Cabinet

18 November 2026

State if
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Review of Highways Maintenance Strategy and Highways Inspection Policy

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Electoral Divisions Affected	All Electoral Division(s)
Key Decision?	Yes
Cabinet Forward Plan	12 May 2026
Report considered by	Economy & Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee - 1 September 2026

1. Purpose of Report

1.1. The last update of Shropshire Council's Highway Inspection Manual was approved by the Council in February 2019. Such policies require regular review and maintenance to ensure that they continue to reflect best practice and adapt to changes in risk.

1.2. Similarly, the Highway Asset Management Policy and Strategy was also approved in 2019. These are the core documents for the management of the Council's highway infrastructure assets. These documents also require an update to reflect the priorities

of the current administration and to ensure that the Council fulfils all the criteria of the Department for Transport Incentive Fund to maximise capital funding.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Cabinet is recommended to:

- approve the proposed Highway Safety Inspection Manual and Car Park Addendum at Appendices C and D;
- approve the Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Policy and Strategy at Appendices A and B; and
- note the recommendations of the Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee at Appendix E and endorse the officer responses and proposed actions set out in this report
- Note the comments is section 12 of this report and content of the Equality, Social Inclusion and Health Impact Assessment at Appendix F.

3. Background

Update of the Highway Safety Inspection Manual

3.1 A review of Shropshire Council's Highway Safety Inspection Manual has been carried out considering:

- Experience of using the current manual by the Highway Inspections team;
- Feedback from the Council's Insurance team on best practice and current risks;
- Feedback from an independent review of the 2019 version;
- Input from the Interim Asset Manager on current codes and best practice.

3.2 The review highlighted a number of areas of improvement. In summary, these were:

- Minor drafting amendments arising from the independent review, alongside the substantive changes summarised below and detailed in Table 1;
- Implementing a robust process for monitoring and implementing changes to the hierarchy and frequencies;
- Improving the provision around the risk to cyclists and motor cyclists;
- A specific note on ash die-back;
- Clarification about dealing with flooding;
- The supporting risk assessment should also consider the size and use of agricultural vehicles and heavy goods vehicles on C-class and unclassified roads, and whether local circumstances warrant a review of inspection arrangements or referral for further assessment;
- Clarification on when kerbs are inspected;
- Updating the general inspection procedures and clarifying the distinction between scheduled inspection frequencies and the response times applicable to identified safety defects;
- Reviewing the underlying risks to update inspection frequencies;
- Widening the scope of the section on heritage assets.

3.3 The proposal follows the updated risk analysis and would establish a consistent scheduled inspection frequency across the Local Access Road hierarchy. The supporting assessment should explain why an annual interval is appropriate, identify the previous frequencies affected and set out the arrangements for responding to reported defects or changes in local risk between scheduled inspections.

3.4 The proposals have already been presented for internal challenge with the following comments and responses which members of Cabinet may wish to consider and add further comment.

- Car Park inspections – is annual inspection sufficient?
  Currently this is considered appropriate in terms of frequency given the damaging impact of relatively low weight vehicles and inspection cycles for the public highway.

- National Policies regarding footways and cycleways – is it possible to surpass current best practice?
  Whilst this is possible it would require additional revenue investment at a time of financial emergency and arguably extra capital investment to upgrade or improve the existing network of footways and cycleways, which is balanced against existing investment priorities in the asset management strategy.

- Appropriate Inspections - e.g. cycleways inspected on a bicycles. Again, whilst this is possible it would require additional revenue investment for the purchase of vehicles and their maintenance. It may also present a challenge in terms of safely recording defects, staff may need additional training and the assessment of H&S considerations which will inevitably result in additional revenue costs.

- Is Climate Change considered?
  The asset management strategy references the climate change emergency and the need to increase the resilient of the asset; however, there is a need for further detail in the strategy on how this challenge will begin to be addressed.

- Abandoned Vehicles in Laybys?
  Abandoned vehicles would be identified through a range of reporting mechanisms and addressed through measures available to the Streetscene service.

- Definition of Secondary Walking routes – this is currently unspecific.
  Secondary walking routes are simply the medium use footways that are not Primary routes (e.g. shopping centres). These are positioned in the hierarchy between Primary routes (e.g. shopping centres) and Link footways (typically in residential areas). It is a term that is widely adopted by local highways authorities and publicly defined in the national code of practice “Well managed highway infrastructure”.

