

Committee	Communities Scrutiny Committee
Date	18 April, 2024
Title	Highways Maintenance Manual
Aelod Cabinet	Councillor Berwyn Parry Jones
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Purpose	Update Members on the Highways Maintenance Manual

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Local highway authorities have a specific duty under the Highways Act 1980 to maintain their adopted highways as maintainable at public expense and to keep them same for public use.
- 1.2 Various national codes of practice have been issued over the years to encourage best practice and to adopt asset management procedures that take a more holistic approach to maintaining the highway network and thus defend authorities from claims or legal action.
- 1.3 In line with the recommendations in the prevailing code of practice 'Well-maintained Highways, Code of Practice for Highway Maintenance Management 2005', the Council published its Highways Asset Management Plan (HAMP) in July 2010. Gwynedd's HAMP was considered to be comprehensive and few other highway authorities had adopted a similar plan at the time.
- 1.4 The HAMP has served its purpose over the years, not only as a daily guide to how to maintain the county's highways but also to protect the Council against third party claims and court cases. Between the 1st of April 2016 and the 1st of April this year, the Council has received 343 third party claims and has been able to successfully defend 294 of them; a success rate of almost 86% This compares very favorably with other highway authorities and the Risk Co-ordinator and Insurance Manager attributes this to the robustness of the Plan.
- 1.5 A new code of practice was introduced in 2016, namely '*Well-managed Highway Infrastructure: A Code of Practice*'. The new code promoted the adoption of an integrated asset management approach to highway maintenance based on the establishment of local levels of service through risk-based management.
- 1.6 In order to ensure that all local authorities in Wales complied with the requirements of the new code, the County Surveyor's Society Wales (CSSW) commissioned specialist consultants to formulate a nationally consistent approach to the new guidelines. Consequently, rather than have one Highway Asset Management Plan to define how they managed their road networks (similar to the Council's existing HAMP), CSSW recommended that each authority publish a suite of documents that support their method of managing their highway asset. The Highway Maintenance Manual is one of these documents.

- 1.7 Highway Maintenance Manuals set out how councils meet their duties as the highway authority; confirm the methods used to ensure that the risk to users of the highway network is appropriately monitored and managed and ensure consistency in how standards are implemented.

In order to achieve all of these, CSSW proposed that authorities undertook the following:

- establish a network hierarchy
- establish an inspection regime
- establish a repair procedure
- use risk to influence how the budget is allocated

- 1.8 The Council already had a network hierarchy, inspection regime and repair procedure in place, and the standards and practices in its HAMP were largely risk based. However, they were probably not entirely consistent with the requirements of the new code and CSSW's recommendations. Consequently, the Department reviewed its existing arrangements (hierarchy, inspection and repair) and established standards that were the same, if not better, than those proposed by CSSW. These are the standards included in the Council's new Highway Maintenance Manual (see Appendix 1).

2. Adopting the Manual

- 2.1 The Department submitted the new Highway Maintenance Manual to the Cabinet in July, 2023 for its full adoption.

- 2.2 The adoption of the new manual ensured that:

- the Council's highway asset maintenance procedures comply with current national guidelines
- the delivery of a safe and well-maintained highway network
- that appropriate maintenance standards are implemented consistently throughout Gwynedd
- that the Council's standards and approach to implementation are consistent with other highway authorities within Wales.
- that the Council will continue to be able to defend third-party claims and legal action by individuals
- that future highway maintenance budget allocations are influenced by risk rather than by other factors.

3. Next Steps

- 3.1 By introducing the changes referred to above, we also adopted a new regime for responding to safety defect along with making use of the asset management system (WDM) to identify and prioritise the planned structural capital works programme.

Safety Defect

- 3.2 Clause 7.1 of the manual identifies our defect categories and are contained within (table 2):

- Critical defect
- Safety defect
- Maintenance defect

- 3.3 Since adopting of the new manual, and as part of the changes the safety defect response has now changed to a response by the end of the next working day.
- 3.4 This change has allowed us to programme work more effectively seeing packages of work being prepared.
- 3.5 To date, no concerns have been identified since the new procedure was introduced, however we will continue to monitor the situation over the coming months. The following graph provides information on the number of safety defects reported on an area basis.



Capital Work Programme/WDM Asset Management System

- 3.6 Our capital works programme will use the following categories to identify the roads to be treated:
- Hierarchy (traffic/usage)
 - Scanner data (rutting, texture, road profile) RCI
 - Visual condition (video survey analysis) CVI data updated annually
 - Area and local network priorities
 - Deficit levels – 3 year deficit history/aggregate score/km
 - Age of construction
- 3.7 We are currently in the process of preparing the programme of works based on the above information which will reflect the real priority of roads that need attention and on a Gwynedd-wide basis. This programme will be shared with all Gwynedd Councillors within the next few weeks.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1 It will take some time to fully assess the impact of the changes but to date, no concerns have been raised. On the contrary, being able to respond to safety defects by the end of the next working day has certainly improved our on-the-ground work arrangements.
- 4.2 There are significant pressures on the Highway Maintenance budget and provision of Gwynedd's priority-based programme of work will evidence which road is to be prioritised.