

CABINET – 26 FEBRUARY 2019

Highways Deep Dive

Report by Councillor Jenny Hannaby, Deep Dive lead member

RECOMMENDATION

1. The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to:

- (a) Consider the findings of the Performance Scrutiny Committee's deep dive into highways.**
- (b) Agree which of the following recommendations the Cabinet will accept:**
 - (1) Ensure there is councillor input into the review of the Highways Asset Management Plan, and that this includes consideration of flexibility for local prioritisation.**
 - (2) Ask Cabinet to ensure there is a smarter process for developing a programme of work to utilise the additional capital investment in highways and that a robust capital governance process is in place to help shape this and improve risk management.**
 - (3) Ensure officers consider the impact on public perception when developing a programme of work and improve opportunities for councillors to influence this based on local priorities.**
 - (4) Ask officers to work with SKANSKA to explore a business case for greater levels of supervision that will ensure the quality of work remains high, including a consideration of how in-house resources could be utilised differently.**
 - (5) Ensure that opportunities to utilise staff in flexible ways are explored further with SKANSKA, so that the maximum benefit of having staff on site can be realised.**
 - (6) Encourage officers to explore more innovative maintenance methods and tools.**
 - (7) Ask Cabinet to ensure an effective approach to publicly publishing and communicating the highways programme of work is in place.**
 - (8) Ask officers to develop a more robust process for informing councillors of local road improvements in their division, so that they can advise on works that need to be prioritised and support early communication with residents.**
 - (9) Ask officers to ensure all responses to highways enquiries / reports through Fix My Street include a named officer contact.**

- (10) Ensure direct points of contact are communicated and established for key stakeholders (e.g. town and parish councils) to ensure that local highway priorities can be followed up and dealt with more efficiently.**
 - (11) Support the Council's ambition to become a Permitting Authority and request a report on the expected impact of this in mid-2019.**
 - (12) Support the development of a comprehensive out of hours traffic management provision to ensure effective management of the impact of major incidents and network failures at these times.**
 - (13) Support the principle of a having greater focus on enforcement.**
 - (14) Ask the Cabinet to instruct officers to explore a case for employing dedicated resource for enforcement across all Highways services/functions.**
 - (15) Ask the Director of Infrastructure Operations to ensure that a structured and robust approach to managing community engagement is in place.**
- (c) Note that the Performance Scrutiny Committee have asked officers to report back to Performance Scrutiny in 6-9 months on the impact of a refreshed approach to community engagement, including evidence of the effectiveness of the Fix My Street Superusers pilot project.**

Executive Summary

2. The condition of roads has a significant impact on levels of public satisfaction with the Council and their local area. As a result, the Performance Scrutiny Committee commissioned a deep dive into the factors affecting public perception and experience of highways and the Council's approach to improving this. From July to November a small group of councillors worked with officers to identify opportunities for improving the condition of the road network, tackling congestion, better managing the impact of street works and adapting our approach to maintenance contracts and partnership working on highways. This report has been considered by the Performance Scrutiny Committee and is now presented to Cabinet for them to consider and respond to its recommendations.

Introduction

3. The condition of Oxfordshire's roads (just under 3,000 miles) has a significant impact on the quality of people's lives and affects the local economy. Roads provide access to jobs, services, schools, the delivery of goods and enable people to make the most of their free time and leisure activities – the road network is key to supporting thriving communities and a thriving economy and affects most people every day.

