

Report to: Lead Member for Transport and Environment

Date of meeting: 8 September 2025

By: Director of Communities, Economy and Transport

Title: Review of Strategic Highway Policies and Asset Management Plans

Purpose: To present the outcomes of three related strands of work undertaken as part of the Council's scheduled review of strategic highway documentation. The report outlines how this review will maintain compliance with legislative requirements and is integral to securing maximum Department for Transport (DfT) Incentive Fund allocation.

RECOMMENDATIONS: The Lead Member is recommended to:

- (1) Note the outcomes of the strategic review process**
- (2) Approve the revised versions of the:**
 - a) Highways Asset Management Policy as set out at Appendix 3;**
 - b) Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Strategy as set out at Appendix 4;**
 - c) Highway Network Resilience Plan as set out at Appendix 8;**
 - d) Highways Drainage Asset Management Policy as set out in Appendix 5; and**
 - e) Drainage Asset Management Plan (DAMP) as set out at Appendix 6;****and**
- (3) Approve the implementation of new policies:**
 - a) Commuted Sums Policy and Guidance Note as set out at Appendices 9 and 10;**
 - and**
 - b) Winter Service Policy as set out at Appendix 11**

with immediate effect, subject to final formatting and publication.

1. Background Information

1.1. As part of the Department for Transport's (DfT) Incentive Funding requirements, East Sussex County Council (the Council) is committed to publishing a clear and effective asset management approach. The Council's current suite of strategic highway documents has served well, and this scheduled review provides an opportunity to enhance scope, consistency, and relevance.

1.2. We wish to ensure that The Council's asset management approach follows a clear "Policy to Pavement" pathway. I.e. Policies set statutory duties, local priorities, and outcomes; these are translated into Strategies and then into detailed asset management plans that guide delivery in practice. This ensures a direct line of sight from high-level decisions to the condition of the network, providing transparency on service levels, trade-offs, and the Council's focus on keeping critical routes and vulnerable users as the top priority.

1.3. This review has been undertaken now as part of the Council's planned cycle of strategic document updates, ensuring our asset management approach remains aligned with the latest DfT

requirements, current legislation, and emerging best practice. It also reflects recent sector developments, including advances in asset data systems, predictive modelling, and learning from benchmarking with other high-performing authorities.

1.4. The review of the Asset Management Policy and Strategy is intended to set the overall direction and tone for the Council's suite of highways asset management documents. This approach and style will be applied consistently across all asset groups to ensure a coherent, integrated framework, with the Drainage Asset Management Plan providing an example of what the individual asset management plans will look like.

1.5. The updates and new policies will be implemented within existing budgets and staffing resources. No additional funding is required and maintaining Band 3 status under the DfT Incentive Fund will continue to secure the maximum level of highways funding available to the Council.

1.6. In practical terms, these changes mean better prioritisation of maintenance works, stronger planning for severe weather, improved drainage management to reduce flooding, and clearer communication with residents and Councillors about how decisions are made.

2. Supporting Information

Element 1: Revisions to the Asset Management Policy and Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Strategy

2.1. **Summary of Formatting Enhancements** – These formatting refinements collectively aim to make the documents more user-friendly for Council Members, operational teams, and the public, promoting improved understanding, consistent implementation, and transparent governance. To enhance the usability and professionalism of the strategic highway documents, the following formatting changes have been implemented:

- **Consistent Document Structure:** All documents now follow a standard format with clearly defined sections, headings, and subheadings. This consistent structure improves navigation and enables users to locate information quickly and intuitively.
- **Unified Terminology and Style:** Terminology and acronyms have been standardised across all documents to avoid confusion and maintain a professional tone.
- **Improved Referencing and Cross-Referencing:** Citations of legislation, standards (including ISO 55000), and internal documents have been updated and formatted uniformly. Cross-references within and between documents have been added or improved to reinforce coherence and ease of use.
- **Accessibility Considerations:** Where appropriate, document formats now adhere to accessibility best practice, including appropriate font sizes, contrast and clear language, to ensure materials are usable by a diverse range of stakeholders, including those with disabilities.

