

**COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE HIGHWAYS,  
TRANSPORTATION AND WASTE MANAGEMENT SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE AT THE MEETING ON 19 JUNE 2002, CONCERNING:**

**HIGHWAYS NETWORK MANAGEMENT BEST VALUE REVIEW**

In addition to the Executive Summary of the Review, the Committee considered an explanatory note of the Chief Executive and Acting Director of Planning and Transportation on liaison with elected members on highway matters. A copy of the note is attached. The note had been prepared at the suggestion of members at the seminar on the matter held on 17<sup>th</sup> June, 2002, to clear up any misunderstandings about what the Review Panel was proposing.

During the ensuing discussion the following comments were made:-

**Financial Evaluation**

The Review had not involved the preparation of detailed costings because this was not practical, rather a financial evaluation had been undertaken so as to allow a like for like comparison of the community costs of the respective options against the cost of the existing arrangements. The Review's focus was therefore at a strategic level and the preparation of detailed financial implications of the chosen model would form a major part of the 5 year implementation plan. However, a summary of the financial implications broken down into broad cost and saving bands had been prepared for illustrative purposes and was set out in Table 1 appended to the Executive Summary.

**District Council involvement**

District Council officers had been kept fully informed about the progress of the review and had received all the information which had been made available to the Review Panel. However, the Review Panel had recognised the need for further detailed discussion with the District Councils on the proposed strategic model (Recommendation 20 of the Final Report). It was appropriate that this take place following a decision by the Cabinet on the outcome of the Review and possible Implementation Plan, although the Districts had been given the opportunity to make comments before these decisions were taken.

Members expressed concern about the apparent lack of responses to the Review to date on the final report from District Councils.

The Acting Director stressed that District Council officers had on two occasions been invited collectively to discuss findings emerging from the Review, but had not availed themselves of the opportunity. However, initial individual meetings had recently been arranged with both Oadby and Wigston Borough Council and Charnwood Borough Council (to take place in the week commencing 24 June). Meetings with other District Councils would follow.

### **Staffing issues**

Concern was expressed that Highways staff currently working for District Councils faced some uncertainty over their future employment, with the proposed cessation of agency agreements and proposed changes to working arrangements throughout the County.

The Acting Director said that efforts had been made to ensure that all staff had been kept informed throughout the progress of the Review, and this would continue. Following the ending of two agency agreements the previous year (in Hinckley and North West Leicestershire), the staff concerned had transferred to the County Council without any particular difficulties. In view of the volume of highways work taking place throughout the County and the present demands within the economy for skilled staff in the field, there was no question that any reduction in staffing would need to be contemplated.

### **Agency Agreements**

In response to a question, the Acting Director explained that as a result of Government Regulations the Agency Agreements entered into had ceased to have effect once the County Council had adopted its new Constitution. However, it had been agreed by all parties that the arrangements contained in those agreements should continue to be followed pending the outcome of the Review.

### **Role of elected members**

The Acting Director explained the current consultation arrangements for the Harborough Highways Partnership (detailed in the briefing note), which it was being proposed would form the model for Local Highways Forums. Under such an arrangement the local community and councillors could have considerable influence on the priorities for their area. The majority of decisions with regard to detailed works to be carried out were taken under delegated powers of Chief Officers and budgets included some unallocated funds to give flexibility in responding to local requests. Where decisions were not within officers delegated powers these were dealt with through the County and District Council as appropriate. The Acting Director assured members that the County Council had a good track record of responding to the views of local communities and that the Harborough Partnership had proved to be an effective way through which local issues and opinions could be highlighted and taken into account.

It was commented that District Councils would also have the opportunity to use the proposed Local Highways Forums to consult members on the exercise of some district functions for example car parking, and street cleaning. It was also noted that some district authorities were satisfied with the current arrangements and might not necessarily press for the establishment of Local Forums.

**Timetable for the Review**

Acknowledging that the timetable for the review involved consideration by the Cabinet on 2<sup>nd</sup> July and by the full Council on 10<sup>th</sup> July, members expressed the view that because of the scale and significance of the Review the Committee should consider the matter further in the light of the Cabinet's decision and have a role in monitoring progress on the implementation plan.

RESOLVED:-

- (a) That the recommendations of the Final Report of the Member Panel be endorsed;
- (b) That the above comments be forwarded to the Scrutiny Commission at its meeting on 26 June 2002.

HTWM Cttee comments

