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**REPORT TO: ECONOMIC GROWTH, HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE ON 16 FEBRUARY 2021**

**SUBJECT: ROADS ASSET MANAGEMENT PLANNING**

**BY: DEPUTE CHIEF EXECUTIVE (ECONOMY, ENVIRONMENT AND FINANCE)**

**1. REASON FOR REPORT**

- 1.1 To inform the Committee of the latest road network condition information.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to the Economic Growth, Housing and Environmental Sustainability Committee following a decision of Moray Council on 17 June 2020 to agree a simplified Committee structure as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the case of this Committee, the combining of the delegated responsibilities of Economic Development and Infrastructure, Community Services (Housing and Property) and Finance (budget, capital and revenue monitoring) (paragraph 9 of the Minute refers).

**2. RECOMMENDATION**

2.1 **It is recommended that the Committee:-**

- (i) **notes the latest road condition indicator (RCI) results for Moray Council; and**
- (ii) **agrees that the RCI results continue to be to be closely monitored to determine if this year's results are a one-off reversal in trend and future financial modelling is undertaken based on our RCI results that are reported November 2022.**
- (iii) **notes that any adjustment to investment will be part of the council's budget setting process.**

**3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The road network represents the Councils' single largest asset and therefore regular and adequate maintenance is vital to ensure it does not deteriorate or become dangerous, and that considerable past investment is not lost. Roads Maintenance covers those activities aimed to preserve the existing roads asset and our gross replacement cost (GRC) has recently been valued at over £1.677 billion.

- 3.2 The network and associated asset liabilities are increasing year on year as new developments are built and adopted. The charts highlighted in **APPENDIX A** clearly show how revenue and capital budgets have significantly reduced over a period of time yet more assets are added to the list of public roads for the Council to maintain. This leads to increased costs of complying with statutory duties; however this has not been recognised by a corresponding increase in budget allocation.
- 3.3 In simple terms, the base allocation needs a similar enhancement if standards are to be maintained.
- 3.4 Roads maintenance activities have four primary purposes:
- Structural maintenance to repair and maintain the fabric of the road network
  - The continued lighting of the network to ensure a safe and free flow for both vehicular and pedestrian traffic
  - Traffic management and road safety aspects to provide for the safe movement of traffic, including cyclists, pedestrians and other vulnerable groups
  - Other routine functions of a reactive or environmental nature needed to remove hazards to road users, to prevent deterioration to the fabric of the road, and to keep the network clean and attractive.
- 3.5 Following the earlier Council decision that was made on the 11 February 2014 (paragraph 3 of the Minute refers), to allow Moray's road condition to deteriorate, it has since been recognised at a meeting of Moray Council on 3 March 2020 (paragraph 3 of the Minute refers), that the reduced capital investment since that decision has had the desired outcome. The Economic Development and Infrastructure Services Committee on 21 January 2020 (paragraph 7 of the Minute refers) considered a report highlighting that Moray's road condition indicator figures are now increasing more aggressively than previous years and that if this is not addressed, the costs of reversing this trend will rapidly become unaffordable.
- 3.6 The condition of the council's road network is monitored via the Scottish Road Maintenance Condition Survey (SRMCS) which is a Scotland-wide machine-based survey, the results of which are used to calculate a Road Condition Indicator (RCI). The RCI provides information about which sections of a network should be considered for planned maintenance soon, which sections should be investigated to determine the optimum time for maintenance and which sections are generally in a good state of repair (these three categories are colloquially known as "red", "amber", and "green" lengths). The RCI in Scotland is the proportion of the network falling within Red and Amber.
- 3.7 In simple terms, the higher this percentage is, the worse the road network's condition is in.

3.8 This report summarises the latest RCI results & highlights what significant factors have changed since the previous survey was undertaken.

#### 4. **LATEST ROAD CONDITION INDICATOR (RCI) & RANKINGS (2018/20)**

4.1 Following the completion of the road condition surveys undertaken in 2020, the council has now received the latest RCI % figures. Table 1 below details the current RCI % figures and ranking position in comparison with other Scottish Authorities for previous years.

**Table 1: RCI (%) and ranking position**

Network	2015-17		2016-18		2017-19		2018-20		2019-21	
	RCI	Ranking								
<b>Whole Network</b>	26.9%	4	27.9%	4	29.1%	4	30.6%	8	28.5%	?
<b>A Class</b>	25.2%	17	25.9%	15	28.6%	21	29.2%	20	26.6%	?
<b>B Class</b>	22.8%	8	23.5%	7	25.6%	13	25.8%	12	22.3%	?
<b>C Class</b>	21.9%	5	24.9%	5	28.1%	8	25.2%	7	21.3%	?
<b>A,B,C Class</b>	22.9%	5	24.6%	5	27.3%	9	26.2%	8	22.7%	?
<b>Unclassified</b>	31.4%	5	31.6%	5	31.1%	6	35.5%	16	35.0%	?

4.2 Unfortunately, at the time of writing this report the rankings of where Moray sits when compared with the other 32 Scottish Authorities have not been released. This is due to a delay as a result of the current Covid pandemic and operational issues in the undertaking of road surveys.

4.3 However, quite surprisingly, it can be noted that in each road classification as well as the overall network, the % of the network that requires treatment has reduced – i.e. our network is in better condition this year than last (this completely bucks the trend of the last few years where the network has been getting worse year on year). However, there have been changes in the way the surveys have been undertaken this year, which are detailed below.

4.4 The national results are not available yet for this year but as a reminder, it was reported at the Economic Development and Infrastructure Services Committee on 21 January 2020 (paragraph 4 of the Minute refers), that Moray had the highest shift change in RCI, (worsening condition of our roads) in comparison with other Scottish Authorities over the previous 6 years.

4.5 The chart in **APPENDIX B** clearly shows our RCI position in 2010/12 and where our RCI is at present. The increased deterioration is exactly as forecast, which further reinforces the need to address the change in road condition and increase the investment to target this.

#### 5. **FACTORS INFLUENCING RCI CHANGES**

5.1 There are a number of factors that may have influenced our RCI figures and road conditions improving this year and following discussions with our survey provider, WDM, these are referenced below.

##### **Change in survey process**

5.2 WDM use a correction process known as texture data correction, which has been

changed this year from previous years. This has been a significant factor in our RCI shift. Our latest network RCI of 28.5% would have been 29.3% if they had continued with the old process. They also confirmed that last year's network RCI of 30.6% would have been 28.5% if it had been calculated using the new process. This can be seen in **APPENDIX C**

### **Survey timing**

- 5.3 WDM carried out the SRMCS survey later last year (August 2020) due to the Covid pandemic. In previous years our surveys have been undertaken in May. This later start means that some of our resurfacing/surface dressing works were completed before the most recent survey. The extended gap between the 2019 and 2020 surveys will have benefitted from 2 years' worth of improvement works. In addition, the lower traffic volumes (due to Covid), and the drier summer weather may both be contributory factors.

### **Cracking data**

- 5.4 WDM's own investigations into our SRMCS data has detected a bias in this year's cracking data, with an increase in the "no cracking identified" category. Clearly less cracking will result in an improved RCI. It is unclear at this time why less cracking was detected, but it could be due to the drier summer and the cracks being full of dust and therefore invisible to the scanner.

### **Scheme selection**

- 5.5 Our annual surface dressing programme has been developed at short notice last year, due to Covid, and officers targeted locations where no (or minimal) preparatory work was required. By their nature, these sites could have been locations which were either red or amber in the previous SRMCS survey due to poor texture only, so the surface dressing will have restored them to green. In previous years we have been using surface dressing to treat roads which really required resurfacing. So, in short, we may have got more 'RCI benefit' from this year's surface dressing programme than we normally would.

## **6. STRATEGIC CONTEXT MOVING FORWARD**

- 6.1 There are a number of strategic drivers for this investment and associated strategies, programmes, and plans are contained in the vision for the Moray Growth Deal which is:
- By the year 2030 Moray is a destination of choice, the area being known and recognised as an outward facing and ambitious community with a thriving and well connected commercial base and an environment in which quality of life is valued and supported."  
There is also strong strategic fit with the UK Governments Industrial Strategy and Scotland's Economic Strategy
  - Infrastructure: a major upgrade to the UK's infrastructure, which aims to deliver an economy where growth is underpinned by long-term sustainable investment in people, infrastructure and assets;
- 6.2 The capital plan approved 2020/2021 included a phased increase in capital budget of £500,000 on an annual basis to address the issue of our deteriorating road conditions. Due to the pandemic, that level of investment was not possible. Proposals for adjusted investment levels are part of the

council's budget setting process and will be confirmed at the council's budget setting meeting on 3 March.

- 6.3 In light of discussions during budget preparations and RCI scores, it is suggested that officers monitor our 2021 and 2022 RCI results and, subject to the outcome of these (assuming they show a deterioration), undertake a more detailed analysis that would provide a more up to date long term prediction on our road condition based on different budget scenarios for the years 2023/24 onwards. In the meantime work will continue to the current standard which is to be mid table in terms of our headline RCI scores.
- 6.4 The risk in this approach is that we could see a dramatic decrease in the condition of our roads. However, given the most recent results and the static position from last year, it is felt that this is unlikely over the next 12 month period.
- 6.5 It is also felt that there may be no significant change in our RCI condition until November 2022 when our results are released. The rationale behind this is due to the impact of Covid during 2020/2021 less traffic and reduced spend. In addition, any the majority of capital works for 2021/22 will not be completed before our annual condition survey, which will take place around July 2021. So, in summary investment in 21/22 will not have any bearing on our roads assessment until the condition surveys are undertaken in the summer of 2022.

## **7. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS**

### **(a) Corporate Plan and 10 Year Plan (Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP))**

Several objectives of these plans are influenced by the condition of the public roads network.

A Growing, Diverse and Sustainable Economy – the public road network is used by all sections of society, to access shops and services and to transport goods within and to and from Moray.

Building a better future for children and young people in Moray encouraging active travel options of walking and cycling require well maintained, and adequately treated during the winter months, facilities.

Empowering and connecting communities – road and footway hazards have the potential to cause injury. Winter gritting provision contributes to making communities safer.

### **(b) Policy and Legal**

The Council is responsible for the maintenance of 1558km of road network which have been adopted by the Local Authority in terms of the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984. The Act places a duty on the Local Authority to maintain the roads, lighting units and structures so adopted, but does not prescribe the level of maintenance to be delivered.

The Well-managed Highway Infrastructure Code of Practice identifies good practice, and consideration has to be given to this advice.

**(c) Financial implications**

Continuing reduced revenue maintenance budgets as part of the Councils financial savings options approved for 19/20 will have a significant impact on the repair of potholes and overall condition of the road network over time. The current 10 year capital plan recognises the need for increased investment and this will be updated to reflect implications of the RCI indicators in the future.

**(d) Risk Implications**

Pressure on general maintenance budgets will increase in terms of reactive maintenance as carriageway conditions deteriorate.

**(e) Staffing Implications**

There are no staffing implications as a result of this report.

**(f) Property**

There are no property implications as a result of this report.

**(g) Equalities/Socio Economic Impact**

There are no equalities implications as a result of this report.

**(h) Consultations**

Depute Chief Executive (Economy, Environment and Finance), Head of Environmental and Commercial Services, Chief Financial Officer, Legal Services Manