

**NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL**

**HIGHWAYS AND NEIGHBOURHOODS  
CABINET MEMBER**

**'PREVENTION AND A BETTER CURE' – FINAL REPORT FROM THE  
POTHOLES REVIEW**

**1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT**

- 1.1 To update the Cabinet Member on the published final 'Pothole Review' report by the Potholes Group as part of the Department for Transport's Highways Maintenance Efficiency Programme.
- 1.2 The report identifies three main themes – prevention is better than cure, focus on 'right first time' and clarity for the public.
- 1.3 The report concludes with 17 recommendations and this report outlines the council's current position in regard to each of these.

**2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 2.1 The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, commissioned a review into potholes as part of the Highways Maintenance Efficiency Programme (HMEP). A progress report was issued in December 2011. The final report from the review was subsequently published in April 2012.
- 2.2 The report refers to the £3 billion allocated from government to local highway authorities through the Local Transport Plan (LTP) for road maintenance over the next four years. It also highlights the £200 million allocated 12 months ago to address the effects of severe weather, of which North Lincolnshire was awarded £1,018,520.
- 2.3 The report also recognises the range of issues impacting on the ability of councils to adequately maintain the highway network. These include the obvious topics such as:
  - harsh winter weather;
  - the range of different designs and standards used as the network has developed over many years; and
  - varying investment levels

as well as issues such as standing water and inadequate drainage, the ingress of water and the freeze-thaw cycle.

- 2.4 There are three key messages or themes identified in the Review:
- **Prevention is better than cure** – intervening at the right time will reduce the amount of potholes forming and prevent bigger problems later.
  - **Right first time** – do it once and get it right, rather than face continuous repair bills. Guidance, knowledge and workmanship are the enablers to this.
  - **Clarity for the public** – local highway authorities need to communicate to the public what is being done and how it is being done.
- 2.5 The Review calls for a more robust evidence base to inform funding decisions at all levels. Recommendations are made for guidance on calculating the economic benefits of highway maintenance and the value of providing greater long term certainty to the funding of highway maintenance by both central and local government.
- 2.6 A recommendation for a specific quality scheme for the sector to introduce is also included.
- 2.7 The review refers to the Audit Commission Report ‘Going the Distance’ which recommended adopting the principles of asset management when making investment decisions. The review claims that not all authorities have adopted these principles even though the benefits are widely understood. It goes on to note that the Department for Transport is spreading best practice with regard to asset management including through HMEP.
- 2.8 The report concludes with 17 recommendations for councils to consider across the three key messages or themes. These are detailed in Appendix 1 (attached). Each has been annotated with the council’s current position in regard to each. All recommendations have been addressed through current practices. Applying the principles of good asset management across our entire highway infrastructure is the key to further improvements.

### 3. **OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION**

- 3.1 There is no doubt that the key recommendation is to ensure that we implement ‘prevention and a better cure’ and to use asset management data and techniques to identify our schemes of work. This will enable us to reduce reactive maintenance requirements and enhance our proactive works programme.
- 3.2 The analysis of our asset management data must also align to our Highway scheme prioritisation methodology, such that proactive surface treatment works become a focused priority for LTP funding allocations.

#### **4. ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS**

- 4.1 A reprioritisation of resources is required to reduce the amount of reactive maintenance work. Funding will need targeting over a number of years at resurfacing and surface treatment works needed prior to potholes forming.
- 4.2 Whilst we have the ability through our asset management experience to predict where proactive repairs are required, it is essential that there is an agreed Highway prioritisation system that clearly identifies where capital investment and LTP funding is required to achieve the maximum impact on the eradication of potholes formation.

#### **5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCIAL, STAFFING, PROPERTY, IT)**

##### 5.1 Financial

- 5.1.1 The performance of the council in spending against transport priorities and targets is measured against National Indicators and, for the LTP in particular, through the delivery reporting mechanisms within the council's Local Transport Plan 2011/26.
- 5.1.2 Directing funding towards the prevention of potholes will require the council to make the decision that this is a key priority that they wish to pursue in regards to highway maintenance investment.

5.2 There are no staffing, property or IT implications to consider.

#### **6. OTHER IMPLICATIONS (STATUTORY, ENVIRONMENTAL, DIVERSITY, SECTION 17 – CRIME AND DISORDER, RISK AND OTHER)**

##### 6.1 Statutory

- 6.1.1 We have a duty to produce an LTP and report to government on our three year Delivery Plan. As the highway authority, we also have a duty to maintain the highway network.

##### 6.2 Environmental

- 6.2.1 Enhancing our asset management approach to preventing the formation of potholes and improving our proactive repair techniques will reduce the quantity and reliance on the use of virgin aggregates.

