

ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Environment Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday 9 September 2021 at the Council Chamber - Shire Hall, Gloucester.

PRESENT:

Cllr Chris McFarling (Vice-Chair)	Cllr Roger Whyborn
Cllr Dominic Morris (Chair)	Cllr Susan Williams
Cllr Gill Moseley	Cllr Paul Baker
Cllr Phil Awford	Cllr Stephen Hirst
Cllr Sajid Patel	

Substitutes: Cllrs Stephen Hirst and Paul Baker

Officers in attendance: Cllr Vernon Smith, Kathryn Haworth, Simon Excell, Cllr David Gray, Liz Kirkham and Alexis Newport

Apologies: Colin Chick, Cllrs Philip Robinson, Alan Preest and Alex Hegenbarth

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 16 June and 14 July 2021 were approved.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

4. MAINTENANCE AND REPAIR OF HIGHWAYS

The Chair invited Kathryn Haworth, Lead Commissioner for Highways, to present this item. The report was taken as read and members noted the following points:

- The County Council was responsible for 5,500km of highway network which equated to around £7 billion as a financial asset. The Council had a statutory duty to keep this network safe.
- The increasing implications of a changing of climate were having a significant impact on the network's stability due to more rainfall and extreme temperatures.
- It was very much an evolved network meaning in some cases, sections of the highway were hundreds of years old. Whilst nowadays, things were designed to be resilient, the older sections of the highway would not have been built to this standard. This meant the network needed to be constantly maintained and looked after to improve its lifespan and reduce the need for capital works.
- Structural maintenance was the preferred way of maintaining the highway network. This meant putting structural integrity back into the network through resurfacing and surface treatments.

- This year was the final year of the £150m investment. This additional investment over and above the standstill costs had definitely made an improvement to the classified road network.
- Standstill costs were the monies needed to maintain the network as it was today (i.e. making no improvements) and this was £16.8m per annum.
- Whilst resurfacing was the best way to improve the network long term, there would always be a need to monitor and maintain areas of the network not due for resurfacing. This was generally done through a programme of regular (which varied depending on the road classification) scheduled safety inspections and reactive reports of defects.
- Any defect would, upon inspection, be allocated a repair timeframe set out in the safety criteria.
- The graph at 4.8 showed how the prolonged winter and extreme weather events from 2020/21 had massively increased the fragility of the network.
- Whilst in an ideal world, there would be enough resource to repair all defects on a road at the same time, this was not always possible. The first priority had to be keeping the public safe and addressing the most hazardous defects first.
- Additional resource had been brought in to help the gangs manage the increased number of defects in the previous 6 months, including a spray injection patching machine and additional patching crews who could address larger areas or clusters, rather than just individual potholes.
- Section 7 of the report outlined the future aspirations for highways. Climate change was certainly identified as a risk to the network resilience and a threat to how operations were currently carried out.
- The scale of the task at hand was large. Prioritisation was key to make sure the public were safe and there was a keenness to work closely with members to help deliver the best service possible.
- Key areas of focus going forward included: improving carbon emissions and sustainability of the network, streamlining systems and the digital offering and making sure information for customers and councillors was easy to find and understand.

4.1 Members welcomed the detailed report, and suggested it would be very useful for residents to have access to it. Noting this was a public meeting and this report was published on the website, it was added that all the highways depots had recently offered drop in sessions, and an action from this was to put together an information pack/highways guide to share around the county as a first point of reference.

ACTION: The Committee were very keen on the above and requested this pack be progressed – Kath Haworth

4.2 A member questioned the abandonment of using road ditches to help manage water off the network. It was explained that 99% of the time, maintenance of a ditch would be the responsibility of the adjacent landowner. Larger landowners were generally good at taking responsibility and maintaining their ditches but the team continued to engage as much as possible to encourage this.

- 4.3 Looking at future resilience and sustainability of the network, it was advised that the department were engaged with new technologies and closely followed the work by ADEPT (Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning & Transport) who were running a series of live labs to trial these. The problem for the industry as a whole was that local authorities were often quite risk adverse due to limited funding, and were very cautious to take a chance and spend large amounts of public money on a new technology that may fail quickly, hence the use of live labs.
- 4.4 Members requested to be kept up to date on the use/trial of advance technologies and materials in highways. This was agreed to be added to the work plan.

