

Wiltshire Council

Environment Select Committee

25 October 2016

Subject: Highways Peer Review

Cabinet Member: Cllr Philip Whitehead – Highways and Transport

Key Decision: No

Executive Summary

In November 2016, Cabinet agreed to an independent review of the highways service through the Highways Maintenance Efficiency Programme (HMEP) Strategic Peer Review process, which is funded and supported by the Department for Transport (DfT). The proposal was for a challenge and review process where officers and members from other authorities help an authority's highways service identify opportunities for improvement, greater efficiencies and change.

The review took place in February 2016 and involved interviews with focus groups of members, staff, customers and partners, and individual interviews with Cabinet Members and senior managers, as well as reviewing service strategies and operational plans. The outcome of the Peer Review was very positive.

Following the review the team returned to Wiltshire for an Action Planning Day on 26 April 2016. An action plan was developed in conjunction with the team, and project teams have now been set up to take forward the various improvements identified (see **Appendix 1**).

Progress on implementing the recommendations of the Peer Review will be reported to this Committee next year.

Proposal

The Committee is requested to note:

- (i) the positive results of the HMEP Peer Review earlier this year, and that progress is being made on implementing its recommendations.
- (ii) the progress on implementing the Action Plan will be reported to a meeting of this Committee next year.

Reason for Proposal

There have been significant changes in the Council's Highways Service over the last few years. These include a significant increase in capital expenditure in maintenance through the Local Highways Investment Fund 2014-20, a substantial reduction in revenue funding, termination and procurement of the term maintenance contract, and restructuring of the service a number of times since Wiltshire became a unitary council.

It was important to get an independent view on whether, after all these changes the service is fit for purpose and provides value for money to the residents. Following the positive results of the Peer Review an Action Plan for service improvements has been developed.

Dr. Carlton Brand
Corporate Director

Wiltshire Council

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Key Decision: No

Purpose of Report

1. To advise the Committee on the progress being made with the implementation of the recommendations of the recent Peer Review of the Highways Service.

Relevance to the Council's Business Plan

2. The Council's Business Plan has three key priorities to look after the vulnerable, boost the economy and support resilient communities. The Highways Service plays an important role in delivering these priorities.

Background

3. Since 2011, the Department for Transport (DfT) has run the Highways Maintenance Efficiency Programme (HMEP) in order to create efficiencies in how highway services in England are managed. One of the initiatives resulting from this programme was to offer a Strategic Peer Review by officers and members from other authorities to help an authority's highways service identify radical opportunities for improvement, greater efficiencies and change. The review is led by Local Government Association (LGA). The objectives of the review are to:
 - enhance the process of improving highways delivery to realise transformational efficiencies and change
 - allow an authority to understand potential improvements set within the wider strategic context of Council operations
 - inform decision-making and provide (re)assurance from fellow professionals or 'peers'
 - encourage engagement, collaboration and commitment to action across the Council and service provider
 - promote the sharing of good practice through peer-to-peer engagement as well as empowering individuals to collaborate across authorities
4. The review in Wiltshire was undertaken earlier this year, and was structured to focus on four areas of the business, including assessing how the Council's delivery takes into account national and local transport policy, corporate vision, stakeholder expectations, legal and financial constraints. Consideration of the

Council's strategy, performance, data and information, and lifecycle planning and works programmes, review of leadership, risk management, asset management, performance monitoring, programme and service delivery and procurement.

5. An initial scoping meeting was held with LGA in November 2015, and as well as the HMEP's objectives, the Council asked that the review should particularly focus on effectiveness of the service in allocation of resources, procurement and contract management, engagement with the Local Enterprise Partnership, and engagement with customers and communities.
6. The review took place between 22 and 24 February 2016 in County Hall, and the key messages from the review team were:
 - The service has successfully overcome some significant difficulties during transition of contracts in the last few months.
 - There will need to be strong leadership and focus on the challenges you face over the coming months.
 - The new arrangements are universally welcomed, but ensure that you stay awake to the issues that are impacting on delivery.
 - Consider how shared learning/alignment with wider Council initiatives can assist the service in its development.
 - Once the operational issues are stabilised, consideration should be given to longer term strategies and sustainability, including vision and key outcomes for the service and how these will be delivered, future procurement and role of the client organisation and the capabilities needed in the future.
7. The findings of the review were reported to this Committee on 12 April 2016. A summary of the review findings and the recommendations are included in **Appendix 1**.

