

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**IMPROVEMENT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - PLACES****20 JULY 2016****REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC DIRECTOR – ECONOMY, TRANSPORT AND COMMUNITIES****REVIEW OF HIGHWAYS INSPECTION AND MAINTENANCE PROCEDURES – PROGRESS UPDATE****1. Purpose of the Report**

To inform the Committee of progress with implementing the action plan arising from the review of highway inspection and maintenance procedures that was approved on 1 March 2015.

2. Information and Analysis

The Committee undertook a review of Highways Inspection and Maintenance Procedures which was presented to the meeting on 11 March 2015. The action plan was subsequently agreed with the Strategic Director – Economy, Transport and Environment on 26 May 2015. A progress update was presented to the Committee on 17 September 2015.

During the review, Members were advised of a number of projects that were ongoing to improve the highway service and to ensure roads are well maintained despite significant budget reductions.

The highway maintenance budget has reduced by more than half over the last six years. Further cuts are planned for 2016/17 and 2017/18 to meet the Council's stringent budget cuts targets, which will bring the total remaining down to £7million. The current budget situation means we have a core service of just 12 gangs for Reactive Maintenance across the county serving 3,500 miles of roads which equates to about 300 miles per gang.

The following progress has been made against the action plan that came out of the Improvement and Scrutiny Review:

Recommendation 1: The factors used to prioritise highway maintenance are clearly communicated to the general public and local Members.

A five year forward works programme for highway maintenance was approved by Cabinet on 24 November 2015. The forward works programme provides a list of generic treatment schemes and a recommendation of when treatments should be undertaken to optimise the maintenance of a particular road. It is based on a technical assessment reflecting the condition of roads and usage.

To ensure the limited resources available are used effectively and targeted at the right roads it is important that the benefits of adopting an asset management approach are promoted both within the Council and outside. Staff and Members have received asset management training and there are plans to progress this further as our plans and policies develop.

A Communications Strategy is currently being developed with the aim of improving the information we provide to the public about how we maintain the highway network.

Recommendation 2: In order to capture more accurate information about the nature and location of road defects clear reporting guidance is made available to the public which includes information about what constitutes a defect requiring action.

The Do It Now reporting form on the DCC Website has been reviewed and improved. It is now much easier for the public to report defects via Call Derbyshire or the Website, and the form encourages them to provide better quality information about the nature of the defect, with photos showing what constitutes a defect requiring action, and the location, preferably attaching a photograph. The reports are now automatically routed to the appropriate action officer through the SAMS Confirm ICT system, saving administration time and ensuring the report is directed to the right person quicker which in turn speeds up the action taken by the department to rectify the defects.

In the first six months of this year the department received 5,847 (33%) enquiries direct from the public via the Do It Now form, a further 8,094 (45%) were received via Call Derbyshire. Work is continuing to encourage the public to use the Do It Now form where they can rather than phoning Call Derbyshire as it is a much more cost effective way of receiving information.

In total, 17,715 highway enquiries were received during the first six months of 2016 compared with 19,970 for the same period last year which represents a 12% decrease.

There has also been a 35% decrease in the number of carriageway potholes reported by the public, 7,288 in the first six months of 2016 in comparison to 10,180 in the same period last year. These reductions in public reports and enquiries could indicate that the public are seeing an improvement in the condition of the highway and need to contact the Council less often.

Additional training is taking place for Customer Contact Advisors at Call Derbyshire to assist them in gathering as much detailed information as possible about the location and nature of defects. Some of the Customer Contact Advisors have been nominated as Highways “champions” and have received additional training. A process for dealing with reports received via social media is being developed.

Recommendation 3: The processes and levels of resource in the Control Centre be reviewed as part of the current Control Centre project,

particularly in relation to technical expertise to ensure that scheduling of reactive maintenance work is more effective and efficient.

As part of the implementation of new ICT through the SAMS Confirm project, the end to end processes for reactive maintenance were reviewed. The Control Centre is a key part of this process. A new scheduling tool, Workzone, was introduced which makes it easier to allocate jobs to gangs, ensuring the most urgent defects are dealt with first and that the optimum route is travelled.

