

Wiltshire Council

Environment Select Committee

12 April 2016

Subject: Local Highways Investment Fund 2014 – 2020

Report Author: Parvis Khansari, Associate Director Highways and Transport

Executive Summary

Wiltshire Council is undertaking a major programme of investment in highway maintenance over six years, which is delivering a significant improvement in the condition of the county's highway network.

The flooding in 2013/14 had an adverse effect on road conditions, but the additional investment through the Council's 'Local Highways Investment Fund 2014 – 2020' has arrested this deterioration, and the county's road conditions continue to improve.

The investment has been targeted at those roads in worst condition, and includes minor roads as well as the main roads. The programme is just reaching the end of its second year, and has already seen a substantial amount of work completed, and an improvement in road conditions.

In 2016/17 it is proposed to increase expenditure on treating the smaller sites, many of which have been outstanding for some time, and to reduce the number of larger surfacing sites.

The length of classified road in poor condition has approximately halved since 2009, and the current programme of work is expected to see further improvements in the future. There are some variations between the condition of roads in different area boards, which it is intended to address in future years (see **Appendix 1**).

The Council is in the process of identifying a 'Resilient Road Network' (see **Appendix 2**), which will form the core network where specific measures would be considered in order to ensure the continuing availability of this route in extreme weather conditions.

The highways service has recently undergone a Peer Review. This was undertaken as part of the Highways Maintenance Efficiency Programme (HMEP), which is funded and supported by the Department for Transport. It involved officers and members from other authorities visiting the Council and, through interviews and focus groups with members and staff, reviewing the highway service.

The outcome of the Peer Review was very positive (see **Appendix 3**). An action plan is being developed for discussion with the Peer Review team, and progress on implementing the recommendations will be reported to this committee in the future.

Wiltshire Council has an extensive programme of road resurfacing, but with a backlog of maintenance required on the road network nationally, it is necessary to make localised repairs of potholes and defects to keep the roads safe. The standards applied when inspecting defects are set out in the Highways Inspection Manual and summarised in a briefing note (see **Appendix 4**).

Proposals

The Committee is asked to note:

- (i) the work completed so far in connection with the 'Local highways Investment Fund 2014 – 2020', and the progress being made in improving the county's roads;
- (ii) a further report will be made to the Environment Select Committee in October regarding road conditions in the county, and work carried out in each Area Board;
- (iii) the proposed 'Wiltshire Resilient Road Network';
- (iv) the positive results of the recent HMEP Peer Review, and that progress on implementing its recommendations will be reported to a future meeting of this Committee.

Reason for Proposal

Wiltshire Council has a major programme of investment in highway maintenance over six years, which is already delivering a significant improvement in the condition of the county's highway network.

The identification of a resilient network will help consideration of future measures required to ensure the availability of the route in adverse weather conditions and other incidents.

Dr Carlton Brand
Corporate Director

Wiltshire Council

Environment select Committee

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Purpose of Report

1. To advise the Committee regarding progress on Wiltshire Council's Local Highways Investment Fund 2014 – 2020, and to review the proposed resilient network.

Relevance to the Council's Business Plan

2. The Council's Business Plan sets out the vision to create stronger and more resilient communities. It includes three key priorities and twelve actions that the Council will deliver over the next four years. One of the twelve actions is to 'invest additional money between 2014 -17 to reduce the historic backlog in highways maintenance'.

Background

3. Expenditure on highways maintenance declined substantially during the 1990's, and there was underinvestment in roads maintenance nationally for many years. There was an increase in spending from 2000/1, with the introduction of Local Transport Plan funding, but there was still a large backlog of maintenance required on the network.
4. In 2014 Wiltshire Council started a major programme of investment in highway maintenance over six years to bring about a significant improvement in the condition of the county's highway network.

