

REPORT FROM THE ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT SELECT COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN TO THE MEETING OF FULL COUNCIL ON WEDNESDAY, 16 NOVEMBER 2016

Communities Highways Fund (CHF)

Since the last update, a key member of staff, following long term sickness, had returned to work and was responsible for the managing of the Network Integrity Register, a list of works and changes that had been requested to the highway network. These were typically changes to speed limits, bus stop infrastructure, parking restrictions, lines, and signs as well as dropped crossings.

A large backlog of items that needed to be addressed had accumulated, some of which were to be funded by the CHF and others that would be pooled from alternative means of funding. The Highways PFI Contracts Programme Manager and the Highways Engineer / Audit and Technical Compliance Manager would look at sorting and filtering those requests that would be considered in an order of priority and what could be and could not be addressed by means of the CHF.

With specific regards to TRO's, the committee were advised that such orders were considered in two categories - permanent and temporary orders. Temporary orders tended to cover such matters as roadworks, events and various maintenance issues, whereas the permanent orders would be for matters such as double / single yellow lines required on a perpetual basis. Requests for TRO's could be initiated by local groups, members of the public and / or local councillors and were also added to the Network Integrity Register (NIR). Island Roads and the Council's Contract Management Team would look to analyse the requests using prescribed criteria and then a decision will be made on what can be approved, what should be rejected and what may need to be amended, before moving forward. Members of the Select Committee were advised that as TRO's were a regulatory function, they were subject to a statutory process that started with notices being advertised in order to alert the public. Whilst resident's representations would be considered, any such comments needed to be relevant to the order. Historically TROs had been prepared on a town by town basis in an agreed review sequence. However this was considered inflexible.

The Head of Contract Management outlined the advantages and dis-advantages of this approach compared with a much more flexible method. In response to the chair, members generally thought the more flexible slant was preferable. It was proposed by the Chair that in order to assist in identifying such jobs that should be prioritised; a total of four members of the Select Committee would meet with members of the Contract Management Team with a view to looking at the most appropriate criteria for prioritising requests from the NIR to be financed from the CHF.

Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs)

There are still around 1,700 items outstanding on the Network Integrity and Safety Assessment Registers (NISAR), ranging from street furniture requests, Double Yellow Lines and Access Protection Bars to speed changes. A number of these have now been removed as they don't have any substantive merit around some key criteria that is being tested to assess individual requests.

The main concerns regarding the quantity of these are around the possibility that it may seem easier for the Contracts Management Team to cancel all outstanding requests and start again, although the cost and resource time involved in the original assessments would have been a waste of time. This may be something members of this committee would like to have some input on. The committee would also need to bear in mind Isle of Wight Council's liability in the case of a potential hazard being highlighted on the NISAR without due consideration being made.

A score based programme tool is in the early stages of being trialled and is hoped to be operational in the next month or so. Some of the key criteria recommended by the Environment and Transport Select Committee forms the basis of a score based points system, with suggestions on how to profile a PC based programme discussed at the recent meeting.

This intends to be slightly weighted in favour of safety factors as a priority, with other criteria based around congestion, environmental impact and hierarchy of the road, financial impact, and community benefit. There may also be a way of adding in the potential of match funding via Town and Parish councils.

The requests for speed changes are going to be trial assessed using a Department For Transport (DfT) tool for speeds, although any changes would still need to be consulted on, using emergency service data and public consultation.

Ultimately the Isle of Wight Council has limited funds and resources, so this still remains a worrying factor for any future additions to the integrity register.

Any additions have a possible long term financial impact to the council, although some items could remain outside the accrual process based on minimal cost of implementation, off set against the minor cost to replace over the contractual term.

It is hoped over the coming months, a robust and operational process will be in place to deal with all future TROs, so as not to get into the frustrating situation of late, with a huge back log of requests accumulated, many of which are over two years.

It should be noted that both the DfT speed limit tool, and the score-based programme being developed internally will aid decision-making but officer discretion will continue to be applied on a case-by-case basis.

Proposed Policy for a 20mph Speed Limit

After the vote at full Council on 19/10/16, It was agreed that a group of 4 members would do some work on preparing a report around what the IWC currently has in place from a policy point of view, as well as getting some feedback from Town and Parish councils, and all the emergency services, using critical collected data.

It was also noted that not enough information is widely known to many members of the Council, so any reports needed to be informative and factual, these will then be looked at by the Executive to asses any possible budgetary implications, and reported back to this committee at our next meeting early next year.

Councillor Jon Gilbey
Chairman of Environment and Transport Select Committee