ACTION: Democratic Services

- 4.5 A member shared detail of a significant work coordination issue experienced during a road closure in their area which caused immense havoc for residents and local businesses.
- 4.6 Whilst an action was taken to look into this specific road closure, the following was shared on general work coordination and advanced planning. In advance of any road closure, notices would be sent out to residents directly affected, local parish/town councils and local councillors etc. Where there were businesses affected, these should also be identified but perhaps closer working with members could help better identify those affected in advance. Diversion routes always had their difficulties; it was a continuing frustration that not all road users followed the suggested diversion, with SATNAVs often being blamed.

ACTION: Kath Haworth

- 4.7 This was mentioned a second time in relation to utility companies closing roads for repairs. Examples were given of councillors and residents having to take remove closure signs that were left behind, plus the need for improved signage on the approach to a closure.
- 4.8 Officers shared the same frustration and tried as much as possible to pre-plan with utility companies to avoid such issues, unfortunately not all were as responsible/responsive as would be hoped. The street works team did have certain powers when it comes to enforcing standards on external companies, including the new permitting scheme which allowed fix penalty notices if companies failed to meet the requirements of their license. Last month these notices amounted to £32,000.

ACTION: Explore the possibility of working with Govt. on increasing fix penalty notices changed to companies breaching their highways work license – Liz Kirkham

- 4.9 For cyclists using the highway network, it was raised that multiple individual pothole repairs made the surface extremely difficult to cycle on, and often resulted in cyclist needing to move out into the road. The member welcomed reference made to increasing the use of patching gangs to repair a wider area of road surface at one time, but stressed they did not see this discretion being used on the ground. It remained the norm that gangs would fix the defect they were there to do, and leave any others surrounding it. Another member added this was particularly frustrating in rural communities as residents were aware of the distances gangs would have travelled to only have to return again shortly.
- 4.10 Another member added this was particularly frustrating in rural communities as residents were aware of the distance gangs would have travelled to only need to return again shortly. This gave a public a perception that highways was not delivering value for money and suggested the need for a more holistic approach to all highway repairs (including hedge cutting, minor sign repairs etc.)
- 4.11 It was reiterated that the reactive maintenance was a safety, risk-based programme with its overall objective being to keep the network as safe as possible, as soon as possible. Whilst noting pothole repairs often made the road surface uneven for cyclist, the overall safety objective remained the gangs' priority. Longer term however, the data on repairs was fed into the planned structural maintenance programme as multiple defects on a road was a sign that the structure was failing overall and a more comprehensive solution would be needed.
- 4.12 Officers completely understood the frustration of members and the public seeing gangs fix one defect and leaving others surrounding. In the past six months, it was appreciated discretion on the ground had not been possible due to the number of defects the gangs were dealing with. The safety criteria had to remain the priority and focus on the most serious defects first. This was not the desired way to operate but this was the reality during times of pressure.
- 4.13 Whilst noting that patching repairs were a really effective alternative response to fixing pot holes and a good way to hold the condition of a road, the department had to be careful to balance the resource of doing this type of repair, to ensure other areas of work did not suffer as a result.
- 4.14 The team were also exploring the opportunity to start using inspection crews to carry out minor repairs works when they were travelling around the county. This could be removing a branch from across a footpath for example.
- 4.15 A member added that there was also an issue of public perception when crews were repairing defects in poor weather conditions, as this sometimes led to the repair needing to be done again. It was advised that good quality repairs were possible in bad weather (moderate rather than extreme) but what also came into play here was the fragility of the surrounding network. If

the road service was in poor condition around the defect, it was less likely to take the repair with the added issue of wet weather.

- 4.16 The Committee were reminded of the [Highways Local Funding](#) available each member this financial year.
- 4.17 A member highlighted that limiting annual spending within highways may also contribute to higher annual carbon emissions with crews travelling extensively on the network to carry out repairs. It was questioned whether there was a business case for taking a risk and spending more upfront in order to get as many roads as possible structurally sound, and therefore making savings in the long term by reducing the need for reactive maintenance (and thus reducing carbon emissions from the annual works programme).
- 4.18 Officers advised that the standstill cost for highways reactive maintenance (making no improvements but maintaining the network as was) was £16.8m per annum, the backlog of maintenance was estimated at £79m. Whilst agreeing that more proactive maintenance would lead to less reactive costs over time, there would always be a need for some reactive maintenance. Long term investment in structural condition of the network and general good routine maintenance activities will prolong the life and minimise the reactive maintenance needed but it is recognised that funding, particularly revenue, is constrained for all services.
- 4.19 It was raised that whilst members reported and encouraged reporting of defects in their divisions, it was really difficult to understand the baseline condition of roads (particularly in more rural communities where much of the highway was C roads or unclassified). Members felt it would be really useful when speaking with residents/town/parish councils to have a document which summarised the condition of the roads in their division, showing where the problems were and how/when these would be actioned.
- 4.20 An action was taken to explore the cost of increasing the regularity of road condition surveys.

