

TITLE OF REPORT: OSC Review - roads and highways – progress update

REPORT OF: Strategic Director, Communities and Environment

SUMMARY

The final report of the Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee review of roads and highways was presented in June 2018. This report provides an update on progress in taking forward the recommendations from the review.

Background

1. The final report of the Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee review of roads and highways was presented in June 2018. The recommendations from this were:
 - 1) that the position on highway maintenance continues to be monitored, with further sessions for members arranged as appropriate;
 - 2) that options for closing the shortfall in highway maintenance funding continue to be examined;
 - 3) that arrangements for keeping local members informed of highway repair and maintenance activity in their area are reviewed;
 - 4) that current policies aimed at reducing traffic growth and minimising congestion are maintained;
 - 5) that the importance of effective enforcement of traffic restrictions by both the Council and Police continues to be recognised;
 - 6) that the benefits of joint working between the Council and Police in the areas of road safety and enforcement are recognised, and that future opportunities are taken to reinforce existing relationships.

2. This report provides an update on progress over the last 2 months in taking forward the above.

Progress

Position on highway maintenance

3. Trends in recorded highway defects remain at a high level, with a consequent impact on the ability to undertake repairs in a timely fashion. During the first quarter of 2018/19, some 2304 footway trips and 1407 potholes were identified in Gateshead.

4. A Members' Seminar on the topic of road maintenance has been arranged for 10th October. A specific progress report on this topic will be prepared for OSC for the meeting in March 2019.

Maintenance funding

5. Short term measures in relation to closing the funding gap include:
 - achieving the top rating (level 3) in the Department for Transport's performance assessment approach. This has meant that the risk of a cut to the Local Transport Maintenance allocation to Gateshead of £138,000 has been averted;
 - commencing a review of practice in relation to road repairs. This will examine current processes to see whether and where there may be scope for further streamlining and efficiencies.
6. Notwithstanding the above, significant additional funding needs to be identified to support maintenance in the future. No straightforward option exists for bridging this gap. A number of options are being considered and further reports on options will be considered over coming months.

Keeping members informed

7. Options are under consideration for keeping members better informed of highway defects and repairs and other transport ward issues. An additional member of staff has been appointed to set up a system and work through outstanding matters.

Maintain current policies

10. It is intended to continue the current overall policy approach of the Council towards transport. A separate document is being drafted which will help explain the approach more succinctly, and tie it in with air quality considerations.

Enforcement of traffic restrictions/benefits of joint working with the Police

11. Following the conclusion of the review the Chair of OSC has written to the Police and Crime Commissioner on these matters and a response has been received. This emphasised the particular matter of speed enforcement identified by the Committee.
12. A Members' Seminar has been held on the issue of Speed Awareness Courses on 5th September.

Recommendations

13. That the progress in relation to the identified actions as set out above is noted, and that further progress reports are provided in due course.

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