

TITLE OF REPORT:	Routine Highways Inspection and Maintenance – Review of Policy
REPORT OF:	Paul Dowling, Strategic Director, Communities and Environment

Purpose of the Report

1. To bring forward a proposed revised policy for routine highways inspection and maintenance.

Background

2. The effective maintenance of highways underpins the social and economic life of the borough. The whole community relies upon the network of roads and footways to enable the safe movement of people and goods. Routine maintenance and inspection of highways is an essential element in the overall maintenance regime, enabling the timely identification of defects and their repair.
3. The carrying out of routine highways inspection and maintenance work is also important in minimising the cost to the Council of highway liability claims and associated insurance.
4. The current Council policy for routine highways inspection and maintenance was last reviewed in 2008. It is important that the policy remains up to date and fit for purpose and so a review now is timely.

Proposal

5. The proposed revised policy is attached as appendix 2. This is similar to that approved in 2008, although a number of changes are proposed:
 - Additional flexibility is provided to reduce inspection frequencies for monthly carriageway inspections to six weekly over the period August to October. This reflects the clear peak in pothole detection for this type of road during the first 6 months of the year;
 - Additional flexibility in inspection frequency and repair times to deal with unforeseen events and severe weather;
 - The inclusion of two cycleways built to adoptable standards but not currently adopted within the inspection regime. These are the Teams and East Gateshead cycleways;
 - Changing the regime for the repair of defects. Those defects considered to pose an immediate danger will continue to be repaired within 24 hours. However most defects not considered immediately dangerous but in excess of defined intervention levels currently have a target repair time of 10 working days. It is proposed to change this so that repairs are carried out:
 - within 10 working days on the busiest routes or where identified through specific complaints/enquiries rather than routine inspection;

- within 40 working days for other non-urgent defects.

Recommendations

6. Cabinet is asked to recommend the Council to approve the revised policy for routine highway inspection and repair attached as appendix 2.

For the following reason:

To continue to support effective and appropriate maintenance of the Council's highway network.

Policy Context

1. The proposals support all the main elements of Vision 2030, with the future aspiration for Gateshead of:
'local people realising their full potential enjoying the best quality of life in a healthy, equal, safe, prosperous and sustainable Gateshead'
relying fundamentally on effective maintenance of the highway. The proposals are similarly important in supporting the priorities identified in Planning for the Future - Core Strategy and Urban Core Plan for Newcastle and Gateshead 2010-2030, and are consistent with the Tyne and Wear Local Transport Plan (LTP).

Background

2. The effective maintenance of highways underpins the social and economic life of the borough. The network of roads and footways maintained by the Council is one of the most fundamental services it delivers, and is relied upon by the whole community to enable the safe movement of people and goods. Routine maintenance and inspection of highways is an essential element in the overall maintenance regime, enabling the timely identification of defects and their repair.
3. The carrying out of routine highways inspection and maintenance work is also important in minimising the cost to the Council of highway liability claims and associated insurance.
4. The current Council policy for routine highways inspection and maintenance was last reviewed in 2008. It is important that the policy remains up to date and fit for purpose and so a review now is timely.
5. National codes of practice for highway maintenance are currently under review. When these have been published some further changes to the policy may be needed.

Consultation

6. The Cabinet Members for Environment and Transport have been consulted and support the proposed changes to the policy.

Alternative Options

7. The alternative of not reviewing the policy would increase the risk of it not being fit for purpose. The review of policy does not alter the underlying principles of highway inspection and maintenance. The amendments reflect a response to particular issues without affecting policy aims.

Implications of Recommended Options

8. Resources

- a) **Financial Implications** – The Strategic Director, Corporate Resources confirms that the costs of the proposed review will be accommodated from within existing resources.

b) Human Resources Implications – There are no human resources implications.

c) Property Implications – There are no property implications.

9. **Risk Management Implications** – Failure to undertake the review would increase the risk that a poorer, less cost-effective service will be provided, and that claims against the Council would be more difficult to defend.
10. **Equality and Diversity Implications** – implementation of an effective system of highways inspections will support the entire community.
11. **Crime and Disorder Implications** – None.
12. **Sustainability Implications** – None.
13. **Human Rights Implications** – None.
14. **Area and Ward Implications** – all wards.

GATESHEAD COUNCIL

Policy and Procedures for Routine Highway Maintenance**1. Introduction**

To comply with its statutory duty to maintain adopted highways in accordance with Section 41 of the Highways Act 1980, the Council undertakes regular inspections of all such highways in the Borough.

This document specifies the Council's approach towards the routine inspection of highways within Gateshead borough. It has been prepared in the context of relevant duties and policies, including the statutory duty under the 1980 Highways Act to maintain the highway. It replaces the previous policy approved in 2005 and reviewed in 2008.