Main Considerations for the Council

Local Highways Investment Fund 2014 - 2020

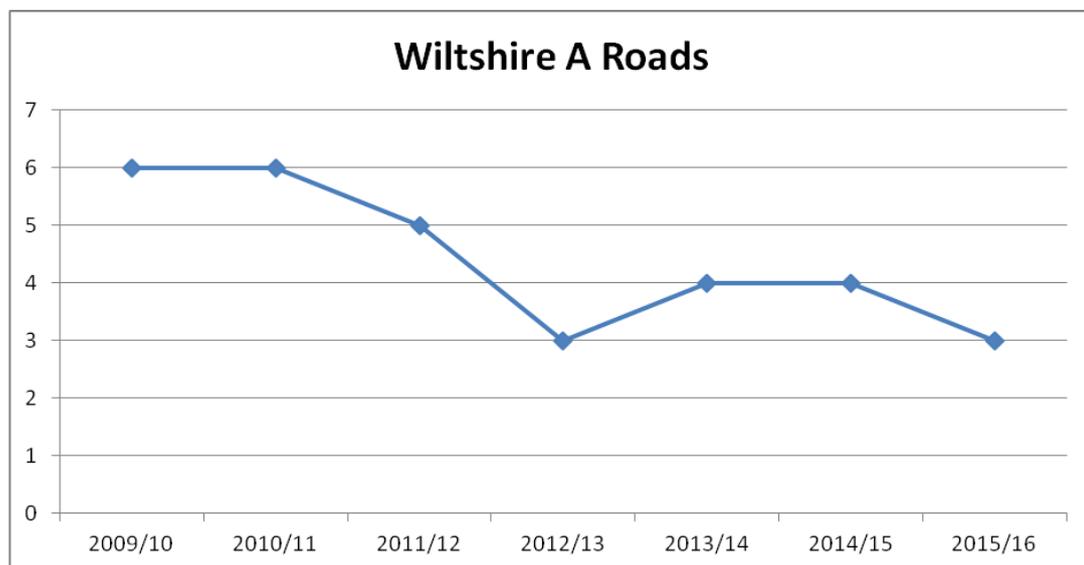
5. The Council's additional investment in road maintenance is initially being targeted at those roads in worst condition, and includes minor roads as well as the main roads. Assessments based on road safety information and road condition data has been used to prepare annual lists of priority sites for treatment which are presented annually to the Area Boards for consideration.
6. The principles of asset management are being applied to the county's road network in order to ensure there is timely intervention to make best use of the resources available. This includes carrying out a programme of surface dressing to prevent to deterioration of the rural network.

7. Some roads need to be treated as priorities in order to address skid resistance and safety problems. As well as addressing the roads in worst condition, improvements are being made to the drainage and footways to bring them up to standard.
8. Following the decision to terminate the highways contract with Balfour Beatty Living Places (BBLP) last year, the road surfacing sub-contracts were transferred to the Council to ensure the continuing delivery of the road maintenance and resurfacing service. The new contractual arrangements enabled the Council to establish a direct contract with the surfacing sub-contractors. This has seen an improvement in service with more certainty of delivery with a good quality of work.
9. The change in contract arrangements involved a number of staff in the reprocurement process. As a result, the circulation of proposed road maintenance information to the Area Boards this year was later than would have been wished. Arrangements are now being made to prepare the proposed list for 2017/18 to enable more time for consultation.
10. An area where delivery has improved significantly in recent months is with regard to the smaller sites where there is localised damage and potholes. These can be particularly difficult because they often need road closures and diversions to enable the works to be carried out safely. Programming these works, and integrating them with works by other on the network, is a challenge, but good progress is now being made.
11. It is proposed to increase the budget for this type of work in 2016/17 in order to address some of the smaller sites which it has not been possible to progress in recent years. It is intended that the local Highways staff will have greater input in identifying priorities, potentially with the CATGs also being involved. The procedures will be developed in more details over the next few months.
12. Unfortunately, during 2015/16 there were a number of sites which it was not possible to complete. These were primarily surface dressing sites, sometimes referred to as 'tar and chip', which is a cheap cost effective way of treating rural roads. However, it does need the underlying road structure to be in good condition as it provides a thin surface to improve skid resistance and seal the road construction, but does not add significantly to the strength to the road.
13. In the event the extent of structural repairs required on some of the minor roads proved larger than anticipated, mainly because of the effects of weather and underlying ground conditions. Consequently, some surface dressing sites had to be deferred into this year. The process has to be carried out during a short period in the summer, and it was not possible to complete the full programme of works last year. This mainly affected roads in rural areas, and the intention is to complete these sites in 2016/17.

