

GROWTH AND PROSPERITY OSP

Highway Maintenance Update



PLYMOUTH
CITY COUNCIL

I Introduction

Following on from the Growth and Prosperity Scrutiny Panel's review of Highway maintenance in November/December 2010, progress reports were submitted to the Panel on 11th July 2011 and 17th October 2011. This report details the actions taken since that report.

2 Scrutiny recommendations

The recommendations and progress to date are as follows:

- 1) *that the Transport and Highways Partnership review service levels in relation to highways maintenance to improve value for money.*

The service levels for highway maintenance are dictated by the *Code of Practice for Highway Maintenance Management*; this recommends the intervention levels for safety defects, response times for repairing defects and the methodology for defining inspection frequencies.

Any variation from the Code of Practice could jeopardise the Authority's defence when dealing with third party accident claims against the council; consequently, the work undertaken to date in reviewing levels of service has been undertaken in a logical, structured way in order that potential risks can be properly considered.

For the initial stage of the review, Plymouth City Council commissioned Amey to provide a report on the reasons for highway claims against the Council. The report was completed in March 2012, and made numerous recommendations to improve the way in which inspections, reporting and repairs could be undertaken to better defend against highway accident claims.

Following on from this initial piece of work, and following legal advice, a review has been undertaken of the Council's existing Safety Inspection Policy to ensure that it is sufficiently robust to defend against claims. The review has considered the current inspection regime and has identified changes that better aligns to the Code of Practice and adopts a new road hierarchy. This has been undertaken in partnership with the Council's Risk and Insurance team, and is due to be submitted to Cabinet for approval in November 2012.

Finally, a further piece of work is due to be commissioned that will consider options and recommendations for changes to defect response times to enable repairs to be dealt with more efficiently. It is proposed that changes will be considered and risk assessed against the new proposed road hierarchy. Consideration will also be given to alternative repair techniques.

- 2) *that highways maintenance be assured of greater emphasis within the transport and highways capital programme alongside new works, but not at the expense of other areas of prioritised work;*

Local Transport Plan (LTP) capital expenditure on carriageway resurfacing and reconstruction was increased from £1.187m in 2010/11 to £1.820m in 2011/12. This budget was used to progress the Operation Upgrade campaign.

An additional £1.3m was made available in October 2011 for carriageway resurfacing. This funded additional works under the Operation Upgrade banner in the 2011/12 financial year, although £161,000 has been carried forward to 2012/13.

For 2012/13 the Local Transport Plan (LTP) the total capital allocation for carriageway resurfacing and reconstruction is £750,000 in the addition to the £161,000 carried forward from 2011/12. Additionally, £257,000 has been allocated to footway resurfacing. The reduction on last year's capital allocation reflects the need to fund other priorities within the 2012/13 transport capital programme, including the maintenance works for Laira Bridge.

- 3) *that an Invest to Save Bid be submitted by officers to successfully secure additional capital funding;*

Officers have been considering options that would make positive in-roads to the footway maintenance back-log whilst reducing the number of insurance claims against the authority arising from trips and falls. Consequently, the council's insurance premiums, and by extension, the Transport and Highways' insurance contributions may be significantly reduced over time. This would enable footway revenue expenditure to be diverted into carriageway repairs.

In October 2011, it was reported to the panel that a viable business case could not be made for an Invest to Save Bid in the City Centre and the St Peters and the Waterfront areas and that officers were considering a lower cost option involving the introduction of an additional, dedicated works gang into these areas to improve reactivity to safety defects and to make smaller scale permanent repairs to defects before they present a risk to safety. These areas have been singled out as accident claims in these areas contribute to greater proportion of footway claims in the city.

Further analysis of accident data and historical defect reports in these areas is required before an Invest to Save bid can be considered. This is currently underway and is likely to be completed in 2012.

- 4) *that despite the current difficult economic climate and the budget position of the authority, the council should consider giving a higher priority to highway maintenance needs over and above other priorities included in the Council's Capital Programme;*

Currently the Council's Capital Programme is fully committed but the Transport and Infrastructure will continue to work with the Capital Delivery Board to seek additional funding in particular from external sources, e.g. commuted sums from developers and Section 106 funding.

- 5) *that the Council's Insurance Reserve be reviewed to identify whether an element could be diverted to planned preventative term maintenance instead;*

Following discussions with the authority's Risk and Insurance team there may be scope to divert an element of the council's insurance reserve, although this would be subject to satisfactorily reducing the risk of claims arising. This is linked to the work described in recommendation 1 and 2, above, which would ensure that suitable levels of service and procedures are in place to reduce claims.