The Control Centre has had to prioritise the scheduling of urgent, 32 hour and 5 day jobs. In light of the high numbers of defects reported by the public and inspectors, it is not possible within existing resources to rectify all the 28 day defects within the current timescales.

The Control Centre is staffed by a mix of technical and business services staff who have all been trained in the new processes and the Workzone software. There are still a few improvements that have been promised by the software supplier which will make the system more effective.

Longer term, the aim is to develop the Control Centre into a “Hub” that oversees a much broader range of activities, contributing to the aim of delivering a safe and reliable highway network.

A separate workstream has brought together staff and management/supervisors from the Control Centre, inspectors and reactive gangs to identify better work practices and to improve shared ownership of the issue of tackling defects. This work is aimed at reducing inefficiencies in all areas of the process.

Recommendation 4: The SAMS implementation plan includes measures to communicate the rationale for the project to all members of staff in order to achieve “buy-in” and the adoption of consistent and more efficient working practices across the county.

The reactive maintenance phase of the SAMS project went live on 23 November 2015. During the implementation phase, a great deal of communication took place with staff and unions to explain the benefits and ensure “buy-in” to the new ways of working.

Whilst there were a few post implementation “teething” issues, in the main the new ways of working were readily accepted by the workforce. In particular, the use of Toughbooks, which is mentioned in more detail below, has been a success, with all 12 gangs using them consistently and correctly.

Visits to depots by the Director of Highways and the Head of Construction have included workforce talks to emphasise the importance of this frontline service, while meetings with relevant managers are used to monitor performance.

Recommendation 5. Robust measures are developed to ensure that road gangs record, accurately and in real-time, the required information about each job using the mobile technology provided, and that managers reinforce this requirement.

The new system provides work schedules directly to gangs through their Toughbooks. The gangs have all relevant details about the jobs to enable them to complete them. The Toughbooks are used to record the time they arrive on site, take a photograph of the area before and after work is done, and to mark the job as complete on the system. This information is available to managers and the Control Centre in real time through the SAMS Confirm system.

Further awareness raising sessions are taking place during July 2016 to support Contracts Managers and Assistant Contracts Managers in using the information to best effect. As it is such a change from the way the work used to be managed, the full benefits of being able to review work completed on a daily basis, both in terms of time taken per job, number of jobs completed each day, and an assessment of quality through reviewing the photographs, has taken longer than expected to be fully embedded.

Recommendation 6: The Strategic Director updates the Committee (at mutually agreed times) on progress made against target times for the completion of reactive maintenance work.

The performance reporting of completion times for urgent, 32 hour, 5 day and 28 day defects is being developed in the new APEX performance system. Although performance data for the first quarter of 2016/17 (April to June) is still being quality checked, it shows improved performance in urgent and 32 hour jobs compared to 2014/15.

It should be emphasised that the quality of data prior to implementing the new reactive maintenance phase of the SAMS project in November 2015 could not be fully relied upon.

Demand is still outstripping the capacity of the reactive workforce available. Budget restrictions mean that the capacity is limited to 12 two person gangs. The Control Centre process of scheduling work is working more efficiently with priority currently being given to scheduling urgent, 32 hour and 5 day jobs. This does mean a backlog is building up. This is dealt with by planned maintenance gangs or other mechanisms such as Jetpatchers when resources allow.

Greater improvements are also being sought to eliminate waste in defect identification and work practices that include defect prioritisation, vehicle load capacity, materials, abortive visits etc.

It is also the intention to identify whether some types of defects could be given a lower priority freeing up resources to deal more effectively with the high priority defects such as potholes. The Department for Transport is expected to release guidance later this year which would enable a full review of our current policy and response times to be undertaken.

3. Conclusions

The reactive maintenance processes have changed considerably over the last six months and are well on the way to becoming fully embedded. There is still some work to do to ensure these new systems and work practices directly impact on improved performance.

Mike Ashworth

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