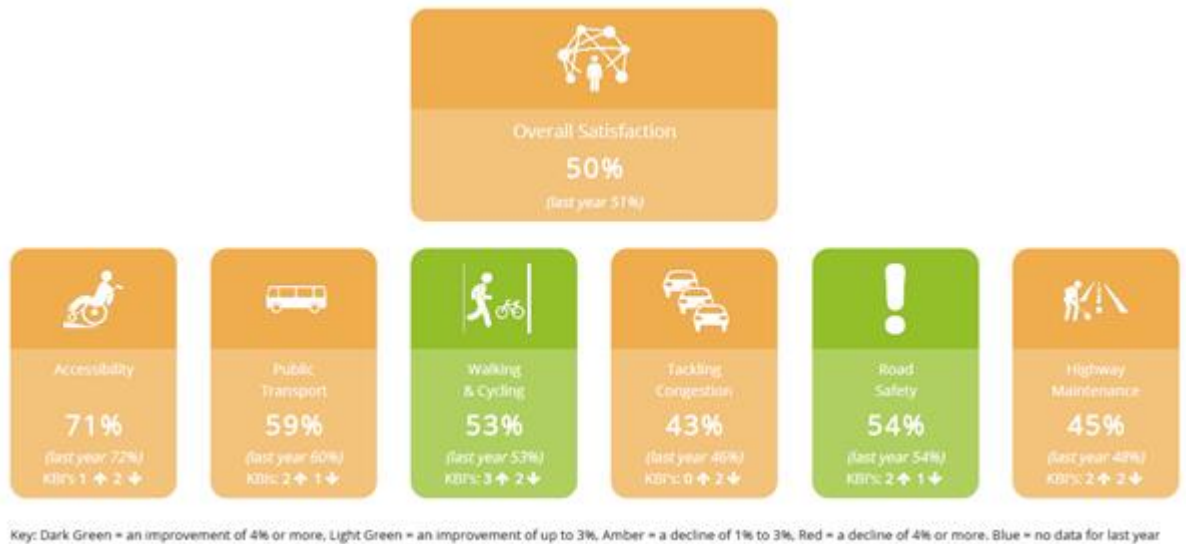
4. With a growing population, expanding economy, increased pressure on housing and infrastructure, and shrinking local government budgets Oxfordshire's roads are inevitably becoming more congested and deteriorating more quickly, requiring more of a focus on repair and maintenance. The challenge for the County Council is to maintain the county's high-demand road network and ensure that Oxfordshire delivers the services residents need, within reduced public funds.
5. Recent national customer satisfaction surveys and correspondence from residents have shown a high level of dissatisfaction with the condition of the county's roads. This is in part also affecting how the public perceive the Local Authority as a whole.
6. In response, the Performance Scrutiny Committee agreed to establish a deep dive to explore what could be done to address this, with a focus on what the County Council is doing to maintain, repair and invest in Oxfordshire's road network.
7. The objectives of the working group were to:
 - Develop a greater understanding of smart traffic management approaches and the prevention of road deterioration.
 - Understand the impact of heavy goods vehicles and other large vehicles on the condition of roads.
 - Explore how the Council works with third parties, e.g. utility companies, to ensure roads are properly reinstated after works.
 - Scrutinise the ways in which councillors and residents can stay informed about work on the county's highways.
 - Explore the Council's relationship with Highways England, particularly the impact of diversions from main arterial routes on secondary roads that are the responsibility of the Council.
8. I have led this deep dive with the support of Councillors Liam Walker and John Sanders. Officer support has been provided by senior staff in the Community Operations team, and a Senior Policy Officer. I thank them for their input, ideas and guidance throughout this process.
9. This report presents our findings and recommendations for consideration and response from the Cabinet.

Residents' perception and experience of highways

10. Local intelligence and feedback from residents to councillors indicates there was a particularly high level of dissatisfaction with the condition of Oxfordshire's roads and levels of maintenance over the winter 2017 / spring 2018 period.

11. The outcomes of the 2018 National Highways and Transport (NHT) survey for Oxfordshire show that overall satisfaction with the road network has decreased since 2017¹.

Figure 1: 2018 NHT survey results – Year on Year comparison (Oxfordshire 2017/2018)



12. The factors most affecting this downward trend are the condition of highways, ease of access and management of roadworks.
13. When compared nationally, the NHT satisfaction rates for Oxfordshire are above average for accessibility, but 4% below the national average for tackling congestion and highway maintenance².
14. The focus of this deep dive has been on highway maintenance and how traffic is managed on the network, but not how congestion is being dealt with in the longer term. We focused on four key lines of inquiry:
- A) The condition of Oxfordshire's roads, including:
- The prevention, identification and repair of pot holes and other road defects,
 - How the 'Dragon Patcher' is used and whether it delivers good value for money,
 - How the Council communicates with residents and councillors about its road infrastructure,
 - How the Council works with district councils and the city to maintain its road network,
 - Benchmarking local customer satisfaction rates nationally.
- B) Congestion, including:
- The county's strategic road networks,

¹ NHT survey based on a survey size of 3,300 and a response rate of 33%

² 2018 NHT survey results – Benchmark comparison with NHT average

- How road diversions are managed on main arterial routes,
- The Council's relationship with Highways England.