2. Policy context

Highway maintenance has an important role in underpinning the success of overall strategies for the future of Gateshead, notably the aspirations embodied in Gateshead's Sustainable Community Strategy, 'Vision 2030'. This is emphasised and supported at a national level by the Code Of Practice For Highway Maintenance Management. At a local level similar recognition is given in the Tyne and Wear Local Transport Plan and the Gateshead Highway Asset Management Plan (HAMP).

Routine inspection of the highway is an important element in the overall highway maintenance regime. It forms an integral part of national advice set out in the Code Of Practice For Highway Maintenance Management.

3. Budgets and Resources

In order to fulfil its duty of care to highway users, the Council allocates appropriate financial and operational resources. Activities can then be carried out in both a planned and reactive manner in order to maintain adopted highways in a safe and serviceable condition. The Council determines its annual allocation of financial resources with due consideration to its overall strategic aims and priorities. Highways maintenance budgets are split between a number of Service areas and include elements of both planned and reactive maintenance.

4. Highways Inspection Teams

Regular, routine inspections of highways are carried out by a team of inspectors. The inspectors are supported by a Maintenance Co-ordinator, together with operational, technical and clerical support, and appropriate levels of management.

The level of staffing is considered adequate to carry out planned inspections at appropriate frequencies, together with additional inspections and investigations associated with ad-hoc requests for service or complaints from Members, the public or other stakeholders.

5. Training

The highways inspectors are generally experienced personnel, with a background in highways maintenance work. Any new inspectors are inducted and trained by experienced colleagues before being allowed to carry out inspections alone.

The inspectors have a variety of related training and qualifications. In addition, the Council has an Achievement and Development programme for all staff, during which any future training needs can be identified and initiated. All inspectors will undertake LANTRA accredited highway inspectors external training and be registered on the Institute of Highway Engineers Highway Inspectors Register

6 Frequencies of Inspection

Based on the recommendations within the Code of Practice for Maintenance Management, the Council has classified its highways hierarchy as follows:-

Carriageways

Category 1	Motorways
Category 2	Strategic Routes
Category 3a	Main Distributors
Category 3b	Secondary Distributors
Category 4a	Link Roads
Category 4b	Local Access Road
Category 4d	Local Access Roads without Footways

Footways

Category 1a	Prestige Walking Zones
Category 1	Primary Walking Routes
Category 2	Secondary Walking Routes
Category 3	Link Footways
Category 4	Local Access Footways

These categories are based on a number of factors, including road classification, traffic volumes, pedestrian usage, location etc. The classification details are recorded on appropriate plans of the Borough, and may be subject to revision to take account of changing circumstances.

The Code of Practice for Maintenance Management advises that "Safety Inspections" would "normally be conducted from a slow moving vehicle." In Gateshead, however, particularly for footway inspections, this is not considered practicable. Therefore all footway inspections are walked at frequencies as recommended by the Code. Carriageway inspections are driven at the recommended frequencies, with an additional walked inspection at an appropriate frequency.

Inspection frequencies and methods are therefore as follows:-

<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Hierarchy</u>	<u>Method</u>
Monthly*	Carriageway Category 2,3a,3b,4a	Driven
Monthly	Footway Category 1a, 1	Walked
3 Monthly	Carriageway Category 4d	Driven
3 Monthly	Footway Category 2	Walked
6 Monthly	Footway Category 3/ Carriageway 2,3a, 3b, 4a	Walked
12 Monthly	Footway Category 4/ Carriageway Category 4b	Walked

*Nearly three quarters of all potholes are identified in the first 6 months of the year, with incidence particularly low over the period August-October. The frequency of scheduled monthly driven inspections may therefore be reduced during the latter period to six weekly.

The inspection frequencies specified are considered reasonable to detect defects caused by normal wear and tear and the like. However defects caused by accidental damage, such as vehicle encroachment onto footways, can occur at any time, and it is not considered realistic for a routine inspection regime to be expected to address all such damage. The same applies to defects caused by deliberate actions such as vandalism, theft and the like. Defects of this kind, particularly those of a serious nature are often reported by members of the public, or are notified by members of staff in the course of other duties, and are investigated separately as appropriate

On occasion there may be unforeseeable events which necessitate some variation to inspection frequencies. These may include, for example, severe weather conditions which may mean that available resources need to be diverted to deal with its immediate aftermath. Where this occurs a degree of flexibility in timing of inspections will be applied to the following maxima:

- Monthly/3 monthly inspections – 2 weeks;
- 6 monthly/12 monthly inspections – 1 month.

Any use of the above flexibilities will be recorded, and will not be used as a de-facto means of reducing inspection frequency.

Occasionally severe weather conditions may also prevent the carrying out of inspections for a period of time. Any such delays will be recorded, and the resulting backlog of inspections cleared as soon as conditions improve sufficiently.

