

CABINET – 11 OCTOBER 2011**CHANGES TO THE HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE POLICY****REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT****PART A****Purpose of Report**

1. To seek the Cabinet's approval to proposed changes to the Highway Maintenance Policy to reflect proposed service reductions to highway environmental and responsive maintenance.

Recommendations

2. It is recommended that the following amendments to the Highway Maintenance Policy, as set out in the Appendix to the report, are approved:
 - (i) Changes to the highway defect response times
 - (ii) Amend the urban grass cutting frequency.

Reason for Recommendation

3. The changes to the Highway Maintenance Policy are required to implement the service reductions to highway environmental and responsive maintenance, as set out in the County Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2010/11 to 2013/14.

Timetable for Decisions (including Scrutiny)

4. An early decision will ensure that the revised approach to responsive maintenance standards can be implemented in a timeframe compatible with delivering the required MTFS savings.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

5. On 9 February 2010, the Cabinet approved the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2010/11 to 2013/14 (MTFS) which included savings set out in paragraph 7 below.
6. On 12 October 2010, the Cabinet approved the following amendments to the Highway Maintenance Policy:
 - Changes to the highway defect classifications and response times
 - Reduction in the urban grass cutting frequency from 12 times per annum to 9 times per annum.

Resource Implications

7. The proposed revised maintenance standards and associated service reductions will contribute to the savings set out in the MTFs as detailed in the table below:

	2011/12 £000	2012/13 £000	2013/14 £000
S75 Environmental Maintenance- cease all but essential winter environmental maintenance and reduced number of grass cuts		-500	-500
S76 Responsive Maintenance – remove the quick response for carriageway repairs such that all non- emergency work is dealt with through planned maintenance	-800	-1850	-2800

8. The County Solicitor and the Director of Corporate Resources have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

None.

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PART B

Background

9. The County Council's Highway Maintenance Policy and Strategy was prepared following the framework of guidance, standards and performance management incorporated in the National Code of Practice for Maintenance Management "Well Maintained Highways", July 2005 (the National Code). The object of the National Code is to encourage co-ordination and consistency in the delivery of local highway maintenance services.
10. The proposed changes to the Highway Maintenance Policy are required to reflect the service reductions to Environmental and Responsive Maintenance identified in the MTFs. The adoption of the revised policy standards will continue to provide a robust basis for maintenance operations and assist the Authority in defending third-party highway liability claims.

Highway Safety Inspections: Defect Classification and Response Times

11. Safety inspections are undertaken to identify all defects likely to create danger or serious inconvenience to users of the highway network. Such defects include those that require urgent attention as well as those where the locations and sizes are such that longer periods of response are acceptable. Depending upon the severity of the defect, they are classified as either Category 1 or 2. Category 1 defects are those that require prompt attention because they represent an immediate or imminent hazard or because there is a risk of short-term structural deterioration, including potholes greater than 40mm in depth. Category 2 defects are those that require attention but do not represent an immediate or imminent hazard.
12. The current policy requires temporary repairs to be replaced by permanent repairs within 7 days. In practice, it is far more cost-effective to use temporary repair materials and techniques that last much longer, or to effect a permanent repair straight away. Consequently, it is proposed to change the policy to require repairs of a permanent nature to be carried out to a timescale according to the defect status following the completion of a temporary repair.
13. The proposed changes to the highway defect response times are intended to reduce the amount of reactive work undertaken, moving this work into longer term co-ordinated and planned works programmes. This approach will reduce the costs of the reactive maintenance operation, reduce the number of temporary repairs on the network, and allow a higher proportion of first-time permanent repairs to be completed.
14. Category 2 defects are divided into 3 sub-categories: Pothole, High Priority, and Low Priority.
15. Category 2 (Pothole) includes all carriageway potholes less than 40mm deep that are expected to become Category 1 defects within 3 months if not attended to. The current policy is to treat 90% of Category 2 potholes within 28 days. The proposed policy is to complete a repair of a permanent nature within 90 days.
16. Category 2 (High Priority) includes all other defects that are expected to become Category 1 defects within 3 months if not attended to. The current policy is to treat 90% of Category

2 (High Priority) defects within 28 days. The proposed policy is to complete a repair of a permanent nature within 90 days.

17. Category 2 (Low Priority) defects are those that are likely to become Category 1 within 3 to 12 months. The current policy is to treat 90% of Category 2 (Low Priority) defects within 28 days. The proposed policy is for repair of these defects to be undertaken as resources become available, or included within a planned maintenance programme (whichever is the sooner).
18. The proposed revised standards are still consistent with the recommendations detailed within the National Code of Practice for Maintenance Management “Well Maintained Highways”.
19. The Appendix to this report shows the existing and proposed defect categories and responses.