C) Street works, including:

- How works on highways are prioritised and programmed,
- The impact of third-party work and significant events on the road network, and the Council's legal rights and duties.

D) Highway maintenance contracts / agreements, including:

- The extent of maintenance work delegated to town and parish councils,
- How successfully highways contracts are monitored and the specific responsibilities of contractors.

The Council's highway infrastructure responsibilities

15. Under the heading of 'Community Operations' the Council manages the maintenance and operation of Oxfordshire's highways and transport system. This includes network management; highway maintenance and minor schemes of work; management of trees and public rights of way; traffic and road safety; and supported transport (see Annex A for a brief overview). Whilst these teams do not lead on major infrastructure projects or the planning process, they are a key contributor to these as and when required.
16. Although extensive guidance on highway maintenance is set out in a Code of Practice³, there is no statutory minimum for standards of repair and maintenance set out in legislation, just a 'duty to maintain'⁴. Whilst there is also no statutory definition of a 'pothole', the Council follows a system of categorisation for defects and risks, as laid out in the Code, which informs the nature and speed of the Council's response.
17. The Code of Practice was refreshed in 2016 and now promotes an integrated asset management approach to highway infrastructure based on local levels of risk-based assessment. The new Code includes a series of recommendations that Authorities must adhere to and as such, the Council's Highway Policy Statements and priorities have recently been revised, in conjunction with members of a Transport Cabinet Advisory Group and the Council's main highway maintenance provider.

The Council's current approach and future opportunities

Highways policy and plans

18. At present 10% of Oxfordshire's roads are categorised as having less than 5 years residual life remaining, with a further 45% considered to have between 5 and 15 years remaining. Current rates of deterioration indicate that the

³ 'Well Managed Highway Infrastructure: A code of practice', October 2016, UK Roads Liaison Group

⁴ S.41 Highways Act 1980

number of potholes in the county will increase by 32% over the next 5 years, although severe weather, as seen during the winter of 2017, is likely to accelerate this.

19. To ensure a strategic response to the deterioration of the county's road network, the Council has a Highways Asset Management Plan (HAMP)⁵ that was developed in 2014 through a councillor working group. This Plan outlines overarching principles in relation to levels of service, highway life cycle plans, asset valuation and an asset register. It is seen as fundamental for demonstrating the value of highway maintenance, as well as delivering on wider corporate objectives and transport policy.
20. We recognise the value of having a HAMP for ensuring minimum standards and a consistent approach to road maintenance, but also see the importance of local discretion and prioritisation by managers and councillors. Officers provided assurance that this already happens to a degree through officer liaison with the main highway maintenance provider, but we believe there is greater scope for councillors to be involved in helping to prioritise local works. With the current HAMP expiring in 2019, there is an opportunity for councillors to be involved in reshaping the next iteration, so that a greater level of local flexibility and influence can be incorporated into planned maintenance work.

Recommendation: Ensure there is councillor input into the review of the Highways Asset Management Plan, and that this includes consideration of flexibility for local prioritisation.

Funding and investment

21. Officers reported that budgets for maintaining the county's highways have reduced by 50% in real terms over the last 10 years, whilst at the same time construction and technical costs have significantly increased. Reductions in central government funding have led to a deterioration in the condition of Oxfordshire's carriageways and footways as local spending has been prioritised elsewhere. In addition, major growth in the county is leading to a greater need for the asset base to be maintained and adding potential liabilities if the condition of roads does not improve.
22. Comparatively Oxfordshire spends less than other Authorities on maintaining its road network, with a total annual spend on highways of c. £21m in recent years, linked to levels of central government funding. We are concerned that the current Department for Transport (DfT) funding formula is having a detrimental effect on the level of funding Oxfordshire receives, as it is based on route length and not road use or condition. It is widely accepted that current spending levels are insufficient to maintain road conditions. Officers assured us that as a Local Authority we are challenging the DfT on how fit for purpose their funding formula is.