- Footway accessibility for buggies and wheelchairs.
  Some footways present accessibility challenges. Safety inspections should remain risk-based, as additional criteria may be difficult to apply consistently and could increase claims and revenue exposure. However, inspection findings, service requests and user feedback can inform Asset Management Strategy priorities and future improvements aligned with LTP active travel objectives. Link to recommendation no. 4 Appendix E.

Car Park Addendum

3.5 The Highway Safety Inspection Manual is primarily in place to describe how the Council discharges its duty under Section 41 of the Highways Act. Off-street car parks are not within the scope of the Highways Act; however, there is still a requirement to maintain these areas so that they are safe to use.

3.6 The competencies required to undertake an inspection and the response to a defect in an off-street car park are similar to those required on the highway; therefore, an addendum has been formed which uses the relevant sections of the Highway Safety Inspection process but tailors the requirements to off-street parking areas.

3.7 The Addendum maintains the separation of the Council's duties under the Highways Act and its need to manage off-street car parks.

Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Policy and Strategy

3.8 The Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Policy and Strategy define the Council's long-term objectives for managing its highway infrastructure assets. Together, they set out how the Council intends to maintain, operate, and improve the network in a way that aligns with its wider strategic direction. A Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Policy is a short document that sets out the Council's overall approach to managing its highway infrastructure assets. It explains what the Council wants to achieve and the principles that everyone involved in delivering the strategy are to follow. A Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Strategy is the more detailed document that explains how the Council will deliver the aims set out in its Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Policy.

3.9 The Strategy document is formed around a framework for asset management as shown in Figure 1.

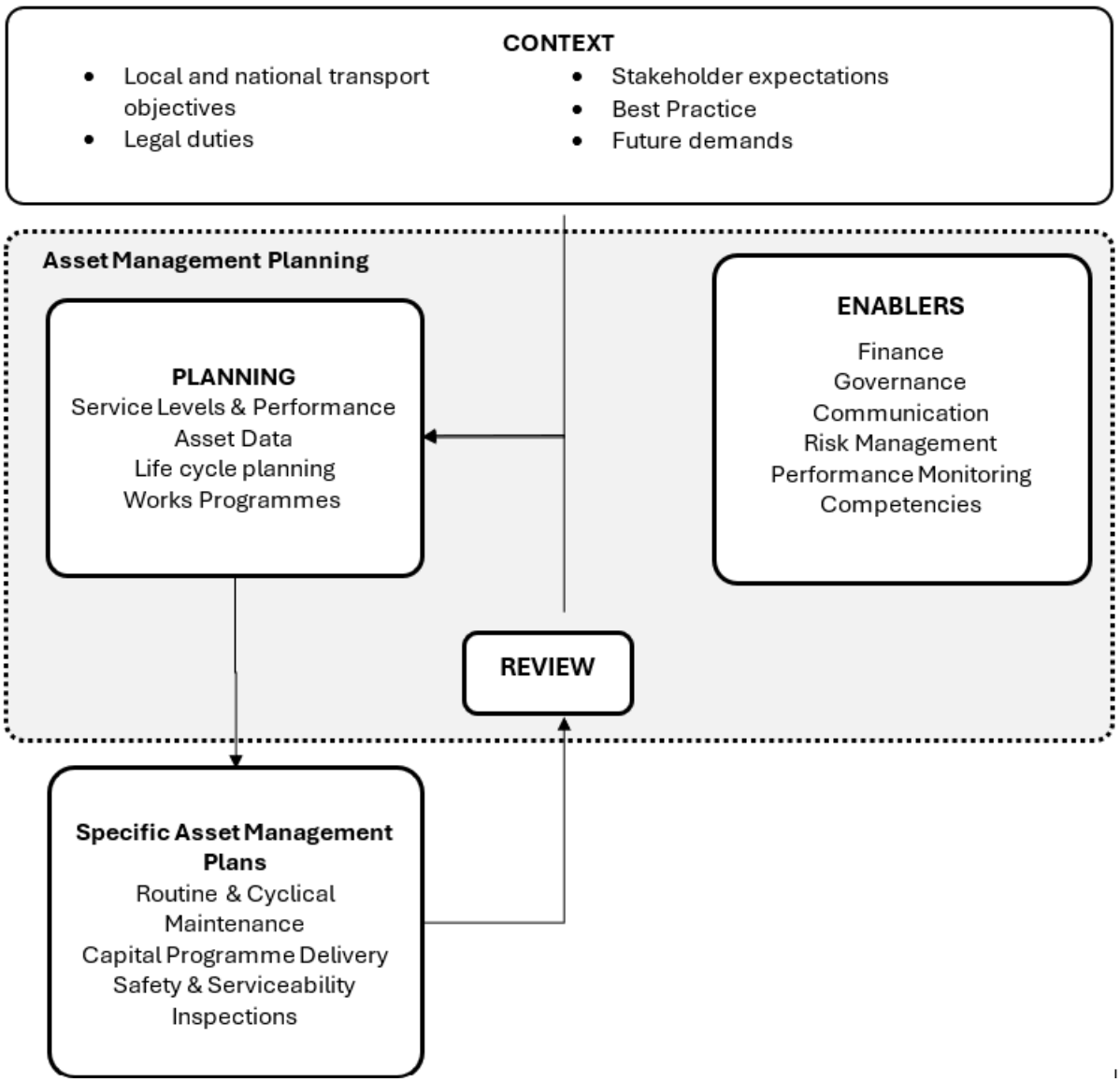


Figure 1. The asset management framework

3.10 The Context section sets out the environment that the Strategy operates. One of the most important sections of the Context is stakeholder expectations. It is unsurprising that the condition of the highway is showing least satisfaction, highest importance and where people would like more money spent.

3.11 These expectations have been used to guide the formation of this Strategy, for example, dealing with potholes and defects supports the first priority in the Strategy.

3.12 The Planning and Enablers section are the core elements of the Highways Asset Management Strategy.

3.13 The Highways Asset Management Strategy has been aligned with the emerging priorities in the Local Transport Plan. This is clearly demonstrated through the establishment of Service Levels (Table 3 of the Strategy); these service levels will be monitored using a Performance Management Framework as set out in Section 6.5 of the Strategy.

3.14 Under the Planning section, the Strategy describes how the Council will manage asset data, understand the life cycle of assets and form programmes of work.

3.15 A set of Enablers are also described which are not a core asset management function but strongly support the delivery of the Strategy.

3.16 The Strategy also includes a set of six asset class strategies for each of the main groups of assets: Carriageways, Footways and Cycleways, Structures, Street Lighting, Traffic Signals and Drainage. These asset class strategies allow for more focussed detail on the assets, the particular challenges presented and strategies to deal with these, and an overall outcome statement for the asset group. These asset class strategies are intended to provide transparency about how and why each type of asset is managed.

3.17 Linked to the Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Strategy are Specific Asset Management Plans, these internal plans will define how each part of the service operates including routine maintenance, inspections and how work is prioritised in accordance with the asset class strategy.

4. Summary of Main Proposals

Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Policy and Strategy

4.1 The Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Policy is provided in Appendix A and the Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Strategy is provided in Appendix B.

Update of the Highway Safety Inspection Manual

4.2 The update does not fundamentally change the risk-based approach that was adopted by the Council in 2019; rather, the changes seek to provide more clarity and better reflect current risks. The update of the Highway Safety Inspection Manual is provided in Appendix C and the Car Park Addendum is provided in Appendix D.

4.3 The updates made to the 2019 version of the Safety Inspection Manual are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Updates to the manual

	Change from 2019 version	Reason for change
2	Scope: Paragraph added to state that the planning of highway safety inspection does not account for the risk of damage from agricultural vehicles.	Risk identified and addressed.
4	Changed sentence to better describe how the inspection frequencies are determined	General Improvement
4	Table 4: Inspections of Local Access Roads is now adjusted to reflect the usage within the urban and rural context on a	Adjustment in the risk-based approach – see section of report

