eastsussex.gov.uk

East Sussex County Council

Scrutiny Review of Road Repairs

Report of the Review Board:

Councillors: Chris Dowling
Claire Dowling
Simon Elford
Nigel Enever
Pat Rodohan
Stephen Shing
Richard Stogdon (Chair)
Barry Taylor

March 2019

Place Scrutiny Committee – 19 March 2019
Cabinet – 23 April 2019
Full Council – 14 May 2019

The report of the Scrutiny Review of Road Repairs

Contents

Recommendations **3**
Summary **4**
Background **5**
Review Board Findings **5**
Communications **5**
Road Repairs **6**
Reactive Pothole Repairs 6
Planned Road Repairs 7
Repair of Pavements **9**
Quality of Repairs **10**
Highway Drainage and Gulley Emptying **12**
Conclusions **13**
Appendix 1:– Summary of additional evidence examined by the Review Board **14**
Road Repairs 14
Repair of Potholes – Reactive Repairs 14
Repair of Potholes – Planned Repairs 15
Pavements 15
Appendix 2: **16**
Scope and terms of reference of the review 16
Board Membership and project support 16
Review Board meeting dates 16
Witnesses providing evidence 17
Evidence papers 17

Recommendations

Recommendations		Page
1	**The Council examines how it could better communicate with residents on highways maintenance policies and practices, and the Committee would welcome the opportunity to work with Officers to achieve this (e.g. how the Council achieves value for money).**	6
2	**Officers conduct a pilot into the feasibility of introducing a new approach to repair all neighbouring potholes at the same time, within a given distance of a category 2 or 3 intervention standard pothole using the funding allocated from the Department for Transport (DfT) pothole fund for the pilot.**	6
3	**Scrutiny should be consulted on the use of any future one-off highways funding from Government, before work has been programmed via a Review Board of the Committee.**	6
4	**That the existing level of capital investment in roads through planned maintenance and the Asset Management approach is maintained and if possible increased, as this is the most cost effective way of repairing potholes.**	8
5	**The Council explores the possibility of identifying additional funding to improve the condition of pavements, via existing sources of funding and partnership working.**	10
6	**The condition of the remaining 50% of pavements is surveyed, and a measure of the condition of pavements is developed within the next 2 years, so that their condition can be monitored and the impact of any additional investment can be assessed.**	10
7	**The Council considers using its powers to ban parking on pavements and verges in problem areas, as part of regular parking reviews.**	10
8	**Safety defect intervention criteria are defined for the different types of pavement surfacing, and insurance claims for pavements are separately recorded.**	10
9	**Increase the amount of sampling and inspections to 20% to monitor and assure the quality of road repairs or reinstatements, and the work carried out prior to resurfacing, particularly those carried out by utility companies.**	11
10	**Officers develop a work programme to complete the Council's knowledge of the highway drainage network, including determining the cost and timeframe for this work, focussing initially on utilising the remaining additional capital investment to gain knowledge of parts of the network that require repair and replacement as a priority. The work programme is to be reported to the Scrutiny Committee in September 2019.**	13
11	**Joint work is undertaken with District and Borough Councils to improve street sweeping, particularly in autumn, to prevent highway gullies and other drainage becoming blocked with leaves and other debris.**	13

Summary

1. The condition of the County's roads is something that is of interest to all residents and businesses in East Sussex and is the most frequent topic raised with councillors. Of particular concern has been the Council's approach to repairing potholes and whether this represents value for money.

2. The Place Scrutiny Committee established a Scrutiny Review in June 2018 to examine this issue. The scope of the review also includes the quality of repairs; how the Council tackles highway drainage problems and; the repair of pavements. Members of the Review Board have undertaken a number of site visits to examine road maintenance issues. They have also taken evidence from key officers and representatives from the Highways Contractor involved in delivering highway maintenance.

3. The Review found that the Council's approach to reactive and planned road repairs is effective and does represent value for money. However, the need to prioritise resources and the nature of the County's road network means that unclassified roads are more likely to need resurfacing, and may be subject to repeated pothole repairs before more extensive work is possible.

4. The Review recommends that steps are taken to better explain the Council's approach to road repairs, and to test the feasibility of repairing clusters of potholes, rather than just those that meet the Council's intervention criteria, particularly on unclassified roads.

5. Although improvements have been made to the quality assurance processes used to ensure the quality of roads repairs, the Review is recommending that the amount of work audited is increased to provide further quality assurance, particularly for utility company reinstatement work.

