

TITLE	Highways and Transport Update Report
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 4 September 2017
WARD	None specific
DIRECTOR	Josie Wragg, Interim Director of Environment
LEAD MEMBER	Chris Bowring, Executive Member for Highways and Transport

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

Improved delivery and control of highways and transportation services and schemes across the Borough.

RECOMMENDATION

Members are requested to:

- 1) note the improvements made to date;
- 2) consider and comment on the further improvements and initiatives proposed and detailed within the report.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

The report provides an update on highways and transportation activities and initiatives within the Wokingham Borough Council, WSP and Balfour Beatty Living Places (BBLP) Highways Alliance, with a focus towards highway maintenance works and as requested the report also includes an update on:

- Highways asset management;
- Assurances and checks in place to ensure that roadworks are delivered to the right specification and to the right standard in terms of quality;
- Highways England Smart Motorways projects acoustic barriers;
- M4/J10 junction improvement works to improve traffic flows and reduce congestion.

Background

The Highways and Transportation Service are committed to keeping the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee updated of improvements and developments within the service along with any specific requests made by the Committee.

General Update

There have been several changes in personnel within WSP and BBLP over recent months, which has provided some challenges to business continuity and maintaining relationships within the highways alliance. However the current teams and personnel are working well together. Via a signed Memorandum of Understanding in September 2016 “partnership working” has very much improved within the Highways Alliance over the last year. This has brought an increased focus towards improving the quality of our reactive works (patching and potholes), improving how we deliver the many highways projects on the network, and a focus towards improving stakeholder and customer communication, engagement and service. Current arrangements and contracts with WSP (Professional Services) and BBLP (Highways Term Maintenance and Projects) are scheduled to end in March 2019.

A review of the current Highways & Transportation Services is underway as part of the Council’s 21st Century Council (21CC) programme Phase 2. It is programmed that the 21CC review and design is complete by Autumn 2017; then drafting the new highways and transport contracts can commence for operation from April 2019. It is early days but the performance measures of the new contracts, which will benefit along with 21CC from new IT, will have a focus towards reducing congestion, promoting public transport/walking and cycling, environmental improvements like improving air quality, improved control of works and projects, introducing innovation and a strong focus towards self-serve and enhanced customer service.

Improvements and streamlining of processes, response times and improved customer services remain a Council priority and the customer experience is centric to the 21st Century Council initiative. As an interim measure the Highways and Transport team introduced the HighwaysforMembers@Wokingham.gov.uk Inbox which has provided excellent service to Members with an increased usage and satisfaction from Members since its inception in Summer 2016. Members are encouraged to use this inbox for the best the service available.

The Council’s current Highway Maintenance Plan dated 2013, including highway inspections and intervention for defects, is available on the Council’s website at this weblink: <http://www.wokingham.gov.uk/search/?q=highway%20maintenace%20policy> Central Government released the new Codes of Practice in November 2016. The new codes require (mandatory) a step change towards a risk based approach where local Councils must decide their own maintenance standards, which must be risk based for all asset classes. Government allowed 2 years for local Councils to adopt their own guidelines by a deadline of November 2018. However Wokingham is planning to undertake the process early to ensure the new risk based approach can be written into the new contracts re-procurement cycle which commences in early 2018.

Update of Specific Issues

Highways Asset Management

There has been significant improvement in Highways Asset Management since the Executive approved the Council's Highways Asset Management Policy and Strategy in 2016, now available to view or download at this weblink:

<http://www.wokingham.gov.uk/search/?q=highways%20asset%20management>

Over 2016 and 2017 there were a number of workshops held with stakeholders including Members and Town and Parish Council plus our Highways and Transport annual residents' surveys were undertaken. The purpose of these workshops and surveys was to find out which parts of the highway network, and which highway and transport services were most important to our customers. We also utilised the opportunity to undertake some transport visioning work, to understand what is likely to become more or less important as we move into the future, looking as far ahead as 2036 which is the same period of the emerging Local Plan and Local Transport Plan, which are both being reviewed. The engagement and sessions were very positive from an Officer perspective, and this enables the service to evolve to meet the needs of stakeholders both now and into the future, including opportunities with the new highways and transport contracts which will come into effect from April 2019.

A summary of some of the information collated is provided below:

Challenges to 2036

Community Isolation
Affordable Housing
Congestion/Air quality
Move to a driverless world
Climate Change & Flood Risk

Opportunities to 2036

Local Plan and Strategic Control
CIL & Infrastructure Delivery
Improvement in IT & data
Public transport/walking/cycling
Health & Wellbeing

Opportunities surrounding new Highways & Transport Contracts from April 2019

Smarter Working (21CC IT for staff & customers)
One Team (partnership working/reduce man marking/duplication)
Network Coordination (manage works & congestion)
Network Resilience (operation & asset performance)
Providing Flexibility (network & technological)
Customer Focus (self-serve, comms & expectation)
Outcome based performance measures:
Congestion / Journey Times / Air Quality / Carbon Red
Innovation / IT / Customer Experience & Satisfaction

As well as ensuring the Highways and Transport service is tailored to our Members, Town and Parish Councils, businesses and residents preferences, effective highways asset management promotes a technical, long term approach to delivering highway maintenance works and delivering Highways and Transport projects. Looking at the Borough and budgets holistically, with expert support from our professional services experts (WSP) and term highway contractors (Balfour Beatty Living Places) we ensure that we take a long term approach to maintaining and developing the highway network, ensuring we use the best techniques and materials to ensure value for money for the residents of Wokingham.