⁵ Oxfordshire HAMP 2014-2019 is available online at: <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/residents/roads-and-transport/transport-policies-and-plans/highway-maintenance/highway-asset-maintenance>

23. We were also informed that funding can be increased through bids to various DfT grant funds, but we fear this is not a sustainable solution. Despite this, officers confirmed that the County Council has been the most successful Authority in bidding for the DfT challenge fund, securing £12.5m of additional funding in 2016, which has significantly increased spending on maintenance per kilometre of road over the last 3 years.
24. Following the initiation of this deep dive, the Cabinet approved a business case for significant levels of additional capital investment in highway assets that will come forward as part of the capital budget proposals for 2019/20. We are supportive of this decision, but recognise there will be a balance to strike between investing in the best maintenance approaches and doing what the public and councillors believe to be an effective use of public funds. There will be opportunities to consider investment in a range of areas that will affect the public's perception of Oxfordshire's roads to differing degrees. Whilst we appreciate that the additional investment will be considerable, it will still not bring the county's road network up to an optimal condition.

Recommendation: Ask Cabinet to ensure there is a smarter process for developing a programme of work to utilise the additional capital investment in highways and that a robust capital governance process is in place to help shape this and improve risk management.

Recommendation: Ensure officers consider the impact on public perception when developing a programme of work and improve opportunities for councillors to influence this based on local priorities.

Contract management

25. We explored in some detail the contract arrangements the Council has with its main highway maintenance provider, to understand how value for money is being achieved and to seek assurance that there is robust monitoring in place. Our contracted provider, SKANSKA, is undertaking work on the highway on our behalf and the quality and timeliness of their work directly impacts on public perception and customer satisfaction.
26. Through discussion with officers we learnt about the collaborative approach taken to our contract with SKANSKA. The approach reflects a relationship based on mutual cooperation, where contract extensions are linked to how well the partnership is working and both parties share an element of risk and reward (e.g. where a target cost for work is agreed, the Council shares the gains if the work costs less, but shares a portion of the additional costs if the work costs more). A number of the strategic performance indicators are designed to be delivered jointly to justify extensions to the contract and only if the provider is meeting their overall operational performance indicators will the Council pay a dividend.
27. We were also reassured that the Council takes a robust approach to contract management and the monitoring of SKANSKA's work. When there have been unresolved issues or performance targets have not been met, the Council has

been strict on withholding contract extensions or reducing the level of dividend paid. The Council also adopts a policy of not paying for work unless the contractor can evidence that it has been undertaken and there are conditions built into the arrangement which mean SKANSKA is liable for the cost of repair works if a road begins to fail following maintenance or construction work.

28. Officers shared that it can be difficult for SKANSKA to attract good quality workers in Oxfordshire because of the many alternative opportunities in the construction industry. The approach taken by SKANSKA is to employ sub-contractors from local supply chains; they directly employ less than 50 frontline staff and the value of sub-contracted work is approximately four times as much as what is delivered by directly employed crews. We recognise this is an area of risk, particularly with the unknown effects of Brexit on the horizon.
29. The Council pays SKANSKA to supervise their sub-contractors, but officers report that this is currently very stretched because of the volume of work being commissioned. With the additional planned investment in highway maintenance the volume of work will continue to increase, so officers are considering options for utilising and growing the Council's in-house workforce to help supplement this direct supervision. A greater level of involvement is one that officers think could be sustained and will ensure value for money in the longer term.

Recommendation: Ask officers to work with SKANSKA to explore a business case for greater levels of supervision that will ensure the quality of work remains high, including a consideration of how in-house resources could be utilised differently.

30. To a lesser extent, we also discussed the Council's contract for the provision of street lighting, given that another source of residents' complaints is the repair of street lights. We were informed that in many cases the issue is often related to the power supply, which is the responsibility of Scottish and Southern Electricity, and the Council is only able to issue a fine for non-repairs after 58 days. We are therefore, pleased that the Council has committed to upgrading all street lights to LED lighting, involving considerably less upkeep, and will be reviewing the maintenance contract as a result.

Repairing defects

31. To see first-hand how maintenance work is undertaken and to understand the costs and benefits of different approaches, we were given a demonstration of the 'Dragon-Patcher' and visited Drayton depot where Council staff and SKANSKA employees are co-located. Officers shared that there are now more than 50 distinct defect categories based on more than just safety-related concerns. Repairs will only be made when defects have reached certain depths and widths, but area managers have the flexibility to authorise and prioritise work in higher risk areas, e.g. near schools, care homes, or on zebra crossings. This also reflects the new risk-based approach to inspection that has been incorporated into the recent review of Highway policies.