ACTION: Kath Haworth

- 4.21 Finally, there was a discussion around the end to end process of maintenance. At the moment, there was a lot of friction caused due to the lack of automated/accessible processes for reporting and follow up correspondence.
- 4.22 Being unable to access reported defects in real time often left Members and residents out of the loop on progress and led to frustrations. It was viewed that many would feel more appeased and patient if they knew where a defect was in the system, even if it had experienced delays. Members were reminded that defects should be reported online so that progress could be tracked.

- 4.23 Officers shared the frustration of the inefficiency of email being for a way of reporting issues and agreed that improvements from a customer point of view in terms of tracking their report were needed. Providing a single portal/digital point of contact for reporting issues and requesting action and in the process limiting email would lead to more overall understanding of the volume of contact, progress on issues and reporting ability. There did need to be consideration that there is a finite resource, and number of gangs/funding, and that safety work is prioritised over other general maintenance work, especially during winter seasons and emergencies when the knock-on effect to programmed works is felt.

ACTION: To consider what opportunities there might be for moving towards a more digital and automated system – Kath Haworth

5. MOTION 876 - CALL TO ADOPT 20MPH MAXIMUM SPEEDS IN AREAS WHERE VULNERABLE ROAD USERS AND VEHICLES MIX

- 5.1 The Chair began by inviting Cllrs Roger Whyborn and Gill Moseley to introduce this item as the original proposers and seconders of the motion. Members noted the following points:

- This motion received no objection in principle or spirit at the Full Council meeting where it was originally considered, as long as any changes were where the community considered them to be appropriate.
- A common sense and consulted approach was very important, we must not impose the limits, each community should be able to make their own case as to what was most appropriate for their area.
- The importance of 20mph speed limits revolved a lot around safety and claiming streets back from constant, fast traffic. If residents felt safe, they were more likely to walk or cycle which brought its own health and environmental benefits.
- Members were aware that the need for Traffic Regulation Orders (TRO) to change speed limits was often preventing parish/town councils from progressing even where there was an appetite due to the cost of obtaining one.
- A solution to this could be to consider 'batching' which was referenced at 6.8 of the attached report where one TRO was used for several areas.
- The police were a key consultee on this issue for any changes to be implemented/successful.
- There would also need to be some financial commitment in next years budget for changes to be possible.
- Learning from other areas in the UK who had taken similar action was welcomed in the report.
- Both members were keen that a response from this Committee was eventually shared with Council and Cabinet and wanted to understand the process for this happening.

- Whilst the recommendations in the report were supported by both members, there was an ask to add a point about engaging with communities to discover the appetite for a change to widespread 20mph speed limits.

5.2 Liz Kirkham, Network Manager, was next invited to present the report. This was taken as read and the following points highlighted for the Committee:

- The level of applications for 20mph limits had increased over recent years, particularly noticed through Covid, where communities potentially had more time to take pride in their areas and consider such changes.
- In order for any speed change to be a success, support was needed from across the board, including the police who were a statutory consultee.
- Change to a 20mph speed **limit** required speeds in an area to be below 24mph whereas a change to a 20mph speed **zone** did not carry this requirement, but meant that traffic calming measure had to be added.
- The Road Safety Partnership produced a 'Community Approaches to Road Safety' document which provided a range of ways communities could become involved in reducing traffic speeds.
- The Welsh Government had introduced a default 20mph speed limit nationwide, whilst the DfT had indicated this power would remain with local highways departments.
- There were a number of existing 20mph schemes in the county, listed at 3.4. Members were informed that as an example of cost – the Hatherley scheme cost around £200,000, funded through S106 monies, whilst a smaller scheme in Nailsworth cost around £25,000. There were also examples of developer led schemes where all costs and the engineering involved would be covered within the construction.
- Section 4 of the report explored potential visions that the motion could achieve for the future of local roads. The example vision statements covered different areas of concern such as making people feel safe on the highway and improving their quality of life, tackling climate change and reducing the need for car use.
- Section 5 provided an overview of stakeholders involved. The list demonstrated there was often a lot of different competing requirements. For example, in order to reduce capacity strain on the police in enforcing speed limits, there needed to be traffic calming measures, but these were not welcomed by buses and emergency vehicles.
- It was also very important to bring drivers on the journey and have a strong communications plan so all parties understood what the changes were, and why they were being made, to enable buy in from all sides.
- The type of Traffic Regulation Order used for speed changes would have to be permanent.
- 6.8 outlined how the council was proposing to spend the additional £100,000 allocated in this year's budget.
- The consultative nature of this process meant it could be a long and costly, a lot slower than people many think.

