

Highways Maintenance Efficiency Programme (HMEP) Strategic Review

Wiltshire Council Position Statement

Introduction

This position statement provides an overview of the context in which Wiltshire Council's Highways and Transport Service operates. In doing so it demonstrates that the Service has undergone a process of continuous improvement utilising relevant best practice and has a strong understanding of local priorities, issues and risks.

While we would be keen to learn any additional lessons from the past, the review provides the opportunity to challenge and advise the Service as it begins to deliver a new highways contract in a period of unprecedented financial constraint. In addition, guidance is sought on how best the Service can adapt to and benefit from the Government's devolution agenda.

Wiltshire

Wiltshire Council is one of the largest unitary authorities in England. The county covers approximately 3,255 square kilometres and has a population of approximately 460,000 people. Wiltshire is a largely rural area encompassing many natural and historic features which make it distinctive. Deprivation is generally low and our communities benefit from safe environments. Wiltshire enjoys strong sub-regional links and is within commutable distance of London, Bristol, Swindon, South Wales and the south coast.

The largest settlements in Wiltshire are the historic cathedral city of Salisbury in the south, the county town of Trowbridge in the west, and the market town of Chippenham in the north. With its cathedral and close proximity to the internationally famous World Heritage Site of Stonehenge, Salisbury is a very popular tourist destination. Trowbridge plays a role as an employment, administration and service centre for the west Wiltshire area, and has good transport links to many nearby settlements, including Bath and Bristol. Chippenham has a busy town centre and, in recent decades, an expanding urban area and is a focus for employment growth due to its proximity and good access to the M4 and rail links.

Aside from these three larger settlements there are also a number of market towns throughout the county and numerous villages and rural settlements: around half of the people living in Wiltshire live in towns or villages with fewer than 5,000 people, reflecting the rural nature of the county.

Wiltshire has important relationships with the surrounding large urban centres of Bath, Bristol, Swindon and Southampton, and lies within 115 miles of London. These larger centres provide a wider range of employment, leisure and cultural opportunities than can be found across Wiltshire and result in out-commuting of Wiltshire's residents for work and leisure activities such as shopping. Evidence also identifies that in some instances workers are commuting into Wiltshire, whilst residing in larger centres such as Bristol and Southampton. The air and seaports related to these settlements are also widely used by Wiltshire residents.

Context

Wiltshire Council became a unitary authority in 2009. The move to unitary status provided an opportunity to transform how services are delivered in the county.

Embracing change and adopting a transformational and innovative approach means that we have achieved a great deal. With the ongoing decrease in funding from central government, combined with the increase in demand for services, it has meant that we have had to adopt new and innovative ways of working. We have looked at how we can work differently, not just within the council, but with communities and our public sector and voluntary partners, so that we can maintain vital frontline services.

Reflecting the above, the Council's current Business Plan 2013-2017 sets out our vision "to create stronger and more resilient communities" and our priorities:

- To protect those who are most vulnerable
- To boost the local economy – creating and safeguarding jobs
- To support and empower communities to do more for themselves.

An important element in helping us achieve the Business Plan's vision are the 18 community Area Boards which aim to bring local decision making back into the heart of the community. They are a formal part of Wiltshire Council that, with representatives from the NHS, fire and emergency services, police, town and parish councils, community area partnerships and many other groups, try to find solutions for local issues including road repairs, traffic problems and speeding in villages.

The countywide and individual community area Joint Strategic Assessments aim to provide a 'single version of the truth' to ensure that services are commissioned on evidence and need. Community resilience is also a key theme of the Wiltshire Community Plan 2011 – 2026 and the Wiltshire Core Strategy 2026.

More recently, in January 2016 the Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership updated and revised the Swindon and Wiltshire Strategic Economic Plan (SWSEP). Three Growth Zones are identified in the SWSEP as the focus for targeted investment - Swindon-M4 Growth Zone, the A350 Growth Zone and the Salisbury-A303 Growth Zone.

Highways and Transport Service

Overview

In recognition that transport needs to be 'joined up' with wider economic, social and environmental objectives, the Wiltshire Local Transport Plan (LTP) 2011 – 2026 was developed within the context provided by a range of national and local policy documents, with a range of goals and strategic objectives.

