

## **EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

**15 NOVEMBER 2016**

**SCRUTINY MINUTE EXTRACT – 27 OCTOBER 2016**

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### **4. REVIEW OF BRIDGES**

- 4.1 With reference to paragraph 5 of the Minute of 22 September 2016, there had been circulated copies of a report by the Service Director – Assets & Infrastructure providing information to Members on the Council's bridge assets, including a list of all bridges in the Scottish Borders, current processes for inspection and maintenance, planned investment, key issues around bridge condition and plans for improvement. Mr Martin Joyce, Service Director Assets and Infrastructure; Mr David Girdler, Chief Officer Roads; Mr Colin Ovens, Infrastructure Manager; and Mr David Richardson, Asset Manager, were in attendance at the meeting. Scottish Borders Council (SBC), under the requirements of the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984, was responsible for maintaining over 1,100 bridges and 155 culverts across the region, many of which were ageing and in need of repair, but were of critical importance to the Scottish Borders, both economically and socially. The current SBC Roads Asset Management Plan (RAMP), approved in 2014, helped the Council deliver the road services and detailed what was required to manage the road network assets, including bridges. However, ensuring that all bridges were inspected regularly to assess condition and then undertaking necessary works was increasingly difficult in the current financial climate. The report presented the current planned investment in bridges and the process around identifying planned maintenance work with future planned actions around performance reporting.
- 4.2 Mr Ovens advised that there was a wide variety of bridge structures, including 562 of masonry arch construction. Responsibility for many of the bridges was shared, for example, 57 of the bridges with Network Rail and several with Northumberland County Council (NCC). He explained that bridges had a limited life and their repair and renewal became necessary due to wear and tear, damage and inclement weather. Additionally, older bridges were not designed to deal with the current volume and weights of traffic which led to more expensive repair requirements.
- 4.3 The RAMP was one of the key strategic plans to be delivered by the Asset and Infrastructure team. As with other services, resource constraints meant that decisions about prioritisation needed to be taken to ensure that public safety was protected and there was appropriate network investment to enhance the Scottish Borders, both socially and economically. The Code of Practice for Management of Highway Structures (CoPMHS) recommended that Councils' adopted the standards contained in the Code. For bridges, this meant that biennially, a visual examination of all parts of the structure should be carried out for all bridges and culverts of 1m diameter and greater. Every six years, a principal inspection – a close examination, using access equipment - should be undertaken on those larger structures identified as requiring a greater level of assessment. Historical inspection information from 2009/2011 was mainly used to make current prioritisation decisions. However, works could be prioritised due to concerns raised about a bridge's condition.
- 4.4 Mr Ovens further advised that the use of data and the RAMP process ensured that SBC met its statutory duty. However, inspections recommended under the CoPMHS had not been undertaken since 2009/11. It was considered that the risks faces by both SBC and road users would be better managed by more regular and planned inspections in line with CoPMHS recommendations. However, it was recognised that additional resources would be required to deliver this enhanced inspection regime. The approximate 'core' annual budget allocation to bridges was £818k. In 2014/15 the Council had invested £1.3 m, which was higher than the annual allocation. This was

as a result of replacement of Carlowse Bridge. Again in 2015/16 an investment of £1.9 m was required due to the replacement of Selkirk Footbridge at £700k and bridge repairs linked to the major flood events of January and February 2016. Mr Ovens continued that recent issues had highlighted concerns over the condition of two bridges – Clackmae, on the back road between Earlston and Lauder, and Melrose Bridge (Lowood Bridge) on the link road between Melrose and Galashiels. Clackmae Bridge was in very poor condition; engineers were assessing the extent of repairs required but these might be in the region of £500k. Melrose Bridge repair cost could be circa £800k. These two examples demonstrated that the annual core budget may be insufficient to perform the required level of inspections and work required, but the Council also had other priorities to consider.

- 4.5 Presently, the list of planned works within the Infrastructure Team was primarily compiled from 2009/11 condition information and records of previous load carrying assessments to determine which bridges were safe to carry heavy loads. The SBC Roads Review currently underway included work to address the gaps around the robustness of performance information on inspections undertaken and condition of bridges. Mr Ovens concluded his report by advising that officers hoped to complete, on an annual basis, the performance reporting table as promoted by the Society of Chief Officers on Transport in Scotland (SCOTS) and look to integrate this measure into the existing performance reporting to the Executive Committee. Principal inspections would populate the major investment plan for the bridge assets. However, distribution of funds would continue to be targeted towards those bridges which the Infrastructure Team considered to be in need or urgent repair. Until such time as officers had a fully developed inventory of asset conditions, this would continue to be determined using existing condition data, adhoc inspections, engineering knowledge and experience.
- 4.6 Following discussion, a number of questions were raised and answered by officers. In terms of repair materials, Mr Richardson confirmed that if possible, this was carried out on a like for like basis. In respect of the Tweed Bridge, Mr Ovens advised that the repair works were being funded by Transport Scotland and the pedestrian bridge would transfer into the ownership of the Council once the works were completed. The cost of bringing all bridges up to an optimum standard was discussed. Mr Ovens advised that until they had carried out the inspection process it was difficult to quantify a cost. Officers advised that where possible, external funding or partner working was considered for every bridge repair. For example, the Union Chain Bridge repairs were being funded by Heritage Lottery Funding, and the Historic bodies in both Scotland and England, as part of a joint project with Northumberland County Council. Mr Joyce added that in each instance potential funding streams were investigated to minimise the impact on the Council's budget. Regarding windfarm developers contributing to the cost of repairs of bridges, the officers gave an example of the strengthening work to Martin's Bridge, which had been funded by a windfarm developer. Officers confirmed that no inspections were carried out on private bridges, only those on the public list. In terms of the Council's position compared to other authorities, some were ahead of the Council and others in the same position. In terms of prioritisation of repairs to bridges, this was assessed regularly using the results of inspections, the potential use of weight restriction, impact on communities, cost, ability to phase work, etc. Members also considered the potential costs of repairs and how this had to fit in with other competing Council priorities e.g. care for elderly, new schools, etc. Following further discussion it was unanimously agreed that the need to carry out inspections on the bridges asset was paramount in order to prioritise repairs using the CoPMHS recommendations. Once the inspection of bridges had been carried out, the results could then be incorporated into the regular performance monitoring reports to Executive Committee. The Committee also asked that officers continued to assess, on a case by case basis, any opportunities for funding to assist with future repairs to bridges.

## **DECISION**

### **(a) AGREED to NOTE:**

- (i) The size of the bridges asset and the challenges this presented;**
- (ii) The current process for carrying out inspections, for assessing the current condition of the bridges asset and the process used in identifying planned maintenance works; and**

**(iii) The improvements being considered to improve data on the overall condition of the bridges asset and subsequent prioritization.**

**# (b) AGREED to RECOMMEND to the EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE that:**

**(i) the current Roads Review should take account of the need to inspect bridges within the Code of Practice for Management of Highway Structures recommendations and that, if possible, some additional resources be identified to allow this work to be carried out in line with the priorities within the Roads Asset Management Plan;**

**(ii) once the inspection of bridges has been carried out, that the condition of all bridges be categorised and incorporated into the regular performance monitoring reports to the Executive Committee; and**

**(iii) when considering future repairs to historic and iconic Borders bridges, officers continue to assess on a case by case basis any opportunities for external funding.**