

Leader Decision

26 March 2020

New Highway Safety Inspection Manual

1. Recommendation

- 1.1 That the Leader approves the implementation of a new Highway Safety Inspection Manual from 1st April 2020.

2. Executive Summary

Background

- 2.1 Highway safety inspections are designed to identify defects likely to create danger or serious inconvenience to users of the highway network. The Highway Safety Inspection Manual sets out how Warwickshire County Council (WCC) manages the inspection and maintenance of its highways to fulfil its statutory obligations and deliver a safe, serviceable and resilient highway network.
- 2.2 'Well-managed Highway Infrastructure' is the national code that defines the good practice that must be considered when operating a system of highway safety inspections. This same guidance is considered by the legal profession when assessing the appropriateness of our policy and procedures.
- 2.3 The code advocates a change in emphasis for highway safety inspections. The code is less prescriptive and instead promotes the establishment of local levels of service through risk-based assessments taking in to account local needs, priorities and affordability.
- 2.4 The code enables authorities to make their own decisions on how to ensure it is meeting its statutory duty under the Highways Act 1980 where this provides a duty to maintain highway maintainable at public expense. The introduction of a risk-based approach allows maintenance to be prioritised based on risk, rather than arbitrary intervention levels.
- 2.5 A new highway safety inspection manual has been developed to maximise the efficiency of the identification and repair of highway defects, to ensure improved workflow to our highway maintenance contractor, to create reciprocal contract efficiencies and reduced costs in the maintenance cycle.

Foundation of Risk

- 2.6 A road network hierarchy based on asset function is the foundation of a risk-based maintenance strategy. Warwickshire County Council has traditionally identified the general operational characteristics of a road within the designations of the road classification. However, these classifications do not necessarily represent the role each carriageway and footway play in providing access to goods, services, shopping, commercial and recreational facilities.
- 2.7 For WCC to implement a highway inspection regime a new maintenance hierarchy has been adopted. The carriageway and footway network have been assessed against a range of operational factors which together reflect the level of use and relative importance of localised parts of the highway network.

Assessment of Risk

- 2.8 The new code of practice does not specify defined intervention levels where action is required to rectify a defect. It allows local authorities to decide if or what investigation criteria is appropriate and requires a risk-based approach to the identification, assessment, evaluation and priority of defects.
- 2.9 Areas of the highway requiring repair will be considered for action dependent upon a risk matrix. The inspector will evaluate the likelihood of an accident occurring and the potential injury or damage that could be incurred before deciding how quickly the defect should be attended to. The risk matrix will inform an appropriate response for the priority of repair to the defect.
- 2.10 For example, the current manual requires a carriageway pothole to be deeper than 100mm to prompt a 24-hour repair. The new manual allows the inspector to make an informed judgment based on risk meaning that a pothole that is 40 or 50mm deep could elicit a similar response.

Defect Target Response Times

- 2.11 New defect target response times have been developed to enable efficient and cost-effective maintenance that is appropriate to the level of risk.
- 2.12 The difference in target response times between the current highway safety inspection manual and the new manual are shown in the table below.

Defect Category	Current Target Response Time	New Target Response Time
Emergency	1 hour	2 hours
Category 1	24 hours	Before the end of the next working day
Category 2H		5 working days
Category 2L	28 days	30 days

- 2.13 The new target response times are designed to enable highway defects to be, wherever practicable, actioned by a permanent repair. The current regime is such that the obligations force a reactive response that does not support the highway asset management strategy and the efficient use of resources.
- 2.14 The current target response time for emergency defects is one hour. This represents an extremely onerous timescale that in a county the size of Warwickshire, particularly during periods of heavy traffic, is not always achievable. The new target response time of 2 hours is not expected to lengthen the time that it takes to attend to emergency defects but provides the assurance that we can respond to a greater number within the allotted time.
- 2.15 Introducing a 5-day response allows some defects that would normally be repaired in 28 days to be repaired much quicker. It also allows us to balance the immediate risk posed to highway users with the ongoing risk that will be posed as a consequence of a failed temporary repair.

Benefits of the New Approach

- 2.16 The new risk-based approach will enable the authority to minimise the risk presented to road users by improving WCC, and our contractors, ability to plan defect repairs more efficiently. Better planning of the inspection and response to defects will:
- Increase the overall number of defects that can be permanently repaired at the first visit.
 - Reduce the need to re-visit defects due to the premature failure of temporary repairs.
 - Maximise the number of defects that can be repaired before their condition deteriorates to a position where an emergency response is necessary.
 - Ensure we meet the target response time for attending to defects.
 - Ensure our approach is consistent with other local and strategic highway authorities, especially those with adjoining networks.
 - Adhere to the recommendations in the code of practice to maintain our special defence in relation to defending highway claims.

Consultation and Scrutiny

- 2.17 In developing the manual, consultation has taken place with adjoining authorities, the Midland Service Improvement Group, Weightmans (WCC solicitors) and the Warwickshire Council Risk and Insurance team. The approach is fully supported.

3. Financial Implications

- 3.1 The revised manual will inform the deployment of highways resources, assist with the defence of insurance claims, and ultimately lead to improved standards of highway maintenance. No additional maintenance costs are anticipated as a result of the new inspection and repair regime. Spend will be monitored as part of regular budget monitoring processes.
- 3.2 If the new safety inspection manual is not approved WCC would have difficulty continuing to defend highway insurance claims. This will result in the Council's repudiation rate falling with the implication of higher insurance premiums or increasing excess levels.

4. Environmental Implications

- 4.1 Robust inspection regime and condition monitoring of the highway infrastructure will help to manage the impacts associated with extreme weather events.

5. Supporting Information

- 5.1 WCC to introduce a new Highway Safety Inspection Manual to come into effect from 1st April 2020 in order to:
 - Comply with the recommendations detailed in the Code of Practice 'Well-managed Highway Infrastructure'.
 - Take a risk-based approach, as per the above code of practice, meaning that there are no prescriptive intervention levels to apply.
 - Ensure WCC can continue to defend highway insurance claims.
 - Make full use of the mobile working and end to end electronic processes afforded by the new Highway Management Information System being introduced in April 2020.
 - Enable cost-effective maintenance that is appropriate to the level of risk.
 - Enable a right-first time approach to a greater number of repairs.

6. Timescales associated with the decision and next steps

- 6.1 The new Highway Safety Inspection Manual will come into effect on the 1st April 2020.

Appendix

New Highway Safety Inspection Manual

Background Paper

Well Managed Highway Infrastructure: A Code of Practice

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