

PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 7 NOVEMBER 2019

Highways Deep Dive

Report by Director for Community Operations

RECOMMENDATION

1. **The Committee is RECOMMENDED to;**
 - a) **note the progress of the actions following the Highways ‘Deep Dive’; and**
 - b) **endorse the tasks identified in paragraph 29 as the remaining priorities.**

Introduction

2. Performance Scrutiny presented their findings and recommendations from the Highways ‘Deep Dive’ to Cabinet on February 2019. Officers were asked to evaluate the recommendations and report progress or appraisal (as appropriate) to Performance Scrutiny in autumn 2019.
3. The recommendations made were varied and across many functions. They are best summarised into five main themes as below:
 - Member engagement in policy reviews and programme development
 - Better communications and enquiry responses
 - Supervision and contract control
 - Increased enforcement
 - Community engagement / OXTOG refresh
4. The recommendations within the Deep Dive report have been used to strengthen practise within the services and provide some focus to make improvements, as well as identifying areas to consider for future enhancements to the highway services.

Recommendation Progress & Evaluation

5. The highways service has continued to deliver its projects and make improvements since the ‘Deep Dive’ was carried out. This report documents the progress that has been made identified for each of the main areas of the recommendations. More detailed information is provided at [Annex 1](#).

Member Engagement

6. Work to update the Highway Asset Management Plan for the next period is underway. The Transport Cabinet Advisory Board are, and will continue to be, involved to help shape the draft before wider member engagement through the locality meetings.
7. Member priority schemes collected last year have been used to help influence the development of next years programme which is being prepared for autumns budget setting process. There will be the ability for local members to input further to refine the detail of the programme and timings of schemes.
8. A sustainable regime to ensure routine member development of the highways capital programme that suitably balances good asset management and local priorities is being developed. Emerging thoughts are to predominantly use asset condition data to drive the maintenance programme for the strategic road network, but to provide much greater community influence when it comes to the local road network priority. The specific proposal is to be developed as part of the Highways Asset Management Plan. A summary of the work underway and direction of thinking is at [Annex 2](#)

Communications

9. The progress of the highways programme continues to be presented at the Member Locality meetings. We have yet to achieve the aspiration of a map-based public-friendly works programmes on the website but we still strive to achieve this. It is anticipated this will take 6 months to achieve and is an objective with the Services Delivery Plan.
10. There is a strong desire for improved contact and communication from the area highway teams, both with councillors and members of the public. We need to ensure the right tools are there to support staff with this, both within the highways service and in the Customer Service Centre. However, we also recognise that this is in part a behavioural issue and we will continue to develop our teams to become more member and resident focussed.
11. The daily email on restricted and closed roads has been revamped and now hopefully delivers an improved quality of information. We will continue to enhance and develop this, using feedback, and as new systems allow.
12. The highways 'who's who' factsheet was issued to all members and parish / town councils so if required they know who to speak with or escalate matters to. One will shortly also be done for Network Management. Highway technical factsheets will also continue to be produced as and when required.
13. Finally, whilst there are some improvements that we can make in this area in the short term, this is an area that is a high priority for the Council's transformation programme, and we will continue to work with the "Customer

Experience” transformation workstream to help support the necessary step change for highways.

Supervision and Contract Control

14. The Skanska contract potentially has another 5 years remaining, if two further years extension are given. Any extensions will only be given if there are clear benefits to the Council, and we will ensure these remaining years provide both value for money and an opportunity to try new approaches and ways of working - to support consideration as to what a new highways contract might be like. Any trial will need to be carefully managed / measured so we can assess success and failure and outcomes. The benefits must also be tangible for both the Council and Skanska.
15. Those alternative ways of working are predominantly meant to help with one or all of the following:
 - Improving efficiency (doing more work reducing the inefficiencies of the back office, supervision, double handling of marking activity)
 - Increase the responsiveness of the services
 - Increase the benefit to the customer/ improve customer satisfaction
 - Build on the area-based work we have already done (ownership of patch)
 - Provide wider social value
16. What is currently being considered and explored to achieve this is:
 - OCC directly controlling and owning the scheduling of gangs and specifying materials
 - Increased collaborative approach with supply chain contracts with the aim of driving more innovative road maintenance materials and techniques.
 - Challenging Skanska to reduce costs / improve efficiency (order of 15%) to support and consider the same financial challenges OCC is having to undertake.
17. Skanska have increased the training of their sub-contractors and supervisors to support the need to improve quality and workmanship, and this includes the importance of aspects such as how the site is left. OCC staff are also escalating issues more promptly to enable suitable action to be taken and lessons learnt. Whilst works quality still occurs it has improved and with the additional scrutiny by both Skanska and OCC this should continue to improve.

Increased Enforcement

18. Progress to move to become a Permitting Authority has been good. On 17th September Cabinet approved the scheme and we plan to implement with a soft launch on 14th January 2020 and full operation February 2020.

19. Resources are being increased to ensure this is suitably supported and enforcement can effectively take place.
20. The importance of enforcement across the highway service is recognised. Permitting will provide the framework to increase enforcement for roadworks, and improvements have been made to our processes to make it easier for officers to issue letters for overgrown vegetation, blocked ditches, illegal signage. We are also seeking to utilise Parish and Town councils where possible to support action. Greater information on this is also now being captured. This means we will be able to better understand the scale of the issue and any cost to the authority.
21. The traffic control centre is now operated week days (0630 to 1900 hours) and Saturdays (0900 to 1700 hours). Sundays are covered as and when special events take place. We are using the current tools available to manage traffic and provide up to date information to the traveling public. As technology continues to develop in this area the capability and tools available will increase.

Community Engagement

22. There is now a dedicated team of two in place to support the management of the volunteer and devolved activity to parish/town councils. In particular they are ensuring that the necessary paper work and monitoring is in place, along with assessing the value of certain activities under OxTog.
23. We have also completed a survey of Town & Parish councils to establish what they do now & what they are interested in becoming involved with in the future. Staff are currently following this up with those who responded as an opportunity to make connections and meet local needs.
24. A cross-council community engagement working group focussing on volunteering activity now meets monthly. Cllr Mark Grey and Cllr Yvonne Constance are in attendance.
25. Noticeable progress has been made in the past few months with a growing awareness and enthusiasm to participate with OxTog. A new document has been prepared to outline the current 'offer' and this will be published shortly. A draft can be seen at [Annex 3](#).
26. The FixMyStreet 'Super-User' programme continues to progress, having tested the concept with a small sample, we are now in pilot stage, with 35 volunteers across 23 communities now trained and actively requesting defects to be fixed which meet OCC intervention criteria.
27. A close working relationship with both the area Highways Inspector and CE staff is encouraged and although still at an early stage over 100 potholes have been fixed using this process. A further 20+ communities have expressed interest in being part of this scheme and are considered to join the pilot.

Future key priorities

28. This report highlights the progress that has been made to address the findings of the highways deep dive, but it is accepted there are further areas of development and exploration still required.
29. The following tasks are considered to be the priority for the highway and network management service delivery plan, which is part of the service and resource planning process. We believe that a focus on these areas will allow us to fully address the recommendations of the deep dive.
 - i. Improving our management of correspondence and enquires
 - ii. Improving member influence on works programmes & improving our communication of them, as part of the new Highway Asset Management Plan
 - iii. Enforcement, particularly the successful introduction of the Permit Scheme
 - iv. Implementing and realising benefits from the FMS 'Super-User' initiative

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Background papers:

1. Performance Scrutiny - 10th January 2019
2. Cabinet - 26th February 2019