

Report

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Report to:	Risk and Audit Scrutiny Forum
Date of Meeting:	19 May 2011
Report by:	Executive Director (Enterprise Resources)

Subject:	Audit Scotland - Maintaining Scotland's Roads – Follow Up Report
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1. Purpose of Report

1.1. The purpose of the report is to:-

- ◆ Provide details of the conclusions of the Audit Scotland report entitled "Maintaining Scotland Roads".
- ◆ Provide the views of the Resource on the key issues raised

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1. The Committee is asked to approve the following recommendation(s):-

- (1) that the conclusions of the Audit Scotland report and the views of the Resource be noted.

3. Background

3.1. In November 2004, a report entitled "Maintaining Scotland's roads" was published by the Accounts Commission and the Auditor General for Scotland. This report made a series of recommendations and the purpose of the recent follow up report by Audit Scotland was to assess progress on implementing the recommendations of the 2004 report.

4. Key Messages from the Audit Scotland report

4.1. It is noted that the condition of Scotland's roads are worsening with only 63% now in acceptable condition.

Comment

This is unsurprising given the report also identifies a 13% investment cut in real terms since 2004 and traffic growth of 27% over the past 15 years.

4.2. The national carriageway maintenance backlog is estimated at £2.25 billion.

Comment

This figure has been in the public domain for some time. It derives from the annual Scottish Road Maintenance Condition Survey facilitated by the Society of Chief Officers of Transportation in Scotland (SCOTS).

- 4.3. All types of road have deteriorated over the past 5 years with the rate of deterioration greatest on A class trunk roads.

Comment – SLC position

	<u>2009-11</u>	<u>2008-10</u>	<u>2007-09</u>	<u>2006-08</u>
Road Condition Indicator	38.0	37.5	37.5	39.2

In recent years the annual condition survey suggests the condition of our network is remaining broadly static. The Road Condition Indicator comprises the percentage of roads which the survey identifies as requiring attention now and those which require to be considered for attention. Hence, low values are better.

- 4.4. This Council's approach in committing to the £126million Roads and Rural Investment Plan is highlighted as an example of good practice.

Comment

This recognition is obviously welcomed.

- 4.5. Councils were encouraged, in the 2004 report, to annually report to elected members the condition of the road network and the maintenance backlog. It is noted that less than half of Councils report maintenance backlogs in financial terms.

Comment

We do not currently report the maintenance backlog annually in financial terms but do report the extent of the road network which is considered to require attention.

- 4.6. It is noted that, nationally, current levels of investment are insufficient to maintain roads in their current condition.

Comment

We are identified as one of only two Councils who consider our maintenance backlog to be decreasing. This assessment, however, predated the serious impact the recent severe weather has had on our roads.

- 4.7. Aspects of winter maintenance are considered. It is noted that, nationally, 80% of people surveyed were happy with the gritting of A class roads but 71% were dissatisfied with the gritting of minor roads and 83% were dissatisfied with the gritting of pavements. This information was drawn from an AA survey undertaken in January 2010.

Comment

These opinions probably broadly represent views in South Lanarkshire. It is accepted that, during extended severe weather, gritting and snow clearing penetration into minor roads in residential areas is limited. However, significantly increased capital and revenue investment would be required to achieve increased levels of winter service. We are identified as one of only 5 Councils which spent over £5million on winter maintenance last year so we are currently providing a relatively high level of service.

- 4.8. The report is critical of progress nationally in preparing Roads Asset Management Plans.

Comment

We prepared our first draft Roads Asset Management Plan in April 2010. Consistent with the approach being undertaken nationally, we intend to further develop this over the next two years to provide a finalised plan in April 2013. Our view is that a pragmatic approach is required to gathering and maintaining road inventory information. An appropriate balance requires to be struck between holding and maintaining important information and gathering additional data which generates a cost which is out of proportion to its value.

- 4.9. The report is also critical of a lack of meaningful benchmarking utilising appropriate performance indicators. It is noted that the Scottish Chief Officers of Transportation Society (SCOTS) is preparing a suite of performance indicators to facilitate better benchmarking nationally. The report advocates the use of these performance indicators.

Comment

While we are supportive in principle of meaningful benchmarking we are in discussion with relevant SCOTS officers with regard to what we consider to be the excessive number of performance indicators currently proposed and the value of some of them.

- 4.10. A lack of formal monitoring of the environmental impact of road maintenance activities is identified with only two Councils using performance indicators.

Comment

The primary issue is the extent to which excavated/waste materials are recycled. Our contractual arrangements ensure that 100% of our excavated materials are recycled.

- 4.11. It is stated that there is scope for more partnership working on road maintenance issues with reference being made to the Arbuthnott report.

Comment

This is currently being explored further via a national review of road maintenance being led by Transport Scotland.

5. Employee Implications

- 5.1. There are no employee implications associated with this report.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1. There are no financial implications directly associated with this report.

7. Other Implications

- 7.1. While, nationally, the condition of roads has deteriorated, South Lanarkshire Council has recognised this and has mitigated against this risk by putting in place the Roads Investment Plan.

8. Equality Impact Assessment and Consultation Arrangements

- 8.1. This report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy or recommend a change to an existing policy, function or strategy and therefore, no impact assessment is required.

Colin McDowall
Executive Director (Enterprise Resources)

8 April 2011

Link(s) to Council Objectives/Improvement Themes/Values

- ◆ Improve the road network and public transport
- ◆ Performance management and improvement
- ◆ Sustainable development
- ◆ Efficient and effective use of resources

Previous References

None

List of Background Papers

Bullet point list or None

Contact for Further Information

If you would like to inspect the background papers or want further information, please contact:- Gordon Mackay, Head of Roads and Transportation Services

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