

Well-managed Highway Infrastructure – Implementing the Code of Practice

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| Originating Authority | Kent County Council |
| Final Decision Taker | Kent County Council |
| Exemption | Non-exempt |
| Classification | For Information |

Recommendation:

- That the report be noted.

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This paper outlines the County Council's strategy for implementing the new Code of Practice for highway maintenance management which becomes fully effective in October 2018.
- 1.2 It is highly unlikely that there will be any material impacts on the volume or cost of highway maintenance works but there will be a greater emphasis on the assessment of risk. Currently, no changes to service standards are proposed however, prior to any changes being made a full evaluation of options would be required followed by approval in accordance with the County Council Constitution.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 Well-maintained Highways, the code of practice for highway maintenance management was published in July 2005. It provided local authorities with guidance on highways management and proposed some prescribed investigation levels for highway defects e.g. 50mm depth for carriageway potholes. The Code of Practice formed the basis for the County Council's Highway Safety Inspection Regime and our approach to highway maintenance. Well-maintained Highways was repeatedly deemed to be best practice by the Courts and by adopting the principles of The Code of Practice we have been able to defend claims against the County Council by demonstrating our defence (under Section 58 of the Highways Act 1980) of implementing all reasonable measures and demonstrating we are not a negligent highway authority.

- 2.2 Well-managed Highway Infrastructure was published in October 2016 and replaces Well-maintained Highways, Well-lit Highways, and Management of Highway Structures in October 2018. Like its predecessors, Well-managed Highway Infrastructure is a national, non-statutory code of practice which sets out a series of general principles for highway maintenance. It is endorsed and recommended by the Department for Transport and its production has been overseen by the UK Roads Liaison Group (UKRLG) and its Roads, Bridges and Lighting Boards. However, the new Code of Practice is less prescriptive and instead promotes the establishment of local levels of service through risk-based assessment.
 - 2.3 On the 13th July 2018, the County Council's Environment & Transport Cabinet Committee endorsed the adoption and phased implementation of the fundamental principles of the Code of Practice. This decision was subsequently agreed by the Cabinet Member.
 - 2.4 Well-managed Highway Infrastructure - Implementing the Code of Practice is published on the County Council's website. It outlines how we will go about applying the principles in the Code of Practice to the way we work and measure our success to ensure continuous improvement and a focus on the County Council's Strategic Outcomes.
 - 2.5 Link to Well-managed Highway Infrastructure
<http://www.ukroadsliasongroup.org/en/codes/index.cfm>
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3 DISCUSSION

The Highway Network

- 3.1 Well-managed Highway Infrastructure recommends that the highway network should be considered as an integrated set of assets when developing infrastructure maintenance policies.
- 3.2 There are several classifications and hierarchies used for the planning and prioritisation of highway inspections, maintenance, renewals, improvements and new installations in Kent. However, residents, communities and businesses do not distinguish between the different categories of road, range of assets or types of work undertaken. They expect the network to be managed and maintained holistically to provide consistent and appropriate levels of service in the context of the County Council's strategic outcomes.
- 3.3 An integrated network hierarchy is the foundation of a risk-based maintenance strategy and will inform intervention levels, inspection frequencies and response times. It is important that it reflects the actual use of each infrastructure asset and needs to be sufficiently dynamic to respond to the changing nature of the network – the classification of an asset may alter because of short term influences such as seasonal fluctuations or due to longer-term factors such as climate change and development.

- 3.4 Much of our network hierarchy information is already published including our Resilient Highway Network and Winter Salting Routes. From April 2019, the County Council will publish a series of related hierarchies which include all elements of the highway network. These hierarchies will consider current and expected use, resilience, and local economic and social factors as well as the desirability for continuity of service across administrative boundaries and a consistent approach for walking and cycling.

Risk Based Approach

- 3.5 Well-managed Highway Infrastructure is underpinned by the fundamental principle that highway authorities should adopt a risk-based approach in accordance with local needs (including safety), priorities and affordability.
- 3.6 Meaningful risk management is an intrinsic part of the management of our highway infrastructure. Inspections, maintenance, renewals and improvements present extensive choices and therefore it is vital that the impact of implementation and the consequences of failure are fully understood. In addition, there are a variety of external influences which impact on the performance of the highway network. Weather, budget, political direction and demand from other service areas also need to be considered when determining the approach to maintenance and investment.
- 3.7 Many of our existing inspection regimes and methodologies for prioritising work on the highway already include a consideration of risk. Furthermore, the County Council has already a risk management approach, detailed in the Risk Management Policy & Strategy 2018-21. This approach will now be applied to all aspects for highway infrastructure maintenance. At a strategic level, the management of current and future risks will be embedded within our approach to asset management. At an operational level, a risk-based approach will be used to determine intervention levels, inspection frequencies, response times and investment priorities across all highway assets.
- 3.8 A case study outlining the practical application of a risk-based approach can be found at Appendix A.

Resilience and Sustainability

- 3.9 Kent provides key transport links between London and the continent and has some of the most intensively used roads in the country. Any disruption to the network has an immediate impact on road users, the economy and services. Ensuring these roads are as resilient and sustainable as is practicable must be a priority.
- 3.10 The County Council has long had robust systems in place to respond effectively to severe weather emergencies, unforeseen events and civil emergencies and we already take a hierarchical approach to the management of our 8,700 km highway network. In September 2017, this approach was enhanced further when The Environment & Transport Cabinet Committee endorsed The Definition for Kent's Resilient Highway Network.

3.11 It is important that the highway network is maintained for future generations. In addition to responding effectively to emergencies and high impact events, it is important that due consideration is given to the impacts of climate change. Furthermore, a balance needs to be sought between providing sustainable growth and a competitive, innovative and resilient economy and protecting and improving our natural and historic assets.

Financial Management, Priorities and Planning

3.12 The way in which investment is prioritised needs to provide sufficient flexibility to deliver value for money. In addition to ensuring effective coordination, an asset management-based approach to managing highway infrastructure requires due consideration of different options and factors that influence their success:

- The differing life expectancies of various treatments and the future implications of these for the balance of capital and revenue funding; for example, renewing a bridge parapet might be more expensive than simply repointing the aging brickwork but doing so could generate a saving with respect to the long-term maintenance.
- The seasonal and weather sensitive nature of many treatments and the service as a whole; for example, renewing a road surface is best done during dry, mild weather as very cold or wet weather can cause the surface to rapidly fail.
- The uncertainties in prediction of out-turn costs for Winter Service, Severe Weather Events and emergencies and the need for financial year-end flexibility

3.13 The County Council has endorsed an asset management based approach to the maintenance and management of highway assets. Part of this approach involves viewing the highway network as a whole rather than as discrete asset groups such as carriageways, drainage, lighting and structures. A cross asset approach will now be taken when developing priorities and programmes and produce a rolling forward works programme that is updated regularly.

Performance Management

3.14 Effective performance monitoring will support the County Council in reviewing progress, performance requirements and works programmes. Our Highway Asset Management Framework establishes mechanisms for performance management, including performance measures and targets, which facilitate the monitoring of delivery with respect to the short, medium and long term strategic direction of the service.

4 CONCLUSION

4.1 The Code of Practice presents an opportunity for County Councils' to shape the services they provide based on local needs and priorities and does not need to

represent a radical change from a customer perspective, particularly in the short term.

- 4.2 A programme is in place to ensure the timely and effective implementation of the Code of Practice, with a view to having the recommendations largely implemented from April 2019. Information sharing with local representatives and communities form a key part of this programme including planned engagement with Parish Councils via the annual Parish Seminars, “for information” updates to Joint Transportation Boards and enhanced information on the County Council’s website.

Appendices to the Report

- Appendix A – Well-managed Highway Infrastructure - Applying the Code of Practice in Kent
- Appendix B – Well-managed Highway Infrastructure - Implementing the Code of Practice in Kent 2018 – 2020
- Appendix C – Case Study: Well-managed Highway Infrastructure – A practical application