For each of the goals and relevant objectives, the LTP outlines the Council's approach in relation to the management of its various transport assets and states that in working towards these, the Council will:

- Ensure that there is a 'whole authority' approach to transport and access issues
- Work in partnership with other service providers, and the community and voluntary sectors
- Encourage and support local communities to deal with their transport challenges
- Make transparent decisions and consult appropriately with stakeholders, partners and the public.

The annual LTP Integrated Transport Block Allocation funding is aligned with and supports the LTP's goals and objectives. It also provides a discretionary highways budget for the 18 Area Boards so that the Community Area Transport Groups (see Community Engagement) can identify and deliver solutions to local highway and transport problems.

Wiltshire Council is committed to effective asset management of its highways assets, and approved the Wiltshire Asset Management Policy and Strategy in May 2015. This has clear links to the Council's Business Plan and was developed in accordance with the HMEP published asset management guidance.

Operational Delivery

Wiltshire's highways assets have a replacement value of £4.5bn and include:

Road Classification	Km
A	572
B	322
C	1681
Unclassified	1934
Total	4509

Bridges and structures 1560

Road gullies 82,775

In terms of the workforce, majority of the design capacity and labour within highways was outsourced in 1999, with most of the term contracts currently being in third or fourth generation. Development of policies, plans and annual programmes, as well as commissioning and dealing with the customer interface is led by the in-house team. The highways service is in the process of changing and realigning its contracts and supply chain in order to improve performance and value for money. We are also planning a programme of cultural transition to compliment the changes in the service.

Following a decision by the Council's Cabinet in July 2015 on the early termination of its Highways and Streetscene contract with Balfour Beatty Living Places (BBLP), a procurement exercise (making use of the HMEP toolkit) has been undertaken for a new Wiltshire and Swindon Borough Councils' Highways Contract.

As part of termination, the contract for major maintenance was novated to the Council and Tarmac will be the contractor for this part of the service up to 2020. Similarly the contract for grounds maintenance and Streetscene services with Total Landscape Group was novated to the Council and will continue till 2020. Atkins have been providing infrastructure consultancy service since 2012.

Using lessons learnt from the BBLP contract, the new term maintenance contract will include the provision of routine highways maintenance, Parish Stewards, pothole repairs, winter gritting and the implementation of safety and Community Area Transport Group (CATG) schemes. Therefore, the new contract will not include Streetscene and grass cutting elements making it a more 'traditional' highways contract which suppliers should find easier to understand and deliver. The reintroduction of the Parish Steward scheme will be welcomed by local communities.

The opportunity has been taken to include Swindon Borough Council in the procurement and contract process. This has the benefit of enabling better coordination of works and resources, and of increasing the scale of the contract, made it more attractive to bidders. It also meets the HMEP and Department for Transport's requirements for collaborative working with other highway authorities.

The new contract which was awarded to Ringway will start on 1 April 2016 and be for five years with extensions up to two years subject to performance, which will be monitored continuously and assessed annually. It is anticipated that annual expenditure through the contract is likely to be in the region of £15m.

The commitment of the Council's leadership and senior management to asset management is demonstrated not only by the adoption of the Wiltshire Asset Management Policy and Strategy, but more significantly, by the increase in funding from its own finances for the Local Highways Investment Fund 2014 – 2020. This has seen investment for highways maintenance increase to £21 million and for bridges to £3 million annually. For comparison, the LTP maintenance block funding was £12.3 million in 2014/15.

Wiltshire Council has been applying lifecycle planning as part of its highway infrastructure asset management for a number of years. Indeed, the Local Highways Investment Fund 2014 – 2020 proposals were a direct result of the Council applying lifecycle planning as part of its highway

infrastructure asset management. This work has recently been developed in more detail by the Council's consultants Atkins using the HMEP Lifecycle Toolkit to inform other investment decisions.