Main Considerations for the Council

8. The Peer Review team returned to Wiltshire on 26 April 2016 to help the Council develop an action plan to take forward the recommendations of the review.
9. The discussions identified a series of actions for implementations. In order to progress the action list the highways managers held a workshop on 10 June 2016. This set up a series of projects or work streams to implement the improvements suggested by the Peer Review. These include:
 - Developing a Vision for highways.
 - Develop a Performance Management Framework for Highways and for its contractors.
 - Develop Training and Development Framework to secure required skill set and succession.
 - Review CATG Role.
 - Asset Management and Achieving band 3 in the DfT self assessment.
 - Winter Service Transformation.
 - Major Infrastructure Pipeline Management.
 - IT Systems to Support Integration.

- Effective Supply Chain Management.
 - Innovations in New Processes and Technologies.
10. The summary of the current position on these work streams is included as **Appendix 2** of this report. Progress has generally been good so far, but staff do have to fit this work in with their day to day duties, which often has to take precedence, particularly with regard to road safety issues. The programmes for the individual work streams vary according to their complexity or particular deadlines, but it is intended that they should all be substantially completed next year.
11. It is proposed that an update report should be prepared for this Committee next year to report on the implementation of the recommendations of the Peer Review.

Overview and Scrutiny Engagement

12. Members of the Highways Contract Task Group took part in the peer review, and were interviewed by the review team as a Focus Group. Other members of Overview and Scrutiny were also interviewed.

Safeguarding Implications

13. Does not apply.

Public Health Implications

14. Improved management of Highways will help improve safety, air quality and reduce noise, and should support the Council's objectives in public health in several areas.

Procurement Implications

15. Any procurement implication of implementing improvements will be considered in the action plan and reported as necessary.

Environmental and Climate Change Considerations

16. 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.
17. 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.

18. The service improvements proposed following the Peer Review should help improve service delivery and contribute to the resilience of the highway network.

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

19. The improvements proposed following the Peer Review should help improve road maintenance, and would be expected to benefit all road users, but especially the more vulnerable, including pedestrians, cyclists and other non vehicle users.

Risk Assessment

20. There are serious risks in connection with the highways service which are effectively managed. 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 procedures in place, but in order to keep the highway network in safe condition it is important that there is adequate investment, and the safety issues are prioritised.
21. The road condition data collected thorough 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.
22. The recommendations of the Peer Review should help improve the highways service, and reduce the safety, financial and reputational risks associated with the highway network

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

23. There are no decisions required at this stage.

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

24. There are no decisions required at this stage.

Financial Implications

25. The implementation of the recommendations in the Peer Review is aimed at creating efficiencies in the service. Any initiative requiring investment would be supported by a business case to substantiate benefits. In order to obtain maximum funding from DfT for highway maintenance it is necessary to demonstrate the application of best practice, and this includes having had a Peer Review of the highways service.

Legal Implications

26. The Council has a duty under the Highways Act to maintain the county's roads. The highway service procedures, policies and improvement plans ensure that this duty is fulfilled.

Options Considered

27. The Peer Review will assist the Council in identifying measures to improve delivery of the highways service, and help in obtaining funding from the DfT for highway maintenance.

Conclusions

28. The Council has received a very positive feedback from the Peer Review about the way its Highways Service is managed and delivered. The areas recommended for consideration have been taken forwarded to form an action plan, and progress with its implementation will be reported to this committee next year.

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The following unpublished documents have been relied on in the preparation of this report:

None

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Highways Peer Review Summary
Appendix 2 – Peer Review Action List