Grass Cutting Frequencies in Urban Areas

20. The existing policy is for urban grass (that is generally on roads subject to a 40mph or lower speed limit) to be cut 9 times per annum. The proposal is to change the wording such that the frequency will be *up to* 9 times per annum.
21. Recent experience has suggested that a frequency of 9 cuts delivers an appropriate balance between cost and amenity without compromising safety. It has also become evident that varying weather conditions through the grass growing season mean that there can be times when the grass does not require cutting. This has prompted the proposed change and would reflect public opinion that there should be a reduction in the frequency of grass-cutting.
22. The proposed revised frequency is still consistent with the recommendations detailed within National Code of Practice for Maintenance Management “Well Maintained Highways” and is comparable with adjacent county authorities, where the urban frequencies range from between 3 and 10 cuts per annum.
23. The Appendix to this report shows the existing and proposed grass cutting frequencies.

Conclusion

24. The proposals are considered necessary to reduce the cost of providing the service whilst maintaining a robust basis for maintenance operations and assist the Authority in defending third party highway liability claims.

Equal Opportunities Implications

None.

Environmental Implications

Fuel consumption will be reduced as a result of increased levels of programmed road repairs and potentially less frequent urban grass cutting.

Background Papers

Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2010/11 to 2013/14
Highway Maintenance Policy and Strategy, approved by Cabinet - 12 October 2010

Appendix

Highway Defect Definitions and Response Times and Highway Grass Cutting Frequencies

Highway Defect Definitions and Response times

Defect definition	
Existing	Proposed
<p>Category 1 – Those that require prompt attention because they represent an immediate or imminent hazard or because there is a risk of short-term structural deterioration, including potholes greater than 40mm in depth.</p>	<p>No change</p>
<p>Category 2 – Those that require attention but do not represent an immediate or imminent hazard, including potholes less than 40mm in depth.</p> <p>Category 2 defects are split into 3 sub-categories: Pothole, High Priority and Low Priority.</p> <p>Category 2 (Potholes) potholes less than 40mm deep that are expected to become Category 1 within 3 months if not attended to.</p> <p>Category 2 (High Priority) defects are those that are expected to become Category 1 within 3 months if not attended to.</p> <p>Category 2 (Low Priority) defects are those that are likely to become Category 1 within 12 months.</p>	<p>No change</p> <p>No change</p> <p>No change</p> <p>No change</p> <p>Category 2 (Low Priority) defects are those that are likely to become Category 1 within 3 to 12 months.</p>

Response	
Existing	Proposed
<p>Category 1 defects should be corrected or made safe at the time of the inspection, if reasonably practicable. In this context, making safe may constitute displaying warning notices, coning off or fencing off to protect the public from the defect. If it is not possible to correct or make safe the defect at the time of inspection, repairs of a temporary nature should be carried out within a period of 24 hours. Repairs of a permanent nature should be carried out within a period of 7 days.</p>	<p>Category 1 defects are to be corrected or made safe at the time of inspection, if reasonably practicable. If it is not possible to correct or make the defect safe at the time of inspection, repairs of a temporary or permanent nature should be carried out within a period of 2 working days, but not more than 72 hours. Where temporary repairs are undertaken, repairs of a permanent nature will be carried out to a timescale according to the defect status following the completion of the temporary repair.</p>
<p>Category 2 (Potholes)</p> <p>Our target is to treat 90% of Cat 2 (Potholes) within 28 days.</p> <p>Category 2 (High Priority)</p> <p>Our target is to treat 90% of Cat 2 (H) within 28 days.</p> <p>Category 2 (Low Priority)</p> <p>Repair of these defects is to be undertaken as part of a planned maintenance programme.</p>	<p><u>Category 2 (Potholes).</u></p> <p>Our target is to complete a repair of a permanent nature within 90 days.</p> <p><u>Category 2 (High Priority).</u></p> <p>Our target is to complete a repair of a permanent nature within 90 days.</p> <p><u>Category 2 (Low Priority).</u></p> <p>Repair of these defects is to be undertaken as resources become available or be included within a planned maintenance programme(which ever is the sooner)</p>

Highway Grass Cutting Frequencies

Item	Existing frequency	Proposed frequency
Grass Cutting – Urban Roads	9 times per year	Up to 9 times per year as conditions require.