32. The number of reported defects has remained below 25,000 during the last four years, but they are predicted to increase significantly by the end of 2018 because of repeat episodes of freezing and thawing during the winter. The repair methods used in some cases have exacerbated the challenges the Council faces over the winter period. Working with SKANSKA the Council has now changed some of its working practices to improve the longevity and quality of repairs, including more saw cut repairs, rather than sweep and fills⁶, and using hotboxes to keep materials warm. This has also enabled SKANSKA to adopt a 'find and fix' approach, not always waiting to be instructed by the Council to fill a pothole. Safety defects continue to be repaired within 2 hours, 24 hours or 28 days depending on an assessment of their severity, whereas other defect works are planned and considered as part of an annual programme.
33. Officers highlighted the benefits of using the Dragon-Patcher over traditional crews, namely that it costs c. £15 per square metre to repair stretches of road using the Patcher, as opposed to c. £60-80 per square metre for a crew to fill potholes. The Patcher is often used where there are a series of defects that need attention, as it can patch up to a kilometre of road defects in a day, whereas crews can usually fill eight to ten potholes per day and are used in more targeted areas. As such, the Patcher is normally utilised on rural roads because of ease of access and the likelihood of the road having more defects due to heavy use. It is not used in more urban areas because of the level of disruption it would cause and the risk of damaging nearby parked cars.
34. During the demonstration of the Dragon-Patcher we were impressed by the speed at which repair work is completed, the quality of the finish, and that only two members of staff are required to operate it. However, we noted there were other issues which could have been resolved at the same time, but were out of the scope of the work order, e.g. gully clearing and grip repair.

Recommendation: Ensure that opportunities to utilise staff in flexible ways are explored further with SKANSKA, so that the maximum benefit of having staff on site can be realised.

Recommendation: Encourage officers to explore more innovative maintenance methods and tools.

Communications and customer focus

35. Whilst the proposed additional investment in highway maintenance will help to build and repair more roads, we acknowledge that this alone will not address levels of public dissatisfaction – we also need to ensure residents are well informed about planned works, as well as how they can report faults. We are pleased to learn that the directorate is already considering how best to provide residents with timely information about works in their area and how to share new approaches being trialled.

⁶ The sweep and fill method involves placing compacted material with the pothole, whereas saw cut repairs involve removing a section of the road around the pothole.

36. As part of this it will be important to ensure the public understands the way that highway works are undertaken and how much it costs the public purse. We also see that a key step will be regular and wide publication of planned work, coupled with the Council delivering against the commitments it makes.

Recommendation: Ask Cabinet to ensure an effective approach to publicly publishing and communicating the highways programme of work is in place.

37. In respect of communicating more widely, we believe more could be done to utilise the contacts and networks that councillors possess. Officers confirmed that councillors can receive regular updates on issues in their area through automated reports from 'Fix My Street', as well as highways work planned via the regular operations reports for their locality. Despite this, councillors often reflect that they do not have timely information about local road improvements in their division, in order to share positive messages about the work or support early engagement with residents.

Recommendation: Ask officers to develop a more robust process for informing councillors of local road improvements in their division, so that they can advise on works that need to be prioritised and support early communication with residents.

38. On a day-to-day basis the online tool Fix My Street is used prolifically by residents, staff and partners to report, update and manage a multitude of highway defects and issues. This provides vital intelligence which informs the programme of work for Community Operations teams; however, discussion with officers about the effectiveness of this tool, identified some key areas for improvement. Whilst it was considered helpful to include a feature that would enable people to 'track' the Dragon-Patcher, we believe a useful development would be the addition of a named contact on responses to members of the public, so that further contact on reported issues can be dealt with more efficiently.

Recommendation: Ask officers to ensure all responses to highways enquiries / reports through Fix My Street include a named officer contact.

39. To this end, we are concerned that the Council's level of anonymity through Fix My Street and by directing enquiries to a single customer contact centre is not helpful for councillors and key stakeholders, such as town and parish councils, who want to discuss and report local concerns. An overview of 'who does what' for councillors and town and parish councils could be a helpful starting point. Longer term, we acknowledge that any changes to the way that people can contact the Authority, will have to fit with the Council's new operating model.

Recommendation: Ensure direct points of contact are communicated and established for key stakeholders (e.g. town and parish councils) to

ensure that local highway priorities can be followed up and dealt with more efficiently.

