

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT OF THE ENVIRONMENT SELECT COMMITTEE 10 JULY 2001

NOTE: A copy of the report mentioned below has been sent to all members of the Environment Select Committee and other members who have requested it. Further copies are available from Nikki Patient, Room 222, County Secretary's Department, County Hall, Hertford.
(Telephone: 01992 555560)

STATUS REPORT ON HIGHWAY CONDITIONS

The Select Committee considered a report detailing the accelerated deterioration and flooding of the County's highways caused by the unprecedented weather conditions during the winter months.

Initial analysis showed that the accelerated deterioration of the local road network alone was equivalent to two years worth of decay occurring in a single winter. In relation to flooding, over the latter part of the winter there have been 50 locations on the network underwater, some of which necessitated complete closure of roads. As at 10 July 2001, 26 locations were still under water resulting in six closures. Without a positive response to the problems the County Council would have been exposed to short term risk and liability.

Despite receiving an increase in funding allocations for road repairs during 2001/02, the damage caused during the past winter highlighted the need to source additional funding:

- i) to repair the damage arising as a consequence of flooded roads, requiring major refurbishment works totalling £1.277 million;
- ii) to repair roads affected by accelerated damage where current levels of short term maintenance are unable to contain the situation require refurbishment works totalling £6.344 million.

The Committee accepted that this was an emergency situation requiring an extraordinary response and supported the following proposals from the Executive Member to address the problems which were being experienced on the highway network:

1. That the County Council should take emergency action to address the financial consequences of dealing with the aftermath of the recent adverse weather on the highway;

2. That the County Council should make strenuous representations to the Government Office for the East of England in order to secure a significant share of the Supplementary Credit Approvals being made available nationally to ameliorate the impact of flood damage to the Highway network;
3. That the proposal to delay £2.5m of programmed schemes from the LTP sustainable programme 2001 / 02 and to defer £0.3m of advanced design be agreed and that the Executive Members for Environment and Resources work with officers to investigate additional sources of funding from elsewhere in the Authority to address the unprecedented damage to the Highway;
4. That the Director keep under active review the programming of schemes to be deferred and allocates revised start dates as soon as practical over the programme period 2001 / 02 / 03, depending upon the extent of Supplementary Credit Approvals received;
5. That the Director should keep the Executive Member, Select Committee Spokesmen and local members informed of any changed scheme programmes;
6. That the County Council's need for extraordinary action should be reported in the LTP Annual Progress Report and clearly communicated to the Government Office for the East of England, District Council's, other key interested parties and the public affected by any scheme deferrals, and
7. That the possibility of making additional funding available to address the cost of refurbishment work to restore the condition of damaged roads experiencing accelerated deterioration due to the unprecedented weather conditions, and compensate for delays in the implementation of schemes should be explored as part of the County Funded Capital Programme for 2002 / 03 and beyond.

The Executive Committee on 25 July 2001 agreed the above proposals.

The Select Committee also made the following additional comments:

- a) The Liberal Democrat spokesman, Ian Simpson, suggested that £1.83 million be made available by virement of capital from the purchase of a new computer system in order to fund emergency action, in addition to the £2.8 million identified from the Local Transport Plan (LTP) sustainable projects programme and advanced designs budgets;
- b) concern was expressed that the County Council may be wasting money by putting in short term solutions rather than full repairs;
- c) there is a need to look at ways of preventing recurrence of the problems experienced and that representations on this matter should be made to the relevant government departments, ministers and MPs;
- d) the economic case to take remedial action now to prevent future insurance claims should be considered and further examined;

- e) concern that the method used to select which Local Transport Plan schemes to delay is consistent, fair and transparent.

The Select Committee supported the proposals subject to an amendment to proposal three to include that the Executive Members for Environment and Resources should work with officers to investigate additional sources of funding from elsewhere in the Authority to address the unprecedented damage to the highway.

[Since the July meeting there have been significant developments.

Representations to the Government Office for the East of England were unsuccessful and the County Council did not receive any additional supplementary credit approval to assist with addressing the flood damage.

In consultation with the Executive Member for Environment it has been possible to delay £2.5 m of sustainable projects programmed for 2001/02. The projects selected consisted of those in the very early stages of community development, in particular where much of the effort would be involved with early feasibility study and public consultations. These projects would be delayed until the next roll forward of the LTP funding. In addition funding allocated for advanced design of road refurbishment works to be implemented during 2002/03 and to be used in the later part of the financial year was made available with immediate effect.

The Executive agreed to transfer £1 m of County capital funding to be provided for additional highway works. This figure was identified from slippage in non Environment based activity included in the 2001/02 Capital programme.

This additional accumulated figure of £3.8 m was targeted at actioning the £1.277 m of damage arising from flooded roads (the subject of the unsuccessful bid to Central Government) with the remainder being used to progress the worst schemes identified within the list of roads subject to accelerated damage.

All new projects have now been programmed within the Environment Department's integrated highway programme which was introduced in response to the enhanced 2001/02 LTP programme approved by the Transport Panel at the beginning of the year.

In addition a Water Summit, chaired by Executive Member Iris Tarry, was held on 1st November. This brought together representatives from the water supply industry, Environment Agency and Hertfordshire County Council to discuss all aspects of water management. The event was well attended by interested parties including both County and District members. It served to improve understanding and foster better inter agency working.]

Nigel Brook
Chairman
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10 July 2001