14. There were also a few sites which had to be postponed because of public utilities work. This was to avoid the road being dug up soon after being laid. The intention is that any public utility mains and cables should be laid completed before the road is resurfaced.
15. It is proposed that a report should be brought to the Environment Select Committee in October, detailing the progress to date in more detail and the effects of the work completed and likely future priorities. This will include a summary of the schemes reprogrammed this year in connection with the surface dressing programme, and information on road treatments in each Area Board.

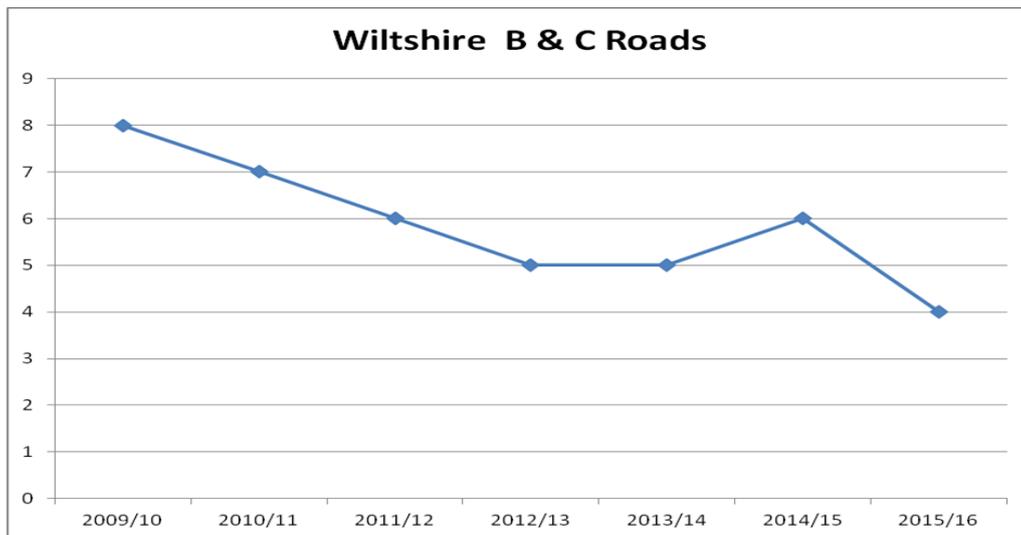
Condition of Roads in Wiltshire

16. The condition of classified roads is measured by technical surveys carried out using vehicle mounted laser scanners to a methodology established by the Department for Transport (DfT). These reflect the overall road condition and have been reported as National Indicators for a number of years.
17. The condition of the classified roads in Wiltshire has improved considerably since 2009/10. The flooding in 2013/14 clearly had an adverse effect on the road network, but the additional investment through the Council’s Local Highways Investment Fund has helped stem this deterioration.
18. The investment made by the Council over the years has seen a reduction in the length of A Class road where treatment should be considered:



Percentage of A Class Roads in Wiltshire in poor condition

19. The B and C class roads have also improved. There has been a reduction in the percentage of road where treatment should be considered in recent years:



Percentage of B and C Class roads in Wiltshire in poor condition

20. The condition data on the unclassified roads is not as robust as for the classified roads, but indications are that these roads are also starting to improve. Data is being collected on the unclassified road network using the same methodology as for the classified roads, but this will take a few years to achieve the same level of detail. At present about 20% of the unclassified network is assessed using this method. Initial analysis of this data indicates that approximately 6% of the surveyed unclassified network is in poor condition.
21. The road conditions in Wiltshire have been compared to other south-west counties. Conditions of the A class roads in Wiltshire, based on the 2013/14 figures published by DfT, are broadly similar to those in Dorset and Somerset, but not as good as those in Devon and Cornwall. The B and C Class roads, which are an important part of the network in Wiltshire, have been better than those of the adjoining counties for a number of years.
22. An assessment has been made of road conditions for each Area Board (see **Appendix 1**). There are some variations between the road types and geographical area, and these will be taken into account in developing the future programmes. However, overall the condition of the county's road network compares favourably with many other highway authorities.

Resilient Road Network

23. The major maintenance work is improving the condition of the highway network and making it more resilient to extremes of weather. The flooding during 2014 affected a number of key routes in the county, and there is a need to identify a core network where specific measures should be considered in order to ensure the continuing availability of the route.