Traffic management

40. The level of congestion on Oxfordshire's roads, caused by road works, accidents and heavy traffic flows, is a factor that significantly affects residents' experience of the road network. As such, we visited the Council's Traffic Control Centre to see first-hand how the county's strategic road network is managed, understand the Council's relationship with Highways England, and scrutinise our approach to managing the impact of third party works and significant events on Oxfordshire's roads.
41. As part of the Council's role in network coordination our officers coordinate all requests for work on the highway, including utility works; council-commissioned road works; temporary traffic signals; and developer works. Currently the Council manages this through a Noticing process (25,000 notices were issued in 2017/18), which represents a passive approach to handling requests. Officers shared their ambition for the Council to become a Permitting Authority, which would mean that we have greater control over when and where work is undertaken, as third parties and our own highway contractors would need to seek permission to undertake work. Officers shared that a feasibility study is underway and the Council will be submitting a proposal to the DfT by March 2019 that supports the implementation of this approach. As yet, the resource implications of moving to a Permitting approach are unknown.

Recommendation: Support the Council's ambition to become a Permitting Authority and request a report on the expected impact of this in mid-2019.

42. In conjunction with network coordination, the Council also processes requests for Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders (TTROs), including requests for road closures. In 2017/18 more than 700 orders were processed, generating approximately £1m of income for the Authority. With an expected increase in the number of planned highway improvements, officers anticipate this number will be much higher in future and without appropriate levels of resource there is likely to be a greater risk of emergency road closures. We are assured that a business case for more resource is being developed, alongside a benchmarking exercise with Cambridgeshire County Council, to review processes and service standards against available resources. This project will be complete in January 2019.
43. Similarly, when works are being carried out on major roads, Highways England put forward their preferred diversion routes, which often have a considerable impact on the deterioration rates of minor roads and levels of congestion. Going forward we are keen for councillors and the Highways team to have a greater influence over these diversion routes, particularly to minimise the impact on rural areas and historic towns, as well as to manage the costs of maintenance.

44. The Traffic Control Centre plays a vital role in providing advance warning to stakeholders and the public when there are issues on the highway, helping to manage levels of congestion. This is done through monitoring a network of 63 fixed cameras at key junctions (linked with the Highways England major road network), publishing online alerts, adjusting traffic signals and providing data to broadcasters for transmission.
45. Our tour of the Centre gave us a useful insight into how the team works to ensure messages are communicated in a timely way, but we were surprised to learn that 10-15% of the cameras do not currently work because of poor connections or faulty hardware. There is also no link between the existing network and traffic signals to help control traffic flow. We are reassured to learn that significant investment has already been secured to upgrade the camera network, but understand there are further opportunities that could be pursued, e.g. asking developers to install new cameras when they connect to existing infrastructure.
46. Officers also shared their ambition to provide traffic control services out of hours, to better manage the impact of major road incidents and network failures, and to mirror the service provided by Area Operations and SKANSKA teams. Currently, staff providing out of hours cover have good working relationships with Emergency Planning, but this is an arrangement based on goodwill, which is therefore not a resilient approach.

Recommendation: Support the development of a comprehensive out of hours traffic management provision to ensure effective management of the impact of major incidents and network failures at these times.

Enforcement

47. Throughout discussion with officers, enforcement was raised as a key focus for improvement across a number of areas. Currently enforcement activity is only part of the role of network coordinators and they predominantly focus on ensuring utility companies working on the highway have the correct notices in place and are not working on the roads for longer than intended. Unless a notice extension is negotiated or the additional time required is reasonable, the Council has the power to issue a fine.
48. The Council also has a licencing team that processes thousands of applications for skip, scaffolding, vehicle access, temporary storage and private road opening licences every year. Although we generate an income from these applications, there is limited resource to enforce the licencing scheme and a risk that the Authority is missing out on further income. Officers reported that they also have limited capacity to work with landowners to ensure responsibility is taken for drainage, gully clearing and grips on their land to reduce the amount of standing water on the road and the risk of potholes developing.
49. With a proposed move towards becoming a Permitting Authority we believe the Council has an opportunity to tighten up its approach to enforcement and

take a stricter stance on fines, penalties and charges. This would encourage third parties to take greater responsibility for the quality of their work and acknowledge their duties in relation to the highway.