6.3 There are no other implications to consider.

## **7. OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION**

- 7.1 The LTP was the subject of an extensive consultation exercise to identify transport priorities and needs. This is reflected in the three-year delivery plan.
- 7.2 The outcomes from this consultation were built into the LTP. The key priority was identified as the condition of the highway and footway networks.

## **8. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 8.1 That the Cabinet Member notes current progress by the council against the recommendations of the report.
- 8.2 That the Cabinet Member considers the adoption of a targeted approach to pro-active resurfacing and surface treatments as a key highway priority.

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Date: 30 May 2012

### **Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:**

'Prevention and a better cure' – Final report from the Potholes Review published April 2012 by HMEP - on behalf of the Department for Transport.

## Theme: Prevention is better than cure

### Recommendation 4 - Economic Benefits of Highway Maintenance

**To evaluate and justify the need for investment in maintenance of the local highway network, the Department for Transport should work in conjunction with local highway authorities to develop advice on determining economic costs and benefits.**

We maintain links with DfT at all times and will receive updates and advice from them as soon as it is issued. We also attend regular CiPFA/IPF meetings where regular asset management updates are given, and these often include direct updates from DfT together with workshop and feedback opportunities. The CiPFA platform is essential to maintaining good practice links relating to Highways Asset Management.

### Recommendation 5 - Commitment of Highway Maintenance Budgets

**The Government should commit to establishing budgets for highway maintenance for the full four years of Comprehensive Spending Review periods. This will provide greater budget certainty for the highway sector. Local highway authorities should ensure their funding for highways maintenance is aligned to this time period.**

We currently work to a 3 year budget timescale within the LTP and Capital expenditure process. The LTP funding is confirmed through to the next Comprehensive Spending Review. We would welcome the opportunity to extend this to a longer profile period, providing funding was fully available for this period. Longer periods of financial planning are better aligned to asset management processes.

### Recommendation 6 - Prevention is Better than Cure

**Local highway authorities should adopt the principle that ‘prevention is better than cure’ in determining the balance between structural, preventative and reactive maintenance activities in order to improve the resilience of the highway network and minimise the occurrence of potholes in the future.**

We are currently developing our latest generation of our Highway Asset Management Plan (HAMP), through which we are developing whole life costing models across our highway assets. This recognises and analyses, reactive/planned maintenance programmes of work, and develops long term programmes of work to appropriately maintain at appropriate times within the lifecycle. i.e. resurface/repair at the appropriate intervention period with the appropriate treatment to arrest deterioration.

### Recommendation 7 - Informed Choices

**Local highway authorities should ensure that appropriate competencies are available to make the right choices when designing and specifying techniques and materials for the maintenance and repair of highways. These competencies can be secured through training, collaboration with neighbouring authorities or external advice.**

We recognised the need for appropriate materials advice, knowledge of techniques etc a number of years ago when we established the Asset Management Team, and in particular the Asset Evaluation section. This is headed by an experienced materials/road pavement Engineer. We also have regular asset management/materials meetings with neighbouring authorities. This is borne out of many years of a shared “materials laboratory” and materials advisory service, a legacy of the former Humberside County Council.

### **Recommendation 8 - Guidance on Materials**

**Comprehensive guidance should be made available in the design, specification and installation of materials for the maintenance and repair of highways, to ensure the use of appropriate materials for the right site. This guidance should be produced by the sector for the sector.**

We currently use Highways Agency documents (e.g. HD36) as supplemented by advisory documents produced by ADEPT (Formerly CSS), and further supplemented by our own extensive local knowledge and materials/specification experience. We would welcome any further national guidance to further supplement this knowledge base. We are also monitoring the outputs from HMEP groups.

### **Recommendation 15 - Co-ordinating Street Works**

**All parties undertaking works on the highway should share and co-ordinate short and long term programmes of work for up to four years in advance, based on good asset management practice.**

Regular meetings already take place to coordinate street work activities, and discuss long term programmes. The Traffic Manager also attends our regular monthly LTP and Capital monitoring programme meetings.

### **Recommendation 16 - Minimising Highway Openings**

**All parties involved in reinstatements must consider the need to minimise long term damage from the installation, renewal, maintenance and repair of utility and highway apparatus through alternative and innovative ways of working. Trenchless technology should be considered as part of this decision making process.**

(See Recommendation 15) It is recognised by us and the industry that trenches cut into road surfaces accelerate the deterioration of those surfaces and should be minimised. We have provided input and advice in the past to the latest Specification for the Opening of Highways, in order to improve reinstatement specifications.

## **Theme: Right First Time**

### **Recommendation 14 - Quality of Repairs and Reinstatements**

**To drive up standards, a quality scheme similar to a National Highway Sector Scheme should be developed by the sector to cover all aspects of manual surfacing operations, including pothole repairs and reinstatements, and its use specified by local highway authorities and utility companies.**

We would agree with this principle, as it would supplement the numerous sector schemes now in place nationally. We would be willing to participate in any forum that is established for developing this sector scheme.

### **Recommendation 13 - Guidance on Repair Techniques**

**Local highway authorities should consider the guidance provided in the ADEPT report Potholes and Repair Techniques for Local Highways and adopt as appropriate to their local circumstances.**

Through our involvement with the Northern Soils and Materials group of ADEPT, we had direct input to this document, and actively

consider the advice and information contained within it. It will be incorporated within our Highway maintenance manual, which is currently being developed alongside our HAMP.

### **Recommendation 11 - Inspection and Training**

**Local highway authorities should utilise inspection manuals to support implementation of their inspection policies. They should also ensure that highway inspectors are trained, qualified and competent in the identification and assessment of defects, including potholes, through a scheme accredited by the Highway Inspectors Board.**

North Lincolnshire Council recognised the need to develop a detailed highway inspection manual a couple of years ago. We have also since trained all of our Highway Inspectors to an accredited City and Guilds level, through modules approved by our current insurers and the Highway Inspectors Board.

### **Recommendation 12 - Technology**

**Local highway authorities should consider using proven technology and systems for the effective identification and management of potholes.**

Through the Asset Evaluation Team, highway condition is monitored using the currently available techniques and technology (e.g. Scanner/Scrim). UKPMS systems are utilised to analyse data and output information in order to develop prioritised programmes of work. We are currently considering extending this analysis capability by purchasing further asset evaluation tools e.g. Scheme Engineer. A comprehensive “street level” database (CONFIRM) is utilised to monitor customer queries, record identified defects, and record issued work instructions and has been in place now for a good number of years.

### **Recommendation 17 - Research and Innovation**

**The sector will benefit from supporting, co-ordinating, contributing and disseminating research on all aspects of pothole operations. Innovation from such research may continue to provide opportunities for improvement of pothole management and operations.**

We have for a number of years provided data for the preparation of annual “pothole” reports e.g. that published by the Asphalt Industry Alliance – the ALARM Survey. We have comprehensive records of asset condition, and records of “pothole” programmes through our CONFIRM asset management and customer service database.

## **Theme: Clarity**

### **Recommendation 3 - Public Communications**

**Local highway authorities should have an effective public communications process that provides clarity and transparency in their policy and approach to repairing potholes. This should include a published policy and details of its implementation, including the prevention, identification, reporting, tracking and repair of potholes.**

We currently have advice and information on potholes and repair programmes on our web site. During the last two years of pothole

repairs that have been comprehensively funded, we have worked hard through our web site to provide weekly work updates and maps of areas where works have been completed/planned. Further work is needed to develop/improve the information on the web site. Further improvements to the customer interface and a web based reporting system is due to be introduced in June/July this year.

### **Recommendation 2 - Public Opinion Surveys**

**Local highway authorities should monitor public satisfaction with road, footway and cycleway condition and repair annually through the National Highways and Transport Public Satisfaction Survey or their own surveys. The findings can be used to benchmark performance and taken into consideration in local highway maintenance policies.**

We monitor all lines of communications and customer contacts with both members of the public and councillors. This provides a vital tool to both determine levels of satisfaction and informs policy and decision making in regard to areas which require investment. Surveys are also carried out determine customer comments following the larger planned schemes of work. There has been a conscious decision not to participate in the NHT survey process.

### **Recommendation 10 - Permanent Repairs Policy**

**Local highway authorities should adopt permanent repairs as the first choice. Temporary repairs should only be used where safety cannot be managed using alternative approaches and in emergency circumstances.**

As previously discussed, the HAMP process identifies long term costing and maintenance models. Comprehensive survey and analysis work is undertaken to identify and prioritise schemes. Safety inspections are undertaken to programmes and appropriate reactive treatments identified, risk assessed and works prioritised. In the round of pothole repairs over the last 2 years, information fed back to DFT indicates that of the money spent on repairs some 20% was spent on temporary repairs and 80% on permanent works.

### **Recommendation 9 - Definition of Potholes**

**To provide clarity, local highway authorities should adopt dimensional definitions for potholes based on best practice as part of their maintenance policy. Response times and treatment of potholes should be based on local needs, consideration of all highway users, and an assessment of risk.**

Our highway inspection manual includes definitions of "potholes" their dimensions and required intervention timescales based upon a risk assessment. A new web based customer interface is currently being developed across all areas of the Council services. For highways this will require a more defined approach to customer query response, a risk based assessment of required inspection and maintenance responses.

### **Recommendation 1 - Strengthen Well-maintained Highways**

**Well-maintained Highways should be revised and strengthened to include all recommendations of this Review which are relevant to local highway authorities.**

We are currently developing Well Maintained Highways as the basis of our maintenance manual to complement and sit within our HAMP documentation. There is a national need for Well Maintained Highways to be constantly reviewed and supplemented.