- Finally, members were referred to the recommendations listed at the end of the report.
- 5.3 Noting the recommendations, a member explained that there was a link between a decrease in speed with a reduction in exhaust emissions, and that the main benefit of these changes needed to be the incentivisation of active travel. Although they understood the need to learn and watch other areas take this step, it was felt Gloucestershire should also have the courage to do the right thing and implement this motion. They particularly noted a line in the report that every 1mph reduction in speed, led to a 6% decrease in collisions and fatalities.
- 5.4 A member shared that 20mph zones had been used in their division for some time now and it generally worked well, most drove sensible through the area and those that didn't stood out. There was a general issue of enforcement as it required the police to be in the right place at the right time. The local community were encouraged to report speeding to the police.
- 5.5 Concern was raised at the high costs reflected in the report. The scheme in Hatherley for example seemed small in comparison to its cost. Officers advised that if you want to introduce a 20mph limit into an area that did not already have low speeds, there was a requirement to install physical traffic calming measures (which is where the cost began to mount up). A simple scheme with minor signage would cost around £12-25,000.
- 5.6 Several members welcomed the approach taken in Oxfordshire where they had implemented wide spread 20mph with minimal or no traffic calming measures and wondered how much appetite there would be for that approach.
- 5.7 It was suggested that it would be more beneficial for the county as a whole to be able to offer a package of broader options that resulted in the same outcome, improving road safety.
- 5.8 A member queried the process of objections against a TRO. It was advised that anyone can object to a TRO during the consultation process, if there were sufficient objections, the Council would not proceed or it would be taken to the TRO Committee for a resolution.

Additional recommendations

- 5.9 Whilst the Committee accepted and supported the recommendations outlined in the report, there was discussion on adding several additional proposals for officers to explore:
- a) The need for an allocation in next year's budget, plus to explore possible ways of drawing in external funding.

Minutes subject to their acceptance as a correct record at the next meeting

- b) An emphasis on working with the police to enable better support of these schemes and the need to enforce them (to include self-enforcing technologies)
- c) Consultation with local areas to understand their appetite for adopting 20mph speed limits.
- d) Exploring and learning from other local authority areas who had already made similar changes.
- e) The provision of a wider offer to communities on alternative and broader options that resulted in the same outcome, improving road safety.
- f) The consideration of batching TROs to improve efficiencies.

5.10 Whilst the Committee agreed on most of the above, point (e) was disagreed on. It was felt by some members that adding this would reduce the emphasis on moving towards 20mph zones/limits which was the reason behind the original motion. It was noted however that as the motion was referred to scrutiny to explore, it was within its power to move and explore outside the specifics of the motion.

5.11 An action was taken to produce a summary document of the additional proposed areas of exploration to be shared with the Lead Cabinet Member. The disagreement on point (e) would be reflected within this.

ACTION: Democratic Services

6. WORK PLAN

Members considered the attached work plan and the following was agreed:

- The item on mineral extraction and its environmental impacts would be delayed from the November 2022 meeting. This would be discussed offline between the Chair and relevant officers.
- Alternative/environmental-friendly technologies and innovative ideas within highways would be considered early in the New Year.
- The E-Scooter trial had just been extended to March 2022, members wanted to understand what the process was for reviewing this trial and whether scrutiny could feed into this via an update at its meeting in November, or whether it would be best to wait to consider this after the trial had finished.
- The Chair shared they received questions at Council regarding delays on the Definitive Map Modification Orders process. It was agreed that a situation report would be included in the next Executive Directors report, the Committee could then decide if they wanted to consider a further item on this.

7. DIRECTOR'S REPORT: ECONOMY, ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE

7.1 A member asked for an update on the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) situation that was discussed at the last Committee meeting.

Minutes subject to their acceptance as a correct record at the next meeting

- 7.2 It was advised officers continued to engage with the relevant district authorities who had adopted the CIL funding. To date GCC had still not received a penny of CIL funding from any of the Joint Core Strategy authorities. Members were encouraged to influence within their own district councils where possible for officers to engage with the county council on this issue. GCC had recently lost an appeal at Coombe Hill and was currently in session on another at Oakley Farm. This appeal was considering contributions of up to £2.46m.

CHAIR

Meeting concluded at 13:37.