24. The Council already has an identified network of main roads which is the priority to keep open in the event of an extreme snow event. This comprises the busiest main roads, and is about 10% of the network. Once these have been cleared other roads are then treated in accordance with local priorities and conditions. There is a much more substantial network of roads which is subject to precautionary salting when ice is forecast.
25. It is proposed that the core network (see **Appendix 2**) should be designated the 'Wiltshire Resilient Road Network', and should be reviewed to determine whether specific measures are necessary to ensure its continued availability in adverse weather conditions of all types.
26. Any comments on the proposed resilient network, or areas of concern, would be appreciated, especially with regard to any sections of the route which may be considered particularly vulnerable. The proposed network has been included in a recent report to the Area Boards to allow local comments to be made.
27. Extending the length of roads to be included in the core network would not be feasible because of resource limitation with regard to snow ploughing or specific works to improve resilience. If the proposed resilient network is too large it could divert funding away from other roads on the network.

Peer Review

28. The highways service has recently undergone a Peer Review. This was undertaken as part of the Highways Maintenance Efficiency Programme (HMEP), which is funded and supported by the Department for Transport. It involved officers and members from other authorities visiting the Council and, through interviews and focus groups with members and staff, reviewing the highway service.
29. The Peer Review Team included representatives from Surrey, Oxfordshire, Gloucestershire, Dorset and Kent County Councils and from the LGA. The outcome of the Peer Review was very positive (see **Appendix 3**).
30. The review identified that services strengths are:
 - (a) There is strong political and officer leadership.
 - (b) Members support the service, and have a positive relationship with officers.
 - (c) Communities are involved in decision making with CATGs allowing local ownership, decision making and influence.
 - (d) Highways is a lean organisation with many skilled and knowledgeable people.
 - (e) Contract termination and challenging procurement and transition was managed effectively.
 - (f) Work done on asset management so far recognised.
 - (g) Positive intent by staff and partners/contractors to make the service successful.

31. Areas for consideration include:
- (a) Aligning strategic vision with corporate outcomes.
 - (b) Capacity review, staff development and succession planning.
 - (c) Significant short term challenge with contract mobilisation, change management and increased capital programme.
 - (d) application of asset management to all assets.
32. The review identified a number of key strengths of the service in connection with highways asset management, and reported that:
- (i) The case has been successfully made for investment in the infrastructure and in an asset management approach/methodology.
 - (ii) The development of long-term depreciation modelling has started for key assets.
 - (iii) Realised opportunity to create benefits for communities from being a unitary authority:
 - Asset transfer and service delegation project,
 - Communities involved in decision making through Area Boards.
33. The review recommended that a performance management framework should be developed, and that depreciation modelling should be rolled out to all assets to enable longer term programmes.
34. The recommendations of the review will be developed into an action plan for further discussion with the Peer Review Team shortly. Progress on implementing the recommendations of the Peer Review will be reported to a future meeting of this Committee.

Potholes and Carriageway Defects

35. Wiltshire Council has an extensive programme of road resurfacing, but with a backlog of maintenance required on the road network nationally, it is necessary to make localised repairs of potholes and defects to keep the roads safe. The standards applied when inspecting defects are set out in the Highways Inspection Manual and summarised in a briefing note (see **Appendix 4**).

Safeguarding Implications

36. Does not apply.

Public Health Implications

37. Increased investment in road maintenance has benefits for public health. The improved road surfaces, better skid resistance and associated safety improvements help reduce the numbers killed and injured on the road network. These improvements complement the other measures to improve road safety, such as traffic calming and speed limits, being introduced through the Local Transport Plan funding and the Community Area Traffic Groups.

38. The improved road surfaces, particularly on the minor urban roads, will be of benefit to cyclists and pedestrians. At present the condition of some of the urban roads may discourage cycling as cyclists are adversely affected by poor road conditions and uneven or damaged surfaces. The current investment supports the strategy to encourage cycling as set out in the Local Transport Plan.
39. Roads in poor condition in urban areas can result in disturbance and noise for residents, especially on busier routes carrying heavy goods vehicles at night. Better road surfaces should result in reduced background noise in residential areas, with potential mental and physical health benefits.
40. The Council monitors road collision data in order to focus safety improvements at those sites with the worst accident records. With the additional funding this process will continue, and where appropriate other alterations to signing, drainage, street lighting or road markings could be incorporated into resurfacing work and schemes to improve safety.

