

SEVENOAKS JOINT TRANSPORTATION BOARD 18 SEPTEMBER 2007

THE HIGHWAY DRAINAGE SERVICE

Report of the: Divisional Director, Kent Highway Services

Status: For Consideration

Executive Summary: This report advises Members of planned changes to the highway drainage service.

Portfolio Holder Cllr. London

Head of Service Divisional Manager, Kent Highway Services – Norman Bateman

Recommendations: It be RESOLVED that Members note the contents of this report.

Background

1. At the last meeting of this Board, Members requested a summary of the Highway Authority's policy for carrying out maintenance and improvement of highway drainage.

Discussion

2. Kent County Council has a legal obligation to drain the highway. This is achieved in one of four ways:
 - "over the edge" whereby water flows directly from the road onto adjacent land. Maintenance is limited to very irregular clearing of any drainage ditches there may be alongside the road.
 - Into gullies which discharge into a soakaway or pond owned by KCC. Records of these soakaways' locations are incomplete and there is no check as to their efficacy. To prevent a soakaway becoming clogged with mud and silt, there needs to be a special manhole (termed a "catchpit") immediately upstream of the soakaway. Catchpits need to be regularly emptied.
 - Into gullies which connect to drains owned by KCC which in turn discharge into a watercourse. The piped network can vary in length from a few metres to several kilometres and may have many intervening manholes. Records of their locations are incomplete.
 - Into gullies which connect to the sewerage authority's sewer network

3. Routine maintenance is limited to emptying gully pots of silt and mud. The frequency varies according to the risk of blockage and those at locations with no history of flooding will be cleaned very infrequently (e.g. once in five years). Other locations (e.g. at low points or under trees) will be cleaned at least once a year. The remainder of the network is only maintained in response to a reported fault or defect.
4. Since the formation of Kent Highway Services (KHS) in April 2005, Officers have become increasingly aware that highway drainage across Kent has suffered from an inconsistent maintenance and investment regime. The reasons for these shortcomings vary depending on which former Highway Unit carried out this function but common issues were fragmentation of expertise, the lack of specific funding to carry out asset condition assessments and insufficient budgets to carry out reactive maintenance.
5. Remedying these shortcomings is a high priority for KHS and work is already underway in advance of a specialist Highway Drainage Team being created in January 2008. The aim is to deliver high quality highway drainage that offers a safe, sustainable, cost-effective and technically sound service that is sufficiently flexible to reflect changing demands and innovation. Current methodology, staffing, plant, working hours, costs, budget, performance and public liaison are all being reviewed in order to gain a clear understanding of constraints and barriers to success. Central to these objectives are the following tasks:
 - creating a single asset champion who will be responsible for the entire highway drainage network
 - creating a detailed inventory of the location and condition of every gully, pipe, ditch, manhole, soakaway and outfall
 - developing the KHS Budget Allocation Model to more accurately reflect prioritised technical need
 - developing cyclic inspection and maintenance programmes for gullies, catchpits and soakaways that reduce the likelihood of unplanned reactive works. This would eventually allow frequencies and standards of routine maintenance to be optimised for every component of the drainage network
 - optimising the use of gully cleaning vehicles by developing working methods that minimise non-productive travel and standing time
 - implementing a level of monitoring sufficient to set reliable service performance criteria
 - formalising procedures and standards of service to be applied during floods and flood emergencies
 - funding investigation of reported drainage problems to identify what capital works are required to resolve them

6. Although work has already commenced on the above, the logistics are immense and there are significant challenges facing this service.
- To deliver the level of improvement being sought will require up-front investment. Without additional funding from central Government, funds currently allocated elsewhere in the KHS Budget Allocation Model will need to be diverted. The business case for this is being prepared and will be considered as part of the 2008-09 budget round.
 - Despite the improvements that will be carried out to the drainage network, the effects of climate change will result in more intense storms and this will result in more severe flooding.
 - Revisions to the Waste Disposal Regulations that take effect in October 2007 will make disposal of any sludge, etc, removed from a drain more difficult and more expensive to dispose
 - If implemented, current EU proposals will require KCC to treat more highway run-off before discharging it into watercourses
7. The primary objective of this new way of working is to drain the highway more effectively and more efficiently. This will make roads in Kent safer and more pleasant to use and will reduce KCC's exposure to public liability claims. Whilst this improvement in service could lessen the incidence of private property being flooded, resolution of such problems will remain a low priority, even if water flowing from the highway is a significant cause of the problem. Aside from improvements to the maintenance regime, the highest priority will continue to be the resolution of flooding on high speed roads and other high-risk locations.

Key Implications

Financial

None for Sevenoaks District Council as a result of this report.

The financial implications for Kent County Council will be incorporated into the Highway Maintenance Budget Model. Assuming no additional funds in 2008/09 are forthcoming from central Government, the desired outputs set-out in this report will require the diversion of funds currently allocated to maintaining and improving other elements of the highway network.

Resource (non-financial)

To make best use of all available data, Officers of Sevenoaks District Council will need to trawl their files to release any information on the highway drainage network that is still held by them.

The resource implications for Kent County Council have yet to be quantified.

Legal etc.

No implications for Sevenoaks District Council as a result of this report.

The legal implications for Kent County Council are integral to the Highway Maintenance Budget Model.

Value For Money

None for Sevenoaks District Council as a result of this report.

The value for money implications for Kent County Council are integral to the Highway Maintenance Budget Model.

Sources of Information:

none

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RISK ASSESSMENT STATEMENT

The Highway Maintenance Budget Model is, essentially, a risk assessment statement.