	minimum frequency of a least once per year.	
4	Cycle Path changed to Cycle Track	A more specific term for this infrastructure, for alignment with National Guidance and Highways Infrastructure Asset Management Strategy
5.1	Improved sentence that points to the response times in Table 3	General Improvement
5.3	Defects: A specific section has been added around the consideration of the risk of defects for cyclists & motor cyclists.	Risk identified and addressed.
5.4	Investigatory levels, defect standards and responses: A wider scope dealing heritage features rather than just surfaces has been introduced.	Risk identified and addressed.
6	Safety inspections – General procedures: • Double manning requirement omitted. • An improved process for inspecting footways during driven inspections. • Provision for the use of AI technology • A more precise definition of who monitors risk •	Risk identified and addressed. Risk identified and addressed. Provision in preparation for adoption of this technology. General improvement.
7	Safety inspections – Specific instructions: • Clause on Non-safety Street Lighting defects omitted • A clarification has been added to define when kerbs are inspected. • A section on EV cables has been added to Obstructions. • Road markings instructions amalgamated into a single instruction. • A reference Ash Dieback added •	Outside of the scope of this document Risk identified and addressed. Risk identified and addressed. Improvement in clarity Risk identified and addressed
8	Roles and Competencies: • Improved descriptions of roles • A definition of competency added	General Improvement. Risk identified and addressed.

Car Park Addendum

4.4 The key aspects of the Addendum are:

- All car parks will be inspected annually.

- Operational defects are treated separately from safety defects.
- Response times are specifically defined for car parks.
- The inspections will be done on foot.

5. Alternative Options

These updated documents have been developed in consultation with Officers and Members. The principal alternative is to retain the 2019 documents. This is not recommended because they would not reflect the current risk review, updated operational practice, Council priorities or the requirements used to support Department for Transport funding. Alternative inspection frequencies and methods were considered during development. More frequent or mode-specific inspections could provide additional information but would require further equipment, training, health and safety assessment and revenue resource. The proposed approach retains a risk-based framework while improving clarity, coverage and governance.

6. Key risks and Opportunities

6.1 The key risks are about securing full funding and minimising the Council's exposure to highway claims.

Risk	Mitigation	Link to Strategic Risk
Out-of-date Highway Asset Management Policy and Strategy leading to loss of funding.	Proposed mitigation: • Approve and implement the updated Policy and Strategy; • Assign responsibility for checking current DfT funding conditions, submission deadlines and supporting evidence; • Maintain an evidence and assurance record, review the documents annually and escalate any compliance gaps or funding exposure through service and financial governance.	Financial sustainability: • Loss of grant funding could increase pressure on available resources and future balanced budgets.
Out-of-date Highway Asset Management Policy and Strategy leading to inappropriate investment priorities.	Proposed mitigation: • Implement the updated Strategy through an evidence led investment programme using asset condition, safety risk, network importance and whole life costs; • Record prioritisation decisions and funding constraints; • Review delivery, condition trends and affordability through the Asset	Financial sustainability and governance: • Poorly targeted investment can increase future maintenance liabilities and undermine approved priorities.

	Management Group and service governance; • Escalate material departures from agreed priorities and review the Strategy annually.	
Inability to repudiate highway claims due to out-of-date Highway Safety Inspection Manual.	Proposed mitigation: • Approve and implement the revised Manual with Legal and Insurance input, a controlled commencement date and inspector training; • Retain auditable inspection, defect-assessment and response records; check compliance with approved frequencies and response times and escalate overdue safety actions; • Review claims learning and policy effectiveness regularly.	Financial sustainability and governance: • Inconsistent inspection practice or inadequate records can weaken claims defence and increase uninsured costs.
Additional costs due to out-of-date Highway Safety Inspection Manual.	Proposed mitigation: • Implement the revised Manual consistently and assess inspection, repair, training and systems capacity before commencement; • Monitor inspection compliance, overdue defects, reactive expenditure and claims costs with Finance and Insurance; • Record and authorise any policy exceptions, supported by a risk assessment; • Escalate resource gaps through transformation and budget governance; • Working outside of agreed policy which in turn exposes the Council to additional risk.	Financial sustainability: • Avoidable inspection, repair and claims costs can contribute to in-year overspend and future budget pressures.

7. Council Priorities

7.1 These updated documents support the following:

- A Council that is financially sustainable, with clear priorities and purpose, and a workforce that is supported to excel.
- Communities are connected by well-maintained roads, accessible transport and infrastructure
- People live in safe, inclusive places with homes that meet their need
- An environment that harnesses our natural assets and supports wellbeing
- A thriving economy that benefits everyone

8. Financial Implications

Budgets are not affected. However, the policy and strategy adjustments ensure that these are aligned with corporate priorities, LTP priorities and DfT requirements, thereby ensuring expenditure represents VfM and is efficiently managed.