In addition, the Council has appointed a Head of Highways Asset Management into a senior role with responsibility for the Council's roads, bridges, drainage, street lighting and traffic signals. The head of service is supported by a team to implement asset management in conjunction with the Council's consultant and contractors. Representatives from the Council, consultant and contractors attend Service Delivery Teams to develop policy, strategies and programmes of work in the relevant specialist areas.

The Council has prepared long-term rolling programmes of work for its major assets which are reviewed annually:

- The programme of major road resurfacing and reconstruction works was developed for the Wiltshire Local Highways Investment Fund 2014 – 2020 and is reviewed annually and published for consultation through the Area Boards before being finalised.
- A five year programme of major bridge works has been identified and is included in the Council's capital budget. Area boards are advised of the work to be undertaken in their areas.
- Recently the Council's traffic signals stock has been reviewed, and a prioritised programme of major maintenance and renewal has been developed based on risk management principles.
- The Council has better information on its drainage assets than most local authorities, although the information is still incomplete in some areas. A substantial budget is available for surveys and repairs, which are co-ordinated with the road resurfacing programme.

While the Council recognises the need to identify long-term programmes, it also needs to be flexible in order to adapt to changing circumstances. For example, resources had to be focussed on repairing flood damage in 2014, when there was serious flooding across Wiltshire with over 500 properties flooded and a number of roads seriously damaged.

The Highways and Transport Service Plan identifies the priorities for the service alongside competing pressures, the actions proposed to achieve the priorities and how success will be measured. Although service plans focus on individual financial years, they also provide the opportunity to shape the service's direction over a medium-term (four year) so enabling service, business and financial planning on a coherent cycle.

Major Schemes in Wiltshire

An increasingly important aspect of the Service's work is now associated with the delivery of the SWLEP's Strategic Economic Plan and its identified growth area and scheme priorities.

Wiltshire Council did not typically fare well under the previous regional assembly system; the move to a more locally devolved process under the LEPs is therefore generally welcomed, and has resulted in delivery of schemes for economic growth.

In line with its objective for strategic connectivity, the Council has recently delivered improvements on the A350 Chippenham Bypass and the A429 at Malmesbury, and is at various stages in developing business cases for a number of other SEP-related major transport schemes, including bypass proposals for Westbury and Melksham. Additional business case work is likely to fall out of the SWLEP's consideration of further scheme proposals in late February 2016. While again this is positive news for Wiltshire, it does present the challenge of resourcing the development of these business cases which can be substantial.

Major Schemes in association with others

The Council is also engaged on a number of other major schemes in partnership with adjoining authorities.

Improvement to the A303/A358/A30 corridor through Wiltshire, Devon and Somerset has long been considered a priority by a strong coalition of businesses, LEPs, local authorities, emergency services and cross-party MPs. In 2013, Authorities along the corridor collaborated to bring together a case for investment, and in 2014, the then coalition Government responded by committing £2 billion to improve (as a dual carriageway expressway) the A303 and A358 in the south west, including a twin bored tunnel at Stonehenge.

The Council is also working with Bath and North East Somerset and Dorset Councils to develop a case for improvements to connections through Wiltshire between the South Coast (the port of Poole in particular) and M4 and onwards to Bristol and the Midlands. These routes have been increasingly compromised over time, and we have been encouraged by discussions with the Minister and senior colleagues at DfT to develop a 'case for action' leading to incorporation in the RIS2/3 study programme.

Data and Customer Satisfaction

Wiltshire Council takes part in the National Highways and Transport survey having been a founder member in the predecessor survey which originated in the south west of England. The Council makes use of this information in assessing its performance and benchmarking against other authorities. The Council also carries out its own People's Voice surveys which can cover a range of services transport and highways issues.

The Council was a member of the South West Highways Improvement Group (SWHIG) for many years. This group collected information for a large range of highways related services and published an annual report, which allowed benchmarking across a range of service between authorities in the south west. The creation of the South West Highways Alliance, of which Wiltshire Council is an active member, has allowed the creation of a new benchmarking club to take over from the SWHIG. This new club will work closely with the specialist groups, including asset management, street lighting etc., to benchmark in detail in these specific areas.