The large majority of cycleways within Gateshead lie either within the adopted highway or form a part of the network of public rights of way. As such they will have an inspection regime appropriate to their status. However there are two important cycleways (the Teams and East Gateshead cycleways) which currently lie outside either of these regimes. In accordance with the national Code of Practice both of these will be subject to a 6 monthly inspection frequency.

7. Criteria for Repair

The Code of Practice for Maintenance Management recommends that “all observed defects that provide for any degree of risk to users should be recorded”

In general, only defects exceeding certain defined criteria i.e. trips and depressions measuring over 20mm in footways, or 40mm in carriageways, will be recorded for repair.

Where a formal pedestrian crossing (zebra, pelican or similar appropriate circumstances) crosses a carriageway the frequency and criteria for inspection and identification of defects will be the same as that for the adjoining footway.

In addition inspectors may exercise their discretion when, for instance, there is a smaller defect in an otherwise good but heavily used area, or where a number of smaller defects in a concentrated area may warrant a repair, or where there may be a large number of elderly residents in a street etc.

Also an inspector may note areas, which although not considered to be in need of repair at present (i.e. which do not meet current repair criteria), may need to be considered for future maintenance (i.e. to be reconsidered at the next routine inspection).

Similarly, if it is considered that a defect currently not meeting criteria for repair may deteriorate significantly before the next routine inspection, an inspector may arrange appropriate repairs.

If no notifiable defects are observed during an inspection, an appropriate record will be made.

8. Recording of Defects

Information relating to defects identified for repair will be input into hand-held data capture devices. Typical information would include location details, type and size of defect, together with appropriate details of materials etc required to carry out the repair. Repair orders/ instructions are then transmitted to works teams in order to organise the repair works.

Inspections will also record:

- The name of the inspector;
- The date of the inspection;
- Weather conditions and the like;
- The general overall condition of carriageways and footpaths, as assessed on a scale of 1 for 'excellent' to 5 for 'very poor'.

9. Priorities for Repairs, and Response Times

Ordered repairs will be allocated a priority as follows:-

Priority	Defect	Repair criteria
P1	Immediately dangerous	To be repaired or made safe within 24 hours
P10	Defects in excess of intervention levels within carriageway/footway hierarchies 1 and 2	To be repaired within 10 working days
P10E	Defects (non-dangerous) identified from complaints/ enquiries rather than inspections	To be repaired within 10 working days

P40	Defects in excess of intervention levels within carriageway/footway hierarchies 3 and 4	To be repaired within 40 working days
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There may be occasional circumstances which necessitate some variation to repair times. These include severe weather conditions, where it may not be possible to undertake repairs, or an exceptional and unforeseen event which require available manpower to be diverted elsewhere.

Any use of the above flexibilities will be recorded, and will not be used as a de-facto means of allowing extra time to carry out repairs. In any such circumstances priority will, wherever possible, be given to urgent (P1) repairs.

10. Defects not under the ownership or control of the Council.

Defects may be identified during inspections which are not the responsibility of the Council to repair. However, under its duty of care to highway users, steps will be taken by the Council to ensure that the party responsible is made aware of the defect.

For Defective Apparatus belonging to Statutory Undertakers (e.g. manhole covers, inspection covers, valve box covers and the like), defects will be reported to the appropriate Utility in accordance with the provisions of Section 81 of the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991. Defective reinstatements resulting from Public Utilities works will be reported to the Streetworks Team within the Council to allow the serving of Defect Notices on the Utility concerned in accordance with the above Act, requiring them to carry out appropriate remedial works.

11. Monitoring and review

Regular monitoring and review of the policy will help to ensure that it:

- Is being implemented as approved; and
- Remains appropriate in relation to meeting its wider objectives.

Policy implementation

The following performance indicators have been defined to monitor the effectiveness of implementation of the policy:

- % routine inspections completed on time;
- % defects repaired on time.

Information on the above will be collated annually, with analysis of other aspects of policy implementation undertaken on an occasional basis as and when required.

Policy review

The need to review the policy may arise from:

- changes in the legal or policy framework;
- assessment of its effectiveness as part of a risk based approach.

The need for changes resulting from legal or policy issues will arise on an ad-hoc basis and be dealt with as such. New/updated codes of practice, new legislation or legal judgements of specific relevance may all lead to a need for amendments to the policy.

At a local level it is proposed to keep the effectiveness of the policy under review through the use of the large amounts of data collected and held in relation to the highway network. This will form the basis of a risk-based approach towards identifying the need for changes to the policy.

Information relating to highway claims will similarly be used to identify specific issues. This will also assist in monitoring possible fraudulent claims – surveys suggest that some 55% of claims are opportunistic and exaggerated. It is intended to take a zero tolerance approach to any fraudulent or exaggerated claims which are detected.