

**ENVIRONMENT, CULTURE AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL  
12 JANUARY 2010**

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**BUDGET SCRUTINY – PROVISION FOR HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE  
Lead Member, Highway Maintenance Working Group**

**1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 This report contains the views of the Environment, Culture and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel's Working Group on the proposed reduction in the budget for highway maintenance, to inform the Panel's consideration of the overall proposed budget for the Environment, Culture and Communities Department in 2010-11.

**2 SUGGESTED ACTION**

- 2.1 **That the Environment, Culture and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel recommends to the Executive, via the Overview and Scrutiny Commission, that the proposed reduction of £315,000 on highway maintenance is applied instead to highway improvements.**

**3 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

- 3.1 The Panel's Working Group on Highway Maintenance is in the early stages of its review, and has prioritised the element of the review on value for money and the use of resources, to inform the budget scrutiny process.
- 3.2 The proposed revenue budget approved by the Executive for consultation contains a reduction of £315,000 in highway maintenance, this to be achieved by stopping all surface dressing. Surface dressing involves spraying and addition of chippings to existing surfaces to extend its life.
- 3.3 The Working Group has considered the implications of this proposal. The Group has been informed by officers that:
- (i) The reduction is some 20% of the total maintenance budget of £1.5 million.
  - (ii) This would entail a radical reduction in highway surfacing and patching, and an inevitable deterioration in the condition of the Borough's highways and performance against National Indicators.
  - (iii) As highways deteriorate, public liability exposure will increase, and insurance premia will probably increase.
  - (iv) The Local Transport Plan finance from the Department of Transport provides in 2010/11 £958,000 for highway improvements and £1,162,000 for highway maintenance.
  - (v) The indications are that central government spending on infrastructure is likely to decrease in future.

The Working Group also noted that the proposed capital programme includes a reduction from £1,640,000 in 2009/10 to £1,501,000 in 2010/11 on highways maintenance and integrated transport measures.

- 3.4 The Working Group recognise: that the proposed budget reduction is designed to save cost rather than be a reflection on the underlying worth of highway maintenance; that the Council's budget is under pressure across the board; also that budget reductions elsewhere impact on the Council's services to residents. The Working Group considers that at such times of financial pressure, priority must be given to those services of greatest use to residents, also to protecting assets as opposed to improving assets.
- 3.5 The Working Group recognise that expenditure on highway improvements contributes directly to road safety and other valuable outcomes; also that some of the expenditure is funded by external grants which cannot be used for other purposes; also that any reductions of expenditure on highway improvements might cause staff to be under-employed. The Working Group consider that a budget reduction in this area might be accommodated by selecting schemes for deferral which do not attract external funding, and by re-deploying staff temporarily onto highway maintenance or other suitable duties.
- 3.6 The Working Group consider that the highway network is a universal and vital service to everyone who lives in or travels through the Borough, and in financial terms the network must be one of the most valuable Council assets. The impact of under-investing in highway maintenance will have a direct impact on highway users and the in-year 'saving' could well be lost many times over in more expensive repairs being needed in the future.
- 3.7 The Working Group conclude that, on balance, if a budget reduction of £315,000 has to be achieved, it would be preferable to reduce the budget for highway improvement rather than highway maintenance.

#### Background Papers

None

#### Contact for further information

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