The Council has a robust asset register in place, and a good understanding of where there are gaps:

- Carriageway data is held on the UKPMS system and is updated by the use of regular scanner and visual surveys. Recently the use of scanner surveys has been extended to unclassified roads as it is considered that these surveys provide better information on condition.
- The Council holds good records of its bridge stock, with a programme of inspections and investigations to update the information.
- Street lighting information is held on the Mayrise system, and the data is updated as changes are made to the asset.
- Information on traffic signals is held on spreadsheets and databases, with a record kept of changes and improvements.
- Drainage data still has gaps because only about a third of the network has been fully surveyed to date, but this is being addressed by a programme of surveys which are ongoing and are focussed on those areas with identified flooding or drainage problems.
- Collection of footway condition data is currently underway and is expected to be completed next year.

It is proposed to develop a Performance Management Framework to identify targets and demonstrate the outcomes of the asset management strategy.

Performance management is also embedded within the partnership with our term consultant and contractor's where all parties score each other over a range of measures and the outcome is regularly reviewed by the senior management teams.

Risks

Wiltshire Council assesses the risks associated with its highways assets (e.g. financial, safety and reputational) and works to actively manage them through the Council's corporate risk management process. The results of risk assessments and associated mitigation measures are regularly reported to the Corporate Leadership Team for review.

The Service Delivery Teams established for each specialist service areas (e.g. major maintenance, structures, street lighting and traffic signals) review relevant risks. A risk management process has also been established in connection with the highway consultancy and works contracts. A 'lessons learnt' register and risk based asset management plan will be developed for critical infrastructure.

Community Engagement

Annual reports are made to the Area Boards on progress on improving asset conditions in their respective area, and the proposals for the following year. This process allows local communities to help identify local priorities and to understand the investment decisions being made in their area. The reports are also made available on the Council's website.

The Highways Service has introduced the highly successful Community Area Transport Groups (CATGs) for each Area Board. These provide the opportunity for local communities to identify local priorities for integrated transport, traffic and safety schemes, and ensure there is a clear understanding of Council policies and the application of regulations. Many of the requests by residents for highways improvements are made to and considered by the CATG at the local level.

Individual schemes specific consultations are often undertaken regarding the timing and duration of works so that the impact on local communities is understood and taken into account in developing the schemes. This also provides the means to improve local understanding of why particular works are being undertaken and how they contribute to the management of the Council's assets.

As part of the new highways contract and following feedback from town and parish councils, the Parish Stewards scheme is to be reintroduced from April 2016. Eighteen stewards will be appointed providing a 'one stop and done' service in liaison with parish and town councils for minor highways works.

The Council makes particular use of the innovative My Wiltshire App for reporting highway and related issues, which has proved particularly successful and is being developed further, as well as being extended to cover other Council services. The new highways contractor will make full use of the My Wiltshire app in identifying and monitoring work, which would be developed to provide improved responses to reports.

Main focus for the review and desired outcomes

- To share experience of how a Highways and Transport Service can better contribute to an area's vision. Part of this includes the Service's contribution to Wiltshire Council maximising its opportunities for benefiting from the SWLEP's Local Growth Fund allocations and optimising engagement with, and influence of, the wider agenda of the SWLEP.
- To offer views on the performance, capability and capacity of the Highways and Transport Service to deliver a modern highways service in the context of the resource pressures that Wiltshire Council is facing. While we have already done a great deal in terms of cost reductions and improved efficiency, we would welcome external challenge which pushes our thinking further in terms of innovation and understanding further opportunities for continuous improvement.
- To focus on the effectiveness of communicating the vision for the Highways and Transport Service with Wiltshire Council's internal and external stakeholders. Part of this would involve assessing how well the service is doing in terms of devolving delivery effectively to a local level, as well as knowing if there is anything the service should be doing to meet Government's devolution agenda.
- To understand if the right procurement and contract governance is applied to purchasing services and goods.
- To recognise and validate improvements and any notable best practice, whilst also signposting relevant best practice from other authorities. Where appropriate, we would welcome an external view of how the service compares with other authorities in terms of performance whilst recognising that there is a unique local context to Wiltshire which influences what, and how, we deliver.