2.2. **Key Changes to Documents** – Following this comprehensive review, the key amendments made to each strategic document are summarised in Appendix 1, highlighting the specific changes and the underlying reasons that informed these updates.

2.3. **Benchmarking Overview** – As part of the Council's commitment to continuous improvement and to ensure ongoing alignment with national best practice, officers have undertaken a benchmarking exercise comparing the Council's asset management documentation with that of

2 neighbouring authorities: Kent County Council and West Sussex County Council. Both are recognised for their similarly mature asset management approaches and have demonstrated strong alignment with the Well-Managed Highway Infrastructure (WMHI) Code and wider industry standards. This exercise focused on reviewing the structure, content, and strategic clarity of East Sussex County Council's documents, particularly the extent to which they reflect a risk-based approach to managing highway infrastructure. The detailed findings of the benchmarking review are provided in Appendix 2.

2.4. ***Maturity Model Evolution*** – A maturity model in asset management is a structured framework used to evaluate how systematically and effectively an organisation manages its assets. It highlights current capabilities, identifies areas for refinement, and supports continuous progression from basic compliance to fully integrated, strategic asset management aligned with long-term objectives.

2.5. ***Current Maturity Position*** – Recent developments in the Council's asset management approach suggest that East Sussex County Council has progressed from a Level 1–2 maturity, characterised by basic inventory management and reactive maintenance, towards Level 3–4 maturity, where predictive modelling, integrated data systems, and defined service standards are now in place. This shift brings the Council more closely in line with best practice guidance and regulatory expectations, including:

- Well-Managed Highway Infrastructure
- ISO 55000 asset management principles
- Environment Act 2021 requirements

2.6. A proposed updated Highway Asset Management Policy can be found at Appendix 3 and a proposed updated Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Strategy 20225-20230 can be found at Appendix 4.

Element 2: Revised Highways Drainage Asset Management Policy, Drainage Asset Management Plan and Updated Highway Network Resilience Plan

2.7. The Drainage Policy (2018) as set out in Appendix 5, has been reviewed and revised to become a true strategic policy. The new policy sets out high-level commitments, while the operational detail has been transferred into the Drainage Asset Management Plan 2025–2030 (Appendix 6 and summarised in Appendix 7). This clearer separation strengthens the overall framework and aligns with the Council's in-house style. Key differences between the old and new policy are:

- The old policy combined policy and operational detail; the new policy sets high-level direction, with detail placed in the Drainage Asset Management Plan.
- The old policy tied drainage explicitly to Council priorities and funding efficiency, the new policy frames drainage in terms of risk, resilience, climate adaptation and compliance.
- The old policy was short but operational; the new policy is slightly longer, more strategic, and consistent with the refreshed corporate style.

2.8. The Drainage Asset Management Plan and Highway Network Resilience Plan have been updated to provide clearer, more integrated frameworks for protecting the highway network against

flooding, severe weather, and other disruptions. The proposed updated documents incorporate the following changes:

- Incorporates the same formatting enhancements and consistency measures outlined in paragraph 2.1, ensuring clarity, accessibility and ease of navigation.
- Clarifies asset responsibilities, improves risk-based prioritisation, and ensures drainage investment targets the areas of greatest need.
- The proposed updated Highway Network Resilience Plan found at Appendix 8, strengthens planning for severe weather and disruption, incorporating the latest resilience principles and links to the Council's resilient network.
- Both documents are included in the summary of key changes at Appendix 1 and fully align with WMHI Code, ISO 55000, and Environment Act 2021 requirements, ensuring national compliance and best practice integration.

