

ENVIRONMENTAL SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

11 MAY 2023

Present: Councillor Owen Jones(Chairperson)
Councillors Derbyshire, Gibson, Green, Lancaster, Proctor and Wood

84 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillors De'Ath, Lloyd-Jones and Parry and Shifa Shazad

85 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following declarations of interest were received:

Councillor Gibson	Item 5	Prejudicial	A close friend and a family member are sub contracted by a School Transport provider
Councillor Derbyshire	Item 5	Personal	Grandchildren and school transport users

86 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 April 2023 were approved as a record and were signed by the Chairperson.

87 : HIGHWAY ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Committee received a report providing an opportunity for Members to consider the draft Highways Asset Management Plan which will inform the Cabinet's recommendations to Council for Revenue and Capital spending in 2024/25 and the medium term financial plan. The document aimed to define a strategic long-term approach to highways and other asset maintenance funding.

Members were advised that when the existing Highways Asset Investment Plan (HAMP) was considered by the Environmental Scrutiny Committee and subsequently adopted by the Council in 2016 a 'steady state' of funding was agreed to maintain resources in their current condition, therefore ensuring no deterioration but also no improvement in the highways asset. It was deemed that this would be the best long-term economic solution at the time. The report indicated that this may not be possible in the current economic climate.

The HAMP is used to formalise strategies for investment in Highways asset groups; define service standards; improve how the Highways asset is managed and ensure the most effective service is delivered within available resources.

The HAMP is also intended to align with the aspirations of the corporate priorities of Stronger, Fairer, Greener (SFG) and support the One Planet Cardiff strategy. To achieve this the HAMP will, where possible, develop a low carbon response to Highway maintenance; maximise the integration of sustainable mode use on the

Highway; and regard the Highways within the wider context of creating high quality public realm, based on placemaking, greening, accessibility, and design quality.

Members were advised that city's assets are inspected on a safety first, risk based approach. However in the city centre of the Capital of Wales areas of status using superior materials may need greater inspections to maintain the area as these materials will be more costly to repair/replace. The costs needed to maintain the approved 'steady state' of maintenance in 2016 were recalculated to take into account the cost-of-living increases that are currently affecting the UK. The Committee was asked to note Table 1 in the report which illustrated that the cost of carriageway and footway build/treatment, per square metre, between 2020/21 and 2022/23 and demonstrates an average increase of around 56%:

The Chairperson welcomed Andrew Gregory, Director of Planning, Transport & Environment, Matt Wakelam, Assistant Director Street Scene and Gary Brown, Head of Highways Infrastructure and Operations to the meeting. The officers were invited to provide a presentation.

The Chairperson opened the debate on this item. Members were invited to comment, seek clarification or raise questions on the information received. The discussions are summarised as follows:

- Members noted the 2012-15 HAMP circulated with the report and the current draft plan. Members asked what plan was in place in the intervening years. Officers stated that an investment strategy was brought forward in 2016 with the intention of informing a revised HAMP. However, a number of challenges resulted in a delay prior to the Covid pandemic. Since the Covid pandemic significant changes associated with cost has caused an additional delay.
- Members sought to clarify whether the existing plan and the current level of funding would result in a 'managed decline' of the highways asset. Members were advised that the aim of the HAMP is to indicate that if existing investment levels are maintained then the service will be managing a decline of the highways asset. The HAMP also enables the authority to develop an investment strategy in the longer term that will result in a steady state position.
- Members asked how much of the increased costs were temporary and may come down over time or were more permanent structural increases. Members also sought to establish whether temporary increases in costs could potentially come down in future years and, therefore, improve the position. Officers indicated that discussions have taken place with contractors to ensure that costs are held at existing prices under the competitive tendering framework. A new framework has been introduced under which prices have increased and the authority will be working under that framework for the foreseeable future. Officers considered that any decrease in costs would be marginal.
- Members asked whether the additional cost of degradation of road surfaces from heavier electric vehicles and the implications of road user charging has

been factored into the draft HAMP. Officers stated that cars have very little impact on road surfaces and it was unlikely electric vehicles will have much impact on the condition of the road. The draft HAMP covered the next 3 years and therefore road user charging has not be taken into consideration for this iteration. Future HAMPs will take account of road user charging, behavioural change and other changes in road usage.

- Members asked for a comparison between the cost of basic pothole repair and a more permanent pothole repair solution. Officers stated that once reported a pothole needs to be made safe within a specified timeframe. There are challenges to making such reactive repairs that can affect longevity, such as weather conditions. The cost would be between £5 and £10 per repair. Permanent reinstatement costs between £50 and £100 per pothole depending on the traffic management requirements.
- Members asked whether the authority was able to set specifications for roads built in new developments to higher standards so that the ongoing cost of repair to those surfaces is lower. Members were advised that all roads and bridges are designed to a specification set out in the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges. The specification is dependent on the volume of traffic and types of vehicles that they are carrying. New road designs are presented to the authority by developers and are validated by officers under Section 278 or Section 38 agreements. Other standards, such as streetlighting, are also imposed under those agreements prior to adoption. Members asked whether there was any scope to exceed the specification set out in the manual. Officers stated that there was scope to increase the specification but developers are also tasked with providing other community facilities such as schools, parks and other local facilities within budget and a balance needs to be found in order to achieve those aspirations.
- Officers were asked to explain what is meant by 'carbon reduction' road surfacing and how it differs from conventional road surfacing. Officers advised that a recent carbon reduction road surfacing used a bi-product from local steel production as an aggregate. The product was stored locally which reduces the impact of transportation of the material. The excavated road surface was recycled by the contractor. Conventional road surfacing uses 'virgin' aggregate which is quarried stone that is transported from around the UK and any excavated materials are disposed of. White lining was undertaken by hand using a cold lay method rather than the hot lay method using large plant machinery. Officers considered that the carbon reduction trial on the A470, which also involved carbon off-setting under the Coed Caerdydd project, had been very successful. Responding to a question from the Committee, officers stated that carbon reduction road surfacing is becoming more mainstream and costs are expected to fall as a result. Contractors are now bringing forward proposals for schemes as part of their research and development to 'green' their industry.

- Members asked whether any consideration was given to potential hazards such as drain covers and detritus build-up when new cycleways are designed. Members were advised that the drainage cover design has improved over time to be more cyclist friendly. The network is cleansed regularly and additional new vehicles have been procured to ensure that cycleways are safe to use.
- Members asked whether developers contribute anything toward the maintenance of the road network in and around the areas where developments are taking place. Officers stated that the road network is designed to facilitate all usage including new developments. Developers are not charged for use of the highway. However, discussions do take place regarding the most appropriate routes for delivery vehicles, etc. Heavy vehicles are also re-routed when there are weight restrictions in place. Developers do provide funding for the maintenance of newly adopted roads for a limited time period.
- A Member asked whether officers were aware of a trial taking place in west Wales using hygiene waste (nappies) as part of their road surfacing. Officers were not aware of the trial. However, trials have taken place in Cardiff using a waste product from the energy from waste plant which would consist of all incinerated waste including nappies.
- Members asked whether the reporting of potholes and other failures on the road network was the responsibility of Councillors and residents. Officers stated that there are inspection regimes in place that cover the entire network. Inspections are undertaken, dependent on the usage of the road. All roads are inspected at a minimum within 12 months but some roads are inspected more frequently. Reports of failures from Councillors and residents are also responded to. The same inspection reports are completed in those circumstances.
- Officers confirmed that contracted and in-house repairs are undertaken. Emergency responses are generally in-house. More permanent programmed works are undertaken by contactors. All works are inspected and quality assured to required standards. Works undertaken by utility providers also need to conform to the same quality assurance regime.
- A Member asked how the draft HAMP compared with previous iterations in terms of the financial pressures to achieve a steady state. Officers stated that previous investment levels were at a level to achieve steady state. It was accepted that the draft HAMP faces considerable additional pressure in terms of cost. Officers considered that the financial position pre-2010 was not comparable as the authority had a much larger internal workforce and the types of carriageway repairs were different at that time. New technology in street lighting has also been introduced which means that street lighting is centrally managed and more efficient.

- Members considered that the public perception is that roads receive the majority of investment whilst pavements are neglected. Members asked whether this was a fair characterisation. Officers stated that roads do receive more investment than the footway but investment is linked to deterioration and usage. Members were asked to note that when large road resurfacing schemes are undertaken, it would cost 3 times the funding to resurface the equivalent surface area of footway.
- Members asked whether consideration has been given to introducing a more proactive drainage and gully clearing regime, given the increasing frequency of extreme weather events leading to flooding. Members were advised that there are over 190,000 gullies in the city and the focus is currently on known flood risk areas. An exercise is being undertaken to ascertain the investment required to achieve the optimal balance between programmed and reactive gully clearance. Officers also considered that older drainage systems were not designed to manage the extreme weather events that are becoming more frequent. However, in the future SUDs drainage systems, which are designed to hold volumes of water safely until it can dissipate naturally, will be used.
- Officers were asked to comment on the insurance claim risk to the authority from road and footway faults. Officers stated that a high number of claims are received, the majority of which are vehicular claims. The cost of vehicular claims are lower than personal injury claims.

RESOLVED – That the Chairperson writes to the Cabinet Member on behalf of the Committee to convey any comments, observations and recommendations made during the way forward.

88 : PASSENGER TRANSPORT PROCUREMENT

Councillor Derbyshire declared a personal interest in this item as his grandchildren are school transport users.

Councillor Gibson declared a prejudicial interest in this item as a close friend and a family member are sub contracted by a School Transport provider. Councillor Gibson left the meeting and took no part in the debate.

The Committee received a report providing Members with the opportunity to consider the proposed Passenger Transport Procurement framework which outlines the process for tendering and procuring a range of transport requirements for the Council including school transport needs. The framework also seeks agreement to increase the value of the delegated authority in relation to contracts allocated via the Dynamic Procurement System (DPS) from £49m to £139m from 2018 – 2029 (the contract period) due to a number of identified pressures.

The Chairperson welcomed Andrew Gregory, Director of Planning, Transport and Environment, Steve Gerrard, Network Operations Team Leader and Jason Dixon,

Transport Development and Network Manager to the meeting. The officers were invited to deliver a presentation.

The Chairperson invited question on the confidential papers set out in the report.

RESOLVED – The public be excluded for this part of the meeting as the Committee discuss information which is confidential and exempt from publication as contained in paragraph 14 of Part 4 and paragraph 21 of Part 5 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972. The public may be excluded from the meeting by resolution of the Committee pursuant to Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 during discussion of this item.

The Chairperson then opened the debate on this item. Members were invited to comment, seek clarification or raise questions on the information received.

The discussions are summarised as follows:

- Officers were asked to comment on the age, emissions and general condition of the vehicles used for school transport. Officers stated that different quality standards depending on the classifications of the vehicles. Tendering companies are required to meet those standards in order to join the approved list of contractors. Vehicle age limits are specified and discussions are ongoing with contractors with a view to improving their vehicles to Euro 6 emission standards. Members were asked to note that there are a reduced number of contractors bidding for tenders and these are working at capacity in terms of the number of vehicles available. Furthermore, some school bus services are provided by public bus companies and these will fall outside of the procurement framework. Services that are procured via the framework will receive a higher score during the tendering process for better quality vehicles.
- Members asked whether officers were confident that the services can be provided in the future given the limited number of contractors tendering for contracts. Members were advised that the position is extremely challenging in Cardiff and across Wales. The impact of the Bus Emergency Scheme, where Councils across Wales may be looking to replace public bus services with contracted services, also needs to be factored in. Bus companies have a limited number of drivers available and they are struggling to cover their existing services. These concerns have been raised with the Welsh Government.
- Members asked whether the new schools being built in the city were being built on established bus routes. Officers stated that consultation is undertaken with colleagues in Planning and Education to ensure that schools have good transport links, including bus services and walking and cycling networks.
- Members asked whether the costs of the contracts would reduce in coming years if budgetary pressures such as inflation and fuel costs come down. Members were advised that tendering is undertaken to provide a consistent cost. For example, ALN contracts are 3-year contracts in order to provide stability for the pupils. These include options for inflationary increases.

However, it is difficult to reduce a contract price. Because of the dynamic nature of the service both contractors and the Council need to give 1 months notice to end the contract and contractors are able to withdraw from the contract.

RESOLVED – That the Chairperson writes to the Cabinet Member on behalf of the Committee to convey any comments, observations and recommendations made during the way forward.

89 : COMMITTEE BUSINESS

The Committee received a report providing in update on the recommendations made by the Committee since 2022.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

90 : URGENT ITEMS (IF ANY)

No urgent items.

91 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Members were advised that the next Environment Scrutiny Committee is scheduled for 15 June 2023 subject to agreement at Annual Council.

The meeting terminated at 6.30 pm

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