Highway related claims remain a financial risk to the Council. An up-to-date inspection policy, supported by consistent implementation and reliable records of inspections and responses, assists in managing that exposure but does not eliminate the risk of claims or establish that every claim can be defended.

Approval of the policy and strategy does not, by itself, amend existing budgets. Delivery of Scrutiny actions, including enhanced reporting, dashboard capability, community training and any change to inspection methods, may require additional capacity, systems or funding. These requirements will be assessed through the relevant transformation and budget governance processes before commitments are made. Maintaining current, consistently applied policies also supports the Council in managing value for money and its exposure to highway related claims. Financial risk will be mitigated by the council having sufficient capacity to respond to service demand and should be addressed through the Transformation process proposal.

9. Legal and HR implications

9.1 The Council, as local highway authority, has a statutory duty under section 41 of the Highways Act 1980 to maintain highways maintainable at the public expense. The proposed Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Policy and Strategy and Highway Safety Inspection Manual provide an important framework through which the Council can discharge that duty.

9.2 Section 58 of the Highways Act 1980 provides a statutory defence to certain claims arising from the condition of the highway where the Council can demonstrate that it had taken such care as was reasonably required to secure that the relevant part of the highway was not dangerous. The existence of an adopted policy or inspection regime is not sufficient in itself. It is important that the arrangements adopted by the Council are evidence based, capable of being delivered and consistently applied, with appropriate records maintained of inspections, identified defects, decisions and responses.

9.3 The approval and maintenance of a clear, current and evidence-based strategy and supporting policies is an important part of demonstrating good governance. It provides a transparent framework for decision-making, establishes clear priorities and standards, supports consistency in the exercise of the Council's functions and helps ensure that resources and operational decisions are directed in accordance with the Council's statutory responsibilities and agreed priorities. Effective

governance also requires the approved arrangements to be implemented in practice, with appropriate oversight, monitoring and review so that the Council can continue to demonstrate that it is acting lawfully, reasonably and in accordance with its adopted policies.

9.4 The proposed arrangements should therefore remain under review to ensure that they continue to reflect changes in legislation, relevant guidance and good practice, operational experience and the risks affecting the highway network. The Car Park Addendum appropriately recognises that off-street parking areas do not fall within the section 41 highway maintenance duty, while providing a separate framework for the Council to manage its responsibilities for those premises.

9.5 Workforce considerations around capacity, competency, training, safe systems of work, role clarity and potential technology change. These are acknowledged and will be managed through implementation and any workforce, Health and Safety, training, competency, resource requirements, will be considered together with any necessary engagement with recognised trade unions and managed through the Council's relevant people, organisational change and job-evaluation processes.

10. Electoral Division Implications

The policy and strategy will be applied consistently across all divisions

11. Health, Social (including "Child Friendly Shropshire") and Economic Implications

The condition and safety of roads, footways and cycleways are relevant to health, wellbeing and access to services. The proposed approach is intended to support safer journeys, active travel and access to education, employment, healthcare and community facilities. The final report should explain how these considerations inform maintenance priorities and identify any adverse impacts and appropriate mitigations. No reduction in injuries, NHS demand or associated costs is quantified in this report.

12. Equality and Diversity Implications

12.1 There are no significant impacts on these documents for equality and diversity. The Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Strategy strengthens the priority for infrastructure that support active modes of travel which will positively impact older people and young people which may not be able to drive.

12.2 An Equality, Social Inclusion and Health Impact Assessment has been carried out – Appendix F.

13. Climate Change, Biodiversity and Environmental Implications

13.1 The policy and strategy adjustments take account of these considerations and the Council statutory obligations and further industry best practice.

13.2 The Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Strategy include an expanded section on sustainability which covers Climate Change, Biodiversity and Environmental aspects.

14. Background Papers

N/A

15. Appendices

Appendix A – Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Policy
Appendix B – Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Strategy
Appendix C – Highway Safety Inspection Manual
Appendix D – Highway Safety Inspection Manual – Car Park Addendum
Appendix E – Recommendations made by Economy and Environment and Overview Scrutiny Committee
Appendix F - Equality, Social Inclusion and Health Impact Assessment