50. As such, we are particularly supportive of the motion recently passed at Council asking for mechanisms to be developed that require developers to mitigate the damage caused by their construction works to Oxfordshire's highways by returning them to their former condition.
51. We are also encouraged to learn that officers are updating the licence charging schedule to ensure sufficient penalty charges are in place for enforcement. However, we recognise the main barrier to effective enforcement is a lack of resource to staff this. We believe there is a case to be made for specifically resourcing enforcement, as this would be offset by the increased level of income generated through fines and charges.

Recommendation: Support the principle of a having greater focus on enforcement.

Recommendation: Ask the Cabinet to instruct officers to explore a case for employing dedicated resource for enforcement across all highways services/functions.

Partnership working and community engagement

52. Through the 'Oxfordshire Together' (OXTOG)⁷ initiative the Council is already working with parish and town councils individually or in clusters to support them in managing and delivering a variety of local highway services. As part of a service agreement each town or parish is offered an annual budget based on the community-led service they are running. Whilst this approach has been successful in some areas, e.g. grass-cutting, there are many more areas that local councils express an interest in having control over, whether to attract further funding or help better utilise their directly employed staff.
53. With continuing pressures on resource and the Council's drive to work more locally, officers are looking at ways to refresh and broaden the initiatives under OXTOG. Work is being done with practitioners from Cranfield University and officers are visiting other Local Authorities to map and learn from alternative approaches. Instead of publishing a list of services that town and parish councils can deliver on our behalf, we are encouraged to learn that officers are listening to what local councils tell us they want to be involved in, and what they would like to see done. We are supportive of this approach, but as part of this we would also encourage officers to explore options for further integration and joint work on highways with district and city council partners, not least through the Cherwell Partnership arrangements.
54. A particular initiative being piloted as part of a new OXTOG is 'Fix My Street Superusers'. Officers described this as a scheme which aims to empower

⁷ Further information on Oxfordshire Together can be found online at: <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/residents/community-and-living/our-work-communities/oxfordshire-together>

local communities and support the Council to deliver its services: a competent and trusted local volunteer is trained to order low-category defect correction works directly from SKANSKA, in line with the Council's intervention criteria. Twelve volunteers have already been trained and are now able to commission works. Timescales for the pilot project are still being defined and officers plan to assess whether real efficiencies can be realised from this kind of approach.

55. Whilst we are supportive of the Council exploring innovative approaches to community engagement and considering ways to manage demand on our resources, we have some concerns about this approach. We have reservations about the use of unpaid volunteers to commission work that is funded by the Council and fear that there is not yet a robust monitoring process in place to provide assurance that public money is being spent in the right areas. Similarly, we have concerns about the parity of such an approach across the county, particularly where some communities are more willing to engage than others. Following the pilot, we believe a business case to evidence the potential efficiencies from this approach is required, before such an initiative can be scaled-up and rolled out.

Recommendation: Ask the Director of Infrastructure Operations to ensure that a structured and robust approach to managing community engagement is in place.

Recommendation: Ask officers to report back to Performance Scrutiny in 6-9 months on the impact of a refreshed approach to community engagement, including evidence of the effectiveness of the Fix My Street Superusers pilot project.

Conclusions

56. We recognise there are a wide range of factors affecting the public's perception and experience of highways and not all of these are within the scope of the Council's control or influence. However, where the Council has specific responsibilities, our deep dive has shown that officers are continually seeking ways to improve what they do and searching for innovative approaches.
57. There are many promising changes planned or being piloted that we are confident will have a positive impact. We are particularly supportive of the significant capital investment proposed to improve highway infrastructure, the move towards becoming a Permitting Authority and the promising approaches being explored around community engagement.
58. However, our investigations also highlighted some key opportunities that we believe are being underutilised, namely the benefits of increased enforcement activity (which would generate more income for the Authority) and a more effective and coordinated approach to communication. We also believe there is scope for greater levels of local prioritisation of planned works and for the Council to review its arrangements with SKANSKA to ensure the full utilisation of staff and development of innovative maintenance methods and tools.

Monitoring progress

59. These recommendations have been endorsed by Performance Scrutiny Committee.
60. If Cabinet are minded to accept some or all of the recommendations to them in this report then a review of progress will be requested by the Performance Scrutiny Committee at a future meeting.

Financial and Staff Implications

61. The financial and staffing implications arising from this deep dive are dependent on whether and how each recommendation is progressed, however, we recognise that a number of the areas identified as future opportunities are likely to have resource implications. Annex B contains officer comments with greater detail about the potential impact if Cabinet are minded to accept the recommendations.

Equalities Implications

62. No equalities implications have been identified through the course of this deep dive or in the recommendations made to the Committee.

Acknowledgements

63. We would like to thank the officers who met with us for giving up their time and helping us to understand the factors that are affecting residents' perception and experience of highways. In particular, we would like to thank senior managers in the Community Operations team, members of the Service Improvement Team, and the staff at Drayton Depot and the Traffic Control Centre.

Councillor Jenny Hannaby

Lead member – Performance Scrutiny Committee Highways Deep Dive

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January 2019

Overview of Community Operations

Annex A

The responsibility for the operation and maintenance of Oxfordshire's highway and transport system sits within Community Operations, which is part of the county council's Communities directorate.

It has responsibility for the operation and maintenance of the Highway, Public Rights of Way, and Transport Network. Ensuring that people can move around safely and minimise any disruption experienced as much as possible.

The core services within Community Operations are; Highway Maintenance (including trees and Public Rights of Way), Network Management, Parking Enforcement & Operation, Community Engagement (incl. Road safety and Countryside), and Supported Transport.

Highway Maintenance is a significant function and consists of three main teams. Asset Renewals, Area Operations - South, and Area Operations - North. Collectively responding to public enquiries, delivering repairs or improvements to the highway network to ensure it is suitable maintained, and Winter preparation & management

Asset Renewals directly manages large maintenance schemes and oversees the whole highway maintenance programme. Is responsible for the Highway Asset Management Plan that sets out our policy and approach to maintenance. Supports the area operations team and has direct responsibility for streetlighting, structures and traffic signals.

Area Operations (North & South) Manages the reactive, cyclical and small scale planned maintenance for roads, pavements, drainage, trees and public rights of way. Is also responsible for coordination and approval of local roadworks, and delivery of minor new infrastructure schemes. There are three main teams:

- Highway & Drainage – managing cyclical and planned highway and drainage works as well as investigating problems.
- Inspections – routine and reactive inspections as a result of customer enquiries, ordering works as necessary to ensure the safe operation of the roads, pavements or public rights of way.
- Traffic – responsible for maintenance of signs and lines, investigate general traffic issues and enquires, and deliver minor improvements schemes.

Network Management manages our highway network to ensure it is operating effectively and key travel information messages get out to the public. The team have oversight of all roadworks on our network and works with the Area Operations teams to ensure suitable coordination of works and events. All Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders are processed through the team. There are three main teams:

- Streetworks approval and co-ordination
- Traffic Control Centre
- Filming and Events

Parking manages the operation and enforcement activity of the parking service which covers:

- Oxford bus lanes

- Oxford On-Street Parking
- Oxford Rising Bollards
- County Council-managed Park and Rides

Community Engagement is a multifunctional group covering a number of activities and functions:

- Road Safety Team – Provides road safety and accident data and analysis along with engineering expertise. Provides Traffic Order Regulation advice and manages the consultation.
- Countryside Access – responsibility for public rights of way and tree activity, providing advice and support to area teams. Direct responsibility for managing our in-house maintenance task team and providing support. Includes managing the Thames Path & Ridgeway National Trails on behalf of all partnership authorities.
- Community Engagement – managing and developing volunteering type activity. Has responsibility for management and supervision of the School Crossing Patrol service and enumerators who carry out traffic monitoring surveys, along with developing the offer under Oxfordshire Together (OXTOG) initiative.

Supported Transport provides and enhances the ability to access transport services, enabling people of all ages to play an active part in the community and live life to their full potential. This is done by supporting and/or arranging school, community, social care, public transport, whilst placing the resident at the heart of everything we do.

Supported Transport are responsible for the following:

- Home to School Transport – Primary, Secondary, Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Post 16 SEN and Meadowbrook College
- Home to School Transport Spare Seat Scheme
- Social Care Transport
- Oxfordshire Comet Service
- Taxi and coach driver Safeguard Training and DBS checks
- Community Transport
- Payments of concessionary fares to commercial bus providers
- Quality Monitoring of all contracts and managing complaints and issues
- Managing the Council's fleet