Element 3: Introduction of Two New Targeted Policies

2.9. **Commuted Sums Policy – Current Process and Formalisation** – The Council currently agrees commuted sums with developers on a case-by-case basis to cover the future maintenance costs of newly adopted assets. These sums are secured through legal agreements and held for use when maintenance is required. This approach has allowed the Council to draw down funds to meet long-term maintenance obligations; however, it relies on individual negotiations and varying practices. While effective for high-value items, such as structural works on bridges, the process is time-consuming and impractical for lower-value assets, for example, replacing a single lighting column. In these cases, the Council has often absorbed the maintenance cost without additional funding being released from the commuted sum. The proposed Commuted Sums Policy (Appendix 9) proposed Public / Developers Guidance Note (Appendix 10) will standardise the calculation, and collection process, ensuring transparent, consistent, and equitable arrangements in line with national best practice.

2.10. **Winter Service Policy – Update and Refinement** – The Council's existing Winter Service Policy has provided the framework for the current highways contract and supported effective winter service delivery; a scheduled review identified the need for refinement. The proposed updated policy can be found at Appendix 11 and sets out clear, transparent criteria for the inclusion of roads within the primary salting network and will make explicit reference to the Council's resilient network, ensuring winter service priorities are closely aligned with network resilience objectives.

2.11. The Winter Service Policy forms the strategic tier of a 3-tier framework, developed in line with recognised best practice, which also includes a public-facing plan and an operational handbook. Together, these tiers provide a clear and transparent structure for delivering winter service, ensuring consistency in approach, operational efficiency, and public understanding:

- Winter Service Policy – sets the strategic direction and principles for winter service delivery.
- Public-facing plan – communicates the service approach, priorities and expectations to residents and stakeholders (prepared by the Contractor in partnership with the Contract Management Group's Asset Management Team).
- Operational handbook – provides detailed procedures and guidance for delivery teams - prepared by the Contractor and updated annually.

3. Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

3.1. This scheduled review forms part of the Council's planned cycle of strategic document updates. It builds on the established and effective framework provided by the existing strategic highway policies and asset management plans, ensuring they remain fit for purpose and aligned with current legislation, national guidance and recognised best practice. The review is a proactive measure to maintain clarity, consistency, and transparency in the Council's approach.

3.2. Approval of the revised documents and new targeted policies will:

- Maintain the Council's DfT Incentive Fund Band 3 status, securing the highest level of funding available.
- Provide clear, documented frameworks for decision-making, complementing the robust approaches already in place.
- Strengthen planning for severe weather, enhance drainage management, and ensure investment priorities are based on risk and whole-life value.
- Formalise a consistent, transparent approach to developer contributions through the Commuted Sums Policy; and
- Establish a clear basis for responding to future winter service network requests without altering existing agreed routes, ensuring continuity while improving clarity.

3.3. These updates will not reduce service levels or change existing commitments, and no additional funding is required. They have been developed entirely within existing budgets and staffing resources and are designed to strengthen the Council's asset management approach, improve operational practicality, and provide greater transparency for Members, staff and the public.

3.4. The revisions and new policies reflect developments in legislation, national guidance, and asset management practice, and have been informed by benchmarking with other high-performing authorities and the Council's own advancements in asset management maturity.

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LOCAL MEMBERS: All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

- Highway Asset Management Policy 2022: <https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/roads-transport/roads/highway-policies/highway-asset-management-policy>
- Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Strategy 2022-2028: <https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/media/x0jnvafd/asset-management-strategy-2022.pdf>
- Highway Network Resilience Plan 2022: https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/media/1utlsbyh/highways_network_resilience_plan_2022_master.pdf

- Drainage Policy 2018: <https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/roads-transport/roads/highway-policies/drainage-policy>

APPENDICES:

Appendix 1 – Summary of Key Changes to Strategic Highway Documents
Appendix 2 – Benchmarking Review Findings
Appendix 3 – Highway Asset Management Policy
Appendix 4 – Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Strategy 2025-2030
Appendix 5 – Highway Infrastructure Drainage Policy 2025
Appendix 6 - Highway Drainage Asset Management Plan 2025-2030
Appendix 7 – Drainage Asset Management Plan Summary
Appendix 8 – Highway Network Resilience Plan 2025-2030
Appendix 9 – Draft Commuted Sums Policy
Appendix 10– Draft Commuted Sum at New Development Guidance Note
Appendix 11 – Draft Winter Service Policy