The adopted Highways Asset Management Policy and Strategy and subsequent operational plans have now assigned various “asset owners” to ensure effective management of all the different parts of the highway asset £4B (£1.3B gross replacement cost plus £2.7B land value) 736km highway network including roads, footways, bridges, structures, drainage, street lighting, traffic signals and street furniture.

Effective asset management promotes more planned works, and lower levels of reactive works like patching and pothole filling. This is considered a more efficient use of funding, although it is recognised that keeping the network free from defects and safe for highway users is of paramount importance across the Highways and Transport service. Programmes of planned works are currently produced annually, consulted upon with the relevant Executive Member, then hosted on the Council's website. Schemes for 2017/18 (up to 31 March) can be found at this link:

<http://www.wokingham.gov.uk/search/?q=road%20programme>

Moving forward and aligned with improvements in asset management we are working towards longer programming of planned schemes and projects, and of all highways asset classes (not just roads) and this will be introduced over coming months along with an improved Highways and Transport Communication strategy for all works promoters; providing greater visibility of what is proposed on the network with access via self-serve.

Assurances and checks in place to ensure that roadworks are delivered to the right specification and to the right standard in terms of quality

The Council's highway maintenance and street lighting contractor, Balfour Beatty Living Places, put great emphasis on the quality of their workmanship. No operative, be they directly employed by BBLP or a member of the supply chain, is allowed to undertake a specific task unless they have the required skills and appropriate qualifications. All team members are fully inducted before they commence work on the contract, ensuring that everyone is fully aware of agreed processes and procedures. Each works supervisor is issued with a manual which includes standard details, method statements and risk assessments that are bespoke to Wokingham, ensuring that works are delivered to a safe and consistently high standard. BBLP Works Agents carry out audits of completed works to ensure that the finished product meets the required standard. The Council's own staff inspect all major works before payment is made, and a proportion of the 7,000 annual reactive works tickets (patching and potholing) are checked for compliance. In addition to this, each year two external quality audits are carried out across the contract in Wokingham to ensure that a robust quality system is in place and that quality procedures are adhered to.

Additionally the Council's Highways and Transport contracts have various performance measures, the majority of which sit within the BBLP term maintenance contract. Through improved partnership working it has been agreed between the Council, WSP and BBLP that these performance measures dating back to 2007, when the contracts were originally written, were in need of a full review. This process is underway and it is proposed the contracts will now be measured by both high level outcomes focussed performance measures aligned to corporate requirements and the Council's Transport Vision to 2036, which Members and the Town and Parish Councils helped to shape, as well as more operationally focussed performance measures such as response times.

The review is also assessing how the performance data can be better presented and shared with Members and residents via the Council's website.

Update on Highways England M4 Smart Motorways Scheme acoustic barriers

In March 2017 Highways England (HE) were invited to Wokingham Borough Council to provide a presentation to Lead Members and Officers regarding the M4 J2-J12 Smart Motorway Scheme, including how HE intended to discharge the requirements of the Secretary of State's Development Consent Order (DCO) made on 2nd September 2016. One of these requirements related to acoustic barriers. At the presentation, the then Leader of the Council requested that HE provided some straightforward and simple information and plans regarding the proposals for the acoustic barriers relevant to the Borough which would help allay local Members' and residents' concerns. At the presentation HE confirmed they would arrange this and submit before the end of June 2017. Regrettably HE failed to deliver on this assurance, and after several approaches from Officers submitted their acoustic barrier proposals as part of their formal application to Wokingham Borough Council's Local Planning Authority to discharge this and various other aspects of the DCO. Below are the web links to this submission from HE.

Acoustic Barrier Specification:

https://smpbim.withbc.com/pub/english.cgi/0/1047340?op=download_page&id=1047340

Acoustic Barrier Location Plans:

https://smpbim.withbc.com/pub/english.cgi/0/1035507?op=download_page&id=1035507

The Local Planning Authority are currently assessing the details submitted from HE in respect of Requirement 22 (Acoustic Barriers) in conjunction with Environmental Health Officers, and were working to a deadline of 28th July 2017.

Update on the M4/J10 junction improvement works to improve traffic flows and reduce congestion

Further to the HE's "Congestion Study Report" released by HE in September 2016 it was agreed between the Council and HE that the "S1&S3 short term works" options from the report would be implemented by the end of March 2017. Due to some of the innovative signing and lining solutions proposed by HE being "non-standard" the approval process turned out to require government/DfT authorisation. This delayed the Council and HE approval processes, meaning the works could not be undertaken by March 2017 as originally planned.

In the meantime the major bridge maintenance works continue with an original end date of November 2017 currently communicated. From discussions with HE it appears their site contractors have encountered some unforeseen ground conditions and their programme and end date may now slip. HE are currently re-assessing the programme and will confirm and arrange appropriate comms should this slippage be confirmed. The short term works will be accommodated as part of the major bridge maintenance works/traffic management. However it is unlikely the subsequent traffic monitoring required to determine if the short term works have eased congestion adequately will provide accurate data until 3 months after the junction is clear of all road works and restrictions, which on the current timescale will be early 2018.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of the austerity measures implemented by the Government and subsequent reductions to public sector funding. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions in excess of £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	0	0	0
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	0	0	0
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	0	0	0

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

The costs for this service are provided and delivered within existing contract and budget provision for the WSP and BBLP contracts

Cross-Council Implications

No specific cross cutting themes

List of Background Papers

None

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