Environmental and Climate Change Considerations

41. The road network is particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. In the past we have seen the effects of a series of severe winters which have resulted in damage to the roads and an increase in the number of potholes. In early 2014 flooding damaged a number of roads in Wiltshire, and increased deterioration, and last winter was particularly wet causing damage to road surfaces.
42. In the longer term a more robust highway network, with roads in better condition, would require less reactive maintenance and reduced travelling to respond to potholes and localised defects. A planned maintenance regime enables the traffic disruption to be kept to a minimum. With unplanned maintenance the delays to traffic and associated fuel consumption could be considerable.
43. The identification of a Resilient Road Network for the county will help identify the key areas where measures may be required to ensure the continuing availability of main routes in extreme weather conditions.

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

44. The improvements in road safety anticipated with increased investment in road maintenance would be expected to benefit all road users, but especially the more vulnerable, including pedestrians, cyclists and other non vehicle users.
45. The highway network is important to local businesses, and to public transport operators. The delays due to un-programmed maintenance and road repairs have been identified as concerns by local businesses. The high profile programme of works to address road conditions will help send the message that transport is important in Wiltshire and could help to promote inward investment and job creation.

Risk Assessment

46. There are serious risks in connection with road maintenance. These include the safety and reputational aspects of those killed and seriously injured on the highway network. In order to reduce these risks the Council has approved highway inspection and skid resistance procedures in place, but in order to keep the network in safe condition it is important that the highway network has adequate investment, and the safety issues are prioritised.
47. The road condition data collected through the technical surveys is used to focus investment on those sites where there is most need and greatest risk. As well as the safety benefits, this approach also ensures that best use is made of the limited available funding in order to keep the asset in optimum condition.

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision and related work is not taken

48. The risks to the Council from lack of road maintenance are in terms of claims against the Council as the result of accidents, or in extreme cases prosecution as a result of particular incidents. As well as the safety and cost aspects, there are also significant reputational implications of such events.
49. Not carrying out highway maintenance would lead to declining public satisfaction in the future as road conditions remain the same and no progress is made on improving them.

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision is taken and actions that will be taken to manage these risks

50. There is a risk that the current programme will not deliver the improvements in road condition anticipated. This risk will be managed by using the technical data to focus the necessary investment on those sections of road where work is required to meet safety requirements, and on those places where it would improve road conditions the most. Effective asset management will reduce this risk and make sure the investment is effective.
51. There is a risk that the investment will not increase public satisfaction with the service. In view of the initial results from those authorities which have made a substantial investment it would appear that satisfaction levels will improve with the investment.

Financial Implications

52. The Council's approved budget has included increased investment to deliver the Council's Business Plan with regard to road maintenance. This has been £21 million for the past two years, with a further £3 million for bridge maintenance. This investment above the Local Transport Plan (LTP) funding levels provided by government is making a significant improvement to the condition of the highways asset.

Legal Implications

53. The Council has a duty under the Highways Act to maintain the county's roads. The highway inspection procedures, policies and improvement plans ensure that this duty is fulfilled. The increased investment and improved road conditions is helping the Council meet its responsibilities with regard to road maintenance.

Options Considered

54. The Council reviews its proposed road maintenance programme annually in order to make best use of the latest information and take into account deterioration of the road conditions because of weather or other factors.

Conclusions

55. The conditions of the road network are important to the public, and this is reflected through the People's Voice and National Highways and Transportation surveys.
56. In Wiltshire there has been expenditure above anticipated LTP funding levels in Wiltshire which is improving the condition of Wiltshire's highway network. The Highways Investment Fund 2014 – 2020 over the six years will provide a significant improvement to the condition of the network, including improving the condition of the unclassified roads, and improving safety on the classified roads.

Parvis Khansari
Associate Director Highways and Transport

Report Author:

Peter Binley

Head of Highways Asset Management,
Wiltshire Council, County Hall, Trowbridge, Wiltshire BA14 8JN
(e-mail: peter.binley@wiltshire.gov.uk)

Background Papers

The following unpublished documents have been relied on in the preparation of this report: None

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Road Conditions by Area Board
Appendix 2 – Resilient Road Network
Appendix 3 – Outcome of HMEP Peer Review
Appendix 4 – Potholes and Carriageway Defects