

TITLE OF REPORT: OSC Review - roads and highways – interim report

REPORT OF: Director of Development, Transport and Public Protection

SUMMARY

The Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee have undertaken a review of the role of the Council and its partners towards roads and highways. This has involved evidence gathering sessions in the four areas of road safety, funding and repairs, enforcement and traffic congestion.

This report updates the interim report presented to OSC in April to provide a final report on the outcome from the evidence gathering sessions.

Background

1. This report sets out the final findings of the OSC review into roads and highways. It updates the previous interim report to reflect the outcome from the additional evidence gathering session attended by the Police.
2. This report summarises:
 - the aims and scope of the review;
 - the policy context for the review;
 - how the review was carried out;
 - issues emerging from the review;
 - recommendations.

Aims of the review

3. The review was focused on gathering evidence in four main areas:
 - funding and repairs;
 - traffic congestion;
 - enforcement;
 - road safety.
4. The review was led by the Council, but included input from the Police in relation to the area of road safety.

Policy context

5. Vision 2030 sets out the 6 Big Ideas for Gateshead. Transport relates closely to the themes of “City of Gateshead”, “Sustainable Gateshead” and “Active and Healthy Gateshead”.
6. The Tyne and Wear Local Transport Plan, which sets out the transport policy framework for Gateshead, identifies three main challenges for the transport network:

- Supporting economic development and regeneration;
- Addressing climate change;
- Supporting safe and sustainable communities.

7. Policy CS13 of the Gateshead/Newcastle Core Strategy seeks the enhancement and delivery of an integrated transport network to support sustainable development and economic growth through:

- Promoting sustainable travel choices;
- Improving the operation of the transport network and its wider connections;
- Ensuring new development is located and designed to promote sustainable travel choices, minimise unnecessary car trips, and connect safely to the network.

How the review was carried out

8. Evidence sessions were held into each of the main areas identified in paragraph 3 above.

Issues emerging from the review

9. As a result of the evidence gathering sessions the following issues were identified:

Funding and repairs

10. Available funding is not sufficient to maintain the highway.

Future actions include:

- A further annual OSC session is to be arranged to review the position of annual spending on highway maintenance
- Further work will be undertaken to improve the effectiveness of our Highway Asset Management Plan and attract higher levels of funding from government as a result.
- Members briefing to be circulated providing details of how members can keep up to date about roadworks in the borough
- Investigate improved ways of keeping ward members updated as to progress on transport and highway issues in their ward.

Traffic congestion

11. As with many urban areas traffic congestion is a significant problem, with various economic, social and environmental consequences. Future development threatens to worsen existing problems, and this needs to be managed through a continuation of current policies and, where appropriate, consideration of further measures.

Future actions include:

- Encourage the use of sustainable forms of transport in Gateshead
- Ensure background studies are done to inform future bids for Government Funding e.g. Transforming Cities fund

Enforcement

12. Effective parking management and enforcement contributes to a number of wider objectives, including congestion, safety, air quality, accessibility and fairness. It is also important in meeting the needs of local residents and businesses.

Future actions include:

- Progressing plans to introduce bus lane enforcement. This will help target specific problem areas identified by residents and the Police

- Target areas suffering the worst parking problems and investigate schemes that will address the issues and enable enforcement to take place
- Investigate the options available to the police and Council to enforce pavement parking
- Investigate the options available to the Council and Police to take action against unsafe parking near schools

Road safety

13. Information on trends in road safety was, and the benefits of better safety noted in relation to:

- lives saved and injuries prevented;
- people living full and healthy lives;
- preventing emotional and physical trauma;
- saving public money;
- supporting wider policies;
- tackling health inequalities;
- improving quality of life.

15. A presentation was received from the Police in relation to their road safety activity. This highlighted the difficulties and concerns around enforcing speed limits particularly at night. Whilst the good work done by the Police was recognised it was also identified that more could be done.

Further action includes:

- Investigate opportunities to liaise with the police over deployment of resources for speed enforcement
- Investigate opportunities to work with the police on road safety education
- Consider the extension of community speedwatch to other areas in Gateshead.

Recommendations

16. The Committee is asked to agree final recommendations as outlined below and to agree to the Chair presenting this report to Cabinet as representing the Committee's findings and recommendations from the review process.

1. That the funding position for 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 investigated
3. That arrangements for keeping local members informed of highway repair and maintenance activity in their ward are reviewed
4. That current policies aimed at reducing traffic growth and encouraging sustainable modes of transport are maintained
5. That the benefits of joint working between the Council and the Police in the areas of road safety and speed enforcement are recognised and opportunities are taken to improve the effectiveness and build on existing relationships.
- 6 That an update of progress against the actions identified is reported back to Committee on an annual basis.