6. Good progress has been made in tackling highways flooding 'hot spots' and a strategic approach is being taken to gaining the information needed to manage the highways drainage network effectively. However, the Board agrees that further targeted work needs to be undertaken to gain a full knowledge of the highways drainage asset.

7. During the course of the review it became evident that the condition of the County's pavements is becoming an increasing concern to residents and councillors. The Review found the current levels of funding are low in comparison with the amount of repair work identified, and there is a risk that the condition of pavements will deteriorate further.

8. The Review makes a number of recommendations to address this issue, although finding additional funding to invest in the repair of pavements is challenging in the Council's current financial position.

9. Overall the Review finds that the Council's arrangements for road repairs are robust and there is a commitment to continuously improve the approach to highways maintenance. The Review makes recommendations, where possible, that focus on how the Council could bring about improvements within existing resources.

Background

10. Many residents question the Council's approach to pothole repairs, asking why some potholes are repaired and others nearby are not. Some residents do not believe this represents value for money and that it would be more economic to repair all the potholes at the same time rather than coming back repeatedly to the same location.

11. The Place Scrutiny Committee (incorporating the former Economy, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Committee) also received a substantial amount of correspondence regarding the quality of road repairs. This led to questions over the quality of resurfacing work, and the possibility that this might undermine the Council's Asset Management approach. The Committee has also received questions about the Council's approach to repairing blocked drains.

12. In response to this Members of Scrutiny Committee have undertaken site visits to examine issues on the ground. The main themes that emerged from this work which have been explored in this review are:

- Whether the current approach to pothole repairs is the right one and represents value for money;
- The quality of the repair and resurfacing work; and
- The time it takes to repair blocked drainage infrastructure once it is reported, either by a member of public or following routine inspection or maintenance.

13. The Review Board subsequently added the repair and maintenance of pavements (footways) to the scope of the review. Residents and councillors have expressed some concerns over the condition of pavements and the potential for trip hazards to result in falls.

Review Board Findings

Communications

14. The Council's policies and approach to repairing potholes can be complex and difficult to understand. They are based on best practice guidance and are comparable with the approach taken by other highway authorities. Spending on road maintenance is limited by the Council's financial position and the external funding it receives. Therefore work has to be prioritised to meet the Council's legal duties to maintain roads in a safe condition, whilst maximising value for money in the way it resurfaces roads.

15. During the course of the review it became apparent that members of the public and councillors do not fully understand the way the highway maintenance contract is structured and the policy approach that is being taken. For example, the reactive repair of potholes as safety defects is covered by a fixed price element within the contract. So the Council does not pay extra money for subsequent or repeated visits. Any perceived inefficiency from return visits to repair adjacent potholes is a cost managed by the contractor while the Council only pays a fixed price irrespective of the number of visits.

16. Work has already been undertaken to provide better information on the approach to highway repairs, including a handbook for Councillors and Parish Councils and information on the East Sussex Highways web site. The Review Board acknowledges the work that is being done, and would welcome the opportunity to work with Officers on how better to communicate the Council's approach to highway maintenance (e.g. how the Council achieves value for money, and the terminology it uses when communicating with the public). The Board has agreed with Officers that a hard copy of the handbook will be made available for reference purposes.

Recommendation 1

The Council examines how it could better communicate with residents on highways maintenance policies and practices, and the Committee would welcome the opportunity to work with Officers to achieve this (e.g. how the Council achieves value for money).

Road Repairs

Reactive Pothole Repairs

17. The Review Board found that the current intervention policy for the reactive repair of potholes is sustainable and is keeping the road network in a safe condition. Overall the Board considers that the approach to reactive repairs under the new contract arrangements has improved compared with the previous Highways Maintenance Contract. For example, all category 3 pothole defects are now repaired within 28 days, rather than by the time of the next inspection (for further detail of the evidence reviewed please see appendix 1).

18. However, the current policy does not deal with the situation where one or two potholes that meet the intervention criteria are repaired, and other adjacent potholes nearby (that are not at the intervention standard yet) are not repaired. The Board considered that if the repair teams have to come back a number of times in a twelve month period to carry out reactive repairs to the adjacent potholes when they do reach the intervention standard, then this does not appear to the public to represent value for money.

