and working with WSP Ltd, an approach has been considered to achieve the ambition of a fully revised and approved Highways Infrastructure Asset Management Policy, Strategy and Plan.

2.13 The objectives of the work will include:

- Review and update Asset Management Policy documents in line with evolving national guidance, priorities for change the use of highway networks, reallocating road space to promote walking and cycling.
- The asset management policy will be a short and concise document that describes the principles adopted in applying asset management to achieve the authority's strategic objectives.
- An updated asset management suite of documents describing service delivery is essential for establishing the fundamentals of asset management.

2.14 The approach will include:

- Engagement of officers, senior management and elected members
- Research into best practice
- Exploration of future challenges facing the authority and nationally
- Consideration of sustainability, decarbonisation, EV charging networks, air quality management, and active travel
- Agreement & Alignment of asset management to corporate / strategic objectives
- Agreement of style and format of documents

2.15 Deliverables:

- A politically endorsed Asset Management Policy, empowering the highway authority to manage their highway network assets effectively.

- The document will provide demonstratable evidence of the authority's commitment to highway asset management, its alignment to corporate policies, community benefits of highway asset management and the County Council's risk-based approach.
- The document will reference sustainability and carbon management, sustainable transport options, and active travel modes where relevant.

3 Other options considered (and reasons for not proposing)

- 3.1 A Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Policy and Strategy has been a mandatory requirement for the Incentive Fund element of the Local Highway Maintenance Block Funding from central government.
- 3.2 The approach to highway infrastructure maintenance service needs to be linked to the County Council priorities and vision.
- 3.3 Not reviewing the Policy, Strategy and Plan could restrict the level of future Local Highway Maintenance Block Funding.

4 Consultation, engagement and advice

- 4.1 The draft Asset Management Policy documents will be circulated, reviewed and endorsed during their development by:
- The Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport
 - Elected members
 - Highways, Transport and Planning Senior Management Team
 - Senior Highway Asset Group Managers and lead officers
- 4.2 The final approved policy documents will be published on the County Councils website in due course.

5 Finance

- 5.1 The development of the Asset Management Policy approach is envisaged to be implemented through existing resource and funding stream investments. No additional funding is requested to deliver this proposal at this stage.
- 5.2 Resource to enable delivery of highway infrastructure management across the individual asset groups is drawn from in-house teams within "business as usual" activities. Specialist additional supply chain support will be utilised as appropriate including support from WSP Ltd.
- 5.3 The management of individual highway infrastructure asset groups is led by the Assistant Director (Highways, Transport and Planning). Individual service teams with specialist capabilities within their asset area, alongside appropriate IT systems are funded from existing revenue budgets.
- 5.4 The effect of the proposal:
- (a) **How the cost represents good value**
- 5.5 Asset management is widely accepted as a means to deliver a more efficient and effective approach to the management of highway infrastructure assets.

(b) **Future savings/efficiencies being delivered**

5.6 Asset management principles supports and supports identification for the case for future investment, better communications with stakeholders, and facilitates better understanding of the contribution highway infrastructure assets make to economic growth and social well-being of local communities.

(c) **Human Resources, IT and Assets Impact**

5.7 The Highways, Transport and Planning organisational design is currently aligned to deliver the Highway Infrastructure Asset Management principles.

6 Risk implications and mitigations

Risk	Mitigating Action (in place or planned)
Corporate Risks	Local highway authorities are required to manage a variety of risks at strategic, tactical and operational levels. The likelihood and consequences of these risks can be used to inform their approach to asset management and support key decisions regarding performance, investment and implementation of works programmes.
Financial and Service Delivery	The individual asset group Lifecycle Plans evaluate and list strategic and tactical risks (including threats and opportunities) alongside their likelihood and impact on the levels of service defined for the highway service. These risks will be analysed with senior decision-makers input.
Resource constraints	It is currently anticipated that current resource implications can be accommodated, however further increase in workload may provide further challenge. WSP Ltd would support further if required.

7 Policy alignment and compliance

7.1 The Highway Infrastructure Asset Management principles will be developed aligned to the aims and objectives of Our Council Plan (the Corporate Plan 2021-2025) which sets out the priorities for the County Council over the next four years and the ambitious outcomes for people who live and work in West Sussex.

7.2 **Equality and Human Rights Assessment** - All delivery emanating from the agreed Asset Management policy approach will be considered and assessed throughout the design and implementation phases of each scheme at the appropriate time to meet appropriate guidance and legislation.

7.3 **Climate Change, Social Value and Sustainability Assessment** - Highway Infrastructure Asset Management recognises the significant role management and maintenance of highways infrastructure has on the County Council's climate change, Social Value and Sustainability commitments, that contributes to enabling the service to:

- Deliver the ambitions of Our Council Plan
- Achieve efficiency savings by reducing operating costs, and reducing the amount of natural resources consumed and purchased
- Increase the resilience of highway infrastructure assets, ensuring they are fit to deliver the expected level of service into the future
- Improve the sustainability of the supply chain, thereby reducing risk and cost
- Make the County Council's highway services as good as they can be.

7.4 Crime and Disorder Reduction Assessment - Crime and Disorder implications will be assessed for individual schemes at the design and implementation phases.

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Appendices - None

Background papers - None