19. Undertaking reactive pothole repairs enables the Council to meet its statutory duty to maintain the highway in a safe condition. However, it is evident that members of the public do not understand why the Council does not repair all adjacent potholes at the same time.

20. The Board suggests examining whether it would be feasible to introduce an approach where all potholes within a given distance, say 5 metres, of an intervention level pothole are repaired at the same time. This is similar to the way the Highways Contractor currently repairs neighbouring potholes as ‘Advisories’ and ‘Observations’ at the same time or a later date (depending on location and complexity), but the scope of this work is limited by budget constraints. The Board is aware that the timescales required for safety defect repairs (category 1, 2 hours; category 2, 5 days and; category 3, 28 days) and the budget constraints may make a wider approach to repairing potholes difficult to achieve in practice.

21. The Board heard from officers that they would not support this wider approach, but nevertheless the Board felt it is worth piloting a wider approach to pothole repairs, targeting category 2 and 3 defects on unclassified roads. A wider “360 degree” repair approach, coupled with better communicating the Council’s approach to repairs to the public, may provide an answer to councillors and local people’s concerns about the current approach to repairing potholes.

Recommendation 2

Officers conduct a pilot into the feasibility of introducing a new approach to repair all neighbouring potholes at the same time, within a given distance of a category 2 or 3 intervention standard pothole using the funding allocated from the Department for Transport (DfT) pothole fund for the pilot.

Recommendation 3

Scrutiny should be consulted on the use of any future one-off highways funding from Government, before work has been programmed via a Review Board of the Committee.

Planned Road Repairs

22. The Council has a capital programme budget of £15 million per year to maintain roads (carriageways). In 2013 when this level of funding was introduced, it was considered sufficient to maintain the condition of the road network in a stable state. The most recent performance figures as measured by the percentage of roads requiring repair and those for 2013, prior to when the Asset Management Strategy was implemented, are given below:

Road Category	Actual 2012/13 % requiring repair	Actual 2017/18 % requiring repair	Target 2018/19 % requiring repair	% of Road Network
Principal (A)	8%	4%	8%	13%
Non-principal (B&C)	10%	7%	9%	32%
Unclassified	19%	14%	20%	55%

23. The performance targets give priority to the maintenance of principal and non-principal roads, which carry the most traffic compared with unclassified roads. The Board heard that the Council does not have enough resources to resurface all roads requiring repair and therefore planned resurfacing work has to be prioritised.

24. The Review Board found that condition of East Sussex roads, measured by the percentage requiring repair, is stable and has improved with the current level of capital funding. This is likely to have been helped in part by the efficiencies included within the new highways maintenance contract arrangements. Progress is being made in the planned maintenance of roads and the Council is now able to schedule maintenance at the optimum time, before road condition deteriorates too far and repairs become more costly. As a result of its Asset Management approach the County Council has secured Band 3 status (highest) and as a consequence receives all of the Incentive Element of its DfT funding.

25. Under the Asset Management approach, reactive pothole repairs are undertaken to keep the highway network in a safe and useable condition, until planned resurfacing work can be carried out. Planned maintenance schemes take into account the overall condition of roads, their classification (A, B, C or unclassified) together with the volume of traffic they carry to prioritise investment where it will make the most improvement. The high cost per square metre for filling potholes as part of reactive maintenance, makes it more expensive to repair potholes using that method and does not represent value for money in comparison with planned road resurfacing. Further details of the evidence the Review Board examined is contained in appendix 1.

26. However, 55% of road network in East Sussex is made up of unclassified roads and 14% of unclassified roads are assessed as being in need of repair. This means that the unclassified roads outside residents' houses and in rural areas are more likely to need repairing because over half of the County's roads are unclassified, but do not have the highest priority for resurfacing. This position, in combination with the reactive repair policy, may explain why some residents are dissatisfied with the condition of their local roads, which are more likely to be unclassified roads.

27. The Review Board is of the view that on the whole, the way planned maintenance work is being carried out is better than under the previous contract. Based on the evidence, the Board finds that planned maintenance work is the most cost effective way of dealing with potholes, and does represent value for money.

28. It may take longer for an unclassified road to be resurfaced as part of the planned maintenance programme, and therefore it may be subject to repeated pothole repairs to keep the road safe to use until more extensive resurfacing is undertaken. The introduction of a wider "360 degree" pothole repair approach may help bridge the outcomes of the reactive repair and planned maintenance policies, but would need to be affordable.

29. If investment in road repairs is reduced in the future, there is a risk that it will increase the costs incurred by the Council for road maintenance and reduce value for money. The Board considered that maintaining and improving the level of capital investment in the County's road network is essential for the wellbeing or residents and the economy of East Sussex.

Concrete Roads

30. The Board heard that there are slightly different maintenance issues for roads that are surfaced with concrete. Concrete roads make up approximately 5% of all unclassified roads in the County where the main issue is repairing any cracking of the surface to prevent water ingress. This prolongs the life of the road and the Board understands that reconstructing concrete roads is very expensive.

31. Some concrete roads have had a thin layer of tarmac applied in the past to improve the road surface appearance and to reduce road noise. This has in some cases started to wear away, but does not constitute an intervention level repair. Of particular concern to residents is the issue of 'stick on kerbs' attached to the concrete surface, which are easily damaged. However, there is no budget to replace them (e.g. by resetting the kerbs behind the concrete slab) and they do not currently represent a priority for maintenance under the Asset Management Strategy.

Road Sub-base Construction

32. The construction of many roads in East Sussex do not meet modern standards, due to the historical construction methods that were used or simply the way roads have evolved from tracks. With modern volumes of traffic this can lead to the failure of the sub-base of the road, requiring expensive reconstruction work to be undertaken. Typically some roads may only have a 20-30mm wearing course of tarmac laid on top of a 'hoggin' sub base ('hoggin' is a mixture of sand, clay and gravel, or what was available locally when the road was built). In many cases, where the road surface is crazed and a depression forms, this is due to the underlying sub-base failing.

33. The Board heard that the amount of survey data available on the quality of the sub-base of roads is limited. Data from the Scanner survey the Council undertakes every year only gives an indication of the condition of the road surface and not the underlying foundations. The Asset Management Team therefore take core samples every 50m or 100m when designing appropriate repairs to determine the underlying condition. In some cases repair work has to be carried out before more extensive road reconstruction works can be undertaken due to budget constraints.

Recommendation 4

That the existing level of capital investment in roads through planned maintenance and the Asset Management approach is maintained and if possible increased, as this is the most cost effective way of repairing potholes.

Repair of Pavements

34. The Review Board heard evidence that residents and ESCC councillors are becoming increasingly concerned about the condition of pavements, with some councillors reporting that this is now the number one highways issue that residents contact them about. The Review Board heard that a reactive and planned maintenance programme is in place for pavements in a similar way to road repairs.

35. There are 2,373 kilometres of pavements in the County. Regular condition surveys are carried out and in 2017, 50% of the pavements in the County were surveyed. This revealed that 53,566 linear metres (around 2.25% of the total) were in 'red' condition and needed major work. Overall, 54% of pavements are in either a 'red' or 'amber' condition, and 46% are in a good or 'green' condition.

36. The Board heard evidence that based on an average repair cost of £40 per square metre for a 1.8 metre wide pavement, it would cost an estimated £3.85m to resurface all the 'red' condition pavements. If it is assumed that the other half of the pavements in the County are in a similar condition, then the estimated cost to repair all 'red' condition pavements will be around £7.7m (for around 4.5% of the total). The estimated cost to bring the whole of the East Sussex pavement network up to a 'Good' condition is £45.6m (based on the notional cost of repair of £20 per square metre for the remaining 1,159,717 linear metres). This is compared with an annual capital maintenance budget of £1.6m.

37. The Board found that there is a considerable amount of work that is required on 'red' condition pavements, which are in need of immediate repair, in comparison with the size of the available capital budget. Although new survey data is becoming available to monitor the condition of pavements, there are no targets set for the condition of pavements, as is the case with roads.

38. Vehicles parking on pavements and verges are often responsible for damage to pavements, particularly where paving slabs are used. This undermines the Council's work to keep pavements in good condition, and options to prevent pavement parking in problem areas should be explored.

39. The Review Board heard that the intervention criteria for safety defects in pavements is 20mm or more difference in level and less than 600mm in width or length. The criteria is in line with the one used by other Highway Authorities and is applied to all types of pavement surfacing. The Board considered that it would also be beneficial to have safety defect intervention criteria defined for different types of pavement surfacing (e.g. one for tarmac, one for paving slabs etc.) to provide clarity for when changes in level should be repaired. The Board also heard that insurance claims made for accidents (trips and falls) on pavements are not separately recorded, and considered it would be helpful to separately record them.

40. The Board concluded that that ways of increasing investment in pavement repairs should be explored. Options to increase investment could include, but are not limited to:

- The use of the DfT pothole fund money for pavement works;
- Joint working with other councils (e.g. District, Borough, Town and Parish Councils);
- Exploring the use of Public Health funding for fall prevention (in a similar way to the £1m that was allocated to the East Sussex Road Safety Programme);
- Use of Local Transport Plan funding (for walking and cycling);
- Re-allocation of existing capital sums within the highways structural maintenance core programme;
- Utilisation of any un-spent Community Match funding;
- Additional capital allocation funded by one-off capital receipts, or new borrowing.

41. The Review Board also found that it would be beneficial to develop a baseline and measure for the condition of pavements, so that their condition can be monitored and investment targeted to improve footway condition over time.

42. The Review Board considered that it would be worth exploring the use of powers to ban parking on pavements through annual parking reviews, where this would prevent damage to pavements, or resolve problems with obstructing the pavement.

Recommendation 5

The Council explores the possibility of identifying additional funding to improve the condition of pavements, via existing sources of funding and partnership working.

Recommendation 6

The condition of the remaining 50% of pavements is surveyed, and a measure of the condition of pavements is developed within the next 2 years, so that their condition can be monitored and the impact of any additional investment can be assessed.

Recommendation 7

The Council considers using its powers to ban parking on pavements and verges in problem areas, as part of regular parking reviews.

Recommendation 8

Safety defect intervention criteria are defined for the different types of pavement surfacing, and insurance claims for pavements are separately recorded.

Quality of Repairs

43. The Board has heard evidence concerning the works undertaken prior to surfacing dressing or resurfacing. The evidence given by the Highway Contractor emphasised that there is no incentive for not getting the standard of work right first time, as the contractor pays for any work that has to be re-done because of quality defects. The work undertaken as part of resurfacing schemes includes:

- repairing existing defects such as pot holes and previous utility reinstatements;
- adjusting surfacing levels and falls to improve drainage and;
- raising ironwork (e.g. drains, inspection covers etc.) or including other features such as granite setts across driveways.

44. The Highways Contractor has given evidence of the changes it has made to the quality control processes, including holding a defects ‘walk through’ with sub-contractors whilst they were still on site so that any defects could be rectified more quickly, and monthly performance monitoring of supply chain partners. There is a robust performance management process in place which monitors key performance indicators and is overseen by the ESCC Contract Performance and Compliance Team. The Team also undertakes quality control inspections and reviews.

45. The Board heard that there are six utility company works on the road network for every one carried out by East Sussex Highways. Given that the greater proportion of utility workings compared to ESCC works, it is likely that some of problems reported on the road network could be due to work carried out by public utilities.

46. Anyone wishing to carry out work on the highway has to apply for a permit to work through the Street Works Permit scheme operated by the East Sussex Highways contractor under the New Roads and Street Works Act (1991). The contractor employs a team of Permit Inspectors who inspect on a randomised basis 10% of utility company works in progress; 10% of works 6 months after completion and; 10% within the 2 year guarantee period. This includes taking core samples from the reinstated road works, to check the quality of work.

47. There is evidence that utility company road openings can reduce the structural life of the carriageway by up to 30% and local authorities on average spend 11% of their highway maintenance budget addressing premature maintenance arising from utility road openings (Annual Local Authority Road Maintenance survey 2018).

48. The Board heard evidence that 98% of potholes are repaired permanently on the first visit, and all potholes are repaired permanently with 28 days. The Highways Contractor is using advanced, durable materials for emergency repairs and those undertaken in wet weather conditions. Repair failure rates are monitored through quality assurance work and quality auditing levels are increased if necessary.

49. The Board noted and welcomed a number of recent improvements in the quality monitoring and control processes. The Board found that the direction of travel in the monitoring of quality is encouraging, but considered more time was needed to assess the impact of these changes.

50. The Board heard that the failure rate of pothole repairs is low, but there are challenges in using the reporting system to monitor situations where repairs have failed. This is due to the level of accuracy of the information in reports and recording the location of defects. The Board supports the work being undertaken to improve information in this area

51. The Board considered that 10% auditing of repair and reinstatement work is insufficient and would like to see 20% of works audited, whether they are planned repairs such as resurfacing schemes, reactive pot hole repairs, and particularly reinstatement work carried out by utility companies. The current cost of auditing utility works is funded through the Street Works Permit scheme, and there will be an increased cost to the Council of undertaking additional audits if this is not related to higher reinstatement failure rates.

Recommendation 9

Increase the amount of sampling and inspections to 20% to monitor and assure the quality of road repairs or reinstatements, and the work carried out prior to resurfacing, particularly those carried out by utility companies.

Highway Drainage and Gulley Emptying

52. The Review Board's interest in highway drainage problems is centred on the situation where a drainage problem has been reported and it has not been possible to resolve the issue by simply jetting the drain run to remove the blockage. In these circumstances it is often necessary carry out further investigations which rely on good information about the drainage infrastructure, and in particular the connecting pipework and drain outlets. It can also require the use of temporary traffic lights and road closures in order to carry out site investigations and survey work safely.

53. Historically the Council did not have a good picture of where all the drain runs were located and how they were connected to outlets. Information on the condition of the drainage pipes and other infrastructure was also limited. However, since the Scrutiny Review of Highway Drainage further investment has been made and a strategic approach taken to gaining this information. The Board heard that there are currently a number of strands of work taking place to improve drainage information:

- the digitisation of highway drainage infrastructure records;
- Surveys and site investigations;
- the new Mapping Outlet Programme which includes whole area surveys; and
- new asset management software being used for gulley cleansing.

54. Survey data now includes detailed photographic and map based information on the condition of the drainage infrastructure gathered through whole areas surveys. These surveys are targeted at areas where there are a number of known drainage problems or flooding 'hotspots'. The Board heard that some drainage investigations are very complex and can result in finding drainage assets that the Council was not aware of. Establishing the ownership, and therefore the responsibility for maintenance, of some drainage assets is problematic and can lead to delays in resolving drainage issues.

55. The Board heard evidence of the work being undertaken to improve the resolution of known highway drainage problems. This work includes:

- Improved knowledge and better mapping of drainage systems, thus making it easier and quicker to identify and resolve problems;
- The addition of specialist sub-contractors to the supply chain, so there is more resource available to investigate problems;
- Looking at larger problem areas, through whole area surveys;
- A better understanding of the need to improve efficient planning for jetting/ clearing and the establishment by the Highways Contractor of a dedicated co-ordinator for drainage work; and
- The Asset Team will also keep work processes under review to improve systems.

56. If there is serious flooding of the highway it will be made safe within 2 hours, and rectified within 5 days. If a property is at risk of flooding due to a highway drainage issue, the aim is to clear the problem within 28 days. However, there some circumstances where this might not be possible, especially where there is a long standing or complex drainage issue and ESCC is not responsible for the drainage outlet.

57. The Review Board noted the improvements that had been made to speed up the resolution of drainage problems. In particular the measures taken to improve the information held about the drainage infrastructure and speed up drainage problem resolution mean highway drainage problems are more likely to be resolved in a timely way.

58. The Review Board noted the progress that has been made to reconstruct drainage ditches and that all identified highway flooding 'hot spots' are being investigated. The Board recognises the need to fix the problems revealed through the detailed investigations that have taken place, but considers further work should be undertaken to improve the information the Council holds on the highway drainage network.

59. The Board considered that the good progress had been made, and the increased capital budget of £1.0 million per year is helping. However, the Board is unsure whether this is having enough impact, especially on the time it may take to gain a more complete knowledge of the highways drainage infrastructure network.

60. The blocking of highway drains with leaves and other debris remains a problem, particularly in the autumn. The Board understands that street sweeping is the responsibility of District and Borough Councils and suggests ESCC liaises with them regarding joint working on any problem areas.

Recommendation 10

Officers develop a work programme to complete the Council's knowledge of the highway drainage network, including determining the cost and timeframe for this work, focussing initially on utilising the remaining additional capital investment to gain knowledge of parts of the network that require repair and replacement as a priority. The work programme is to be reported to the Scrutiny Committee in September 2019.

Recommendation 11

Joint work is undertaken with District and Borough Councils to improve street sweeping, particularly in autumn, to prevent highway gullies and other drainage becoming blocked with leaves and other debris.

Conclusions

61. The recommendations the Review Board has made are based on the evidence that it has heard and aim to address the key issues in the areas of highway maintenance covered by the review. The Council is achieving value for money in the approach it has taken to reactive and planned road repairs, but the Board believes there are improvements that could be made in the way the Council communicates its approach to road repairs and how it deals with clusters of potholes, particularly on unclassified roads.

62. Improvements have been made in the quality assurance processes used by the Council and the way highway drainage problems are tackled. The Board considers further work needs to be undertaken to improve the Council's knowledge of the highway drainage network. The condition of the County's pavements is becoming an increasing concern, and the Board has made a number of recommendations to address this issue.

63. The Review Board recognises that the Council's increasingly difficult financial position, however the issues under consideration are pivotal to the wellbeing of residents and the economy of East Sussex and investment now will save money in the long run. There are risks associated with under investment in the County's Highways infrastructure, which the Council should avoid if it possibly can.

Appendix 1:– Summary of additional evidence examined by the Review Board

Road Repairs

Repair of Potholes – Reactive Repairs

1. The Council has a duty under Section 28 of the Highways Act (1980) to maintain highways, maintainable at public expense, in a safe condition. As one of a number of measures to do this, the Council has defined criteria for repairing potholes according to their severity. Other measures include regular inspections carried out by Highway Stewards and undertaking detailed condition surveys which feed into planned maintenance work programmes. The current intervention criteria has three categories of pothole repair:

- Category 1 - Potholes which are greater than 100mm deep and at least 300mm wide in all directions are made safe or repaired within 2 hours.

- Category2 - Potholes which are greater than 60mm deep and less than 99mm deep, and at least 300mm wide in all directions are made safe or repaired within 5 days.

- Category 3 - Potholes which are greater than 40mm deep and less that 59mm deep, and at least 300mm wide in all directions are made safe or repaired within 28 days.

2. This policy ensures that the worst potholes are made safe or repaired quickly, and all potholes are made safe or repaired within 28 days. The Review Board heard evidence that under the Highways Contract approximately 30,000 potholes are repaired each year, of which 98% are permanently repaired on the first visit. The response time for category 3 repairs has been improved under the current Highways Contract as all defects are repaired within 28 days, rather than by the time of the next inspection. The Board heard that the majority of councils use the 40mm depth intervention criteria for pothole repairs, but not all councils make safe or repair all potholes with 28 days.

3. The Board has reviewed the current intervention policy for the reactive repair of potholes and the use of 40mm depth as a trigger for intervention. This policy is judged to be sustainable because it is affordable within the existing resources (i.e. the timescales for repairs can be met and there is sufficient budget to carry out the repairs), and it accords with good industry practice. Evidence examined by the Board indicates that the current policy is achieving the aim of maintaining highways in a safe condition, and has reduced the number of insurance claims.

4. The Board has heard evidence that the cost of repairing all pot holes that meet the intervention criteria is around £1.5m a year, which is funded from the core revenue budget. It is estimated that there are four times as many non-intervention pot holes, which if repaired, would cost approximately £6m. Evidence presented to the Board indicates that the cost of repairing pot holes in a reactive way is less cost effective than repairing them through planned maintenance work based on a cost per square metre.

5. The Review Board understands that work is underway looking at how the Council could better communicate its approach to highway maintenance. The Board supports this work to better explain the work the Council undertakes so that the public has confidence that the Council is acting in a way that achieves value for money, whilst ensuring safety requirements are met.

Repair of Potholes – Planned Repairs

6. The Council's policy approach to highway maintenance is driven by national and local policies, with maintenance regimes derived from national codes of practice, which in turn determine local levels of service. The Council has adopted an Asset Management approach to planned maintenance work that looks at the whole life cost of each asset, and determines an annual resurfacing work programme for roads based on condition surveys and the road hierarchy.

7. The Board reviewed the standards the Council has set for the condition of the East Sussex road network. The road network has been divided into a hierarchy of principal roads (A roads), non-principal roads (B and C roads) and unclassified roads. These standards are monitored quarterly through Council monitoring reports. Evidence was also presented that the level of Department for Transport (DfT) funding for road repairs is contingent upon the Council using an Asset Management approach.

8. However, unclassified roads make up 55% of the road network in East Sussex and are the roads on which most journeys start and finish (e.g. the road outside your house, whether that is in a housing estate or on a country lane, is likely to be an unclassified road). The Board also examined evidence that indicates that the previous one-off additional capital investment of £10m (spread over 2 years) for resurfacing unclassified roads, is likely to have led to the condition of unclassified roads improving from 25% in need of repair in 2013/14, to 14% in 2017/18.

9. The Board heard evidence from the Asset Management Team that resurfacing roads when they in 'amber' condition, but before they deteriorate to 'red', is the optimum time to intervene and is the most cost effective (value for money) approach. There is evidence that the backlog of 'red' condition roads has been reduced and the Council is in a position to intervene at the optimum time.

10. The Council measures value for money based on the 'whole life cost' of each asset such as roads. There are occasions where budget constraints mean that work is undertaken to extend the life of an asset when renewal would have been preferable, but unaffordable at the time. The Asset Management Team devise planned maintenance programmes for all types of highway assets. Allocating the capital budget to meet the competing needs of the different assets such as roads, pavements, drainage, bridges and other structures is challenging.

Pavements

11. The main types of pavement repairs are slurry sealing and the reconstruction or resurfacing of pavements using tarmac. Structural reconstruction may involve renewing kerbs and the surface of the footway, providing edging, replacing damaged paving slabs or replacing slabs with tarmac. Tarmac is considered to be the most cost effective type of surfacing and as it is long lasting. Damaged concrete slabbed pavements are resurfaced with black tarmac where possible, but other surface materials are used in conservation areas and where communities fund other materials (e.g. red tarmac, paving slabs, concrete paviours etc.).

12. The Review Board also saw evidence of the particular maintenance issues involved where the roots of mature street trees have started to damage pavements and cause trip hazards. It was evident that in extreme cases, different approaches to dealing with the surface level changes may be needed to ensure pedestrian safety whilst preserving the mature street trees (e.g. the mature Elm trees in Eastbourne).

Appendix 2:

Scope and terms of reference of the review

The scope of the review includes the repair of roads (carriageways) covering the reactive repair of pot holes and planned maintenance work to resurface or reconstruct roads by examining current policies, quality of work and value for money. The review also examines the arrangements for the repair of blocked highways drainage and the maintenance of pavements (footways), following a decision by the Review Board to extend the scope of the review.

The Review was established to examine a number of lines of enquiry and make recommendations on the following:

- Are the current intervention criteria and maintenance policies producing the intended outcomes?
- At what point is it more cost effective to resurface a section of road rather than patch repair it and how is this decision made?
- What happens when a Highway Steward reports a section of road that is likely to need repairing/resurfacing in the near future but it is not yet at the intervention standard, and how is this work prioritised?
- Would it be more cost effective to carry out more substantial/extensive pothole repairs rather than re-surfacing?
- Has the adopted contract model got the right amount of resources to monitor the quality of re-surfacing work and other road repair operations in order to assure the longevity of the road surface and protect the investment the Council is making?
- What steps could be taken to improve the time it takes to resolve cases of blocked drainage infrastructure, once they have been reported for attention?
- How are pavements (footways) maintained and what measures could be taken to improve the condition of pavements.

Board Membership and project support

Review Board Members:

Councillors Chris Dowling, Claire Dowling, Simon Elford, Nigel Enever, Pat Rodohan, Stephen Shing, Richard Stogdon (Chair) and Barry Taylor.

Martin Jenks, Senior Democratic Advisor provided support to the Board throughout the review.

Review Board meeting dates

4 October 2018

29 October 2018

3 December 2018

29 January 2019

12 February 2019

1 March 2019

Witnesses providing evidence

The Board would like to thank all the witnesses who provided evidence in person:

Karl Taylor, Assistant Director Operations

Dale Poore, Contract Manager Highway Infrastructure Services

Mathew Jasper, Team Manager Asset Management

Mike Egleton, Service Director Costain/Jacobs

Hannah Cawley, Team Manager Contract Performance and Compliance

Councillor Nick Bennet, Lead Member for Transport and Environment

East Sussex County Council Members who submitted written evidence:

Councillors Godfrey Daniel, Angharad Davies, Deirdre Earl-Williams, David Elkin, Steve Wallis.

Evidence papers

Item	Date
East Sussex County Council - Highway Asset Management Strategy 2015 – 2022	August 2015
Annual Local Authority Road Maintenance (ALARM) survey 2018	March 2018
Road Conditions in England 2017 (Department for Transport statistical release)	January 2018
RAC Report on Motoring 2018	September 2018
Well-Managed Highway Infrastructure: A Code of Practice (UK Roads Liaison Group)	October 2016

Contact officer: Martin Jenks (Senior Democratic Service Advisor)

Telephone: 01273 481327
E-mail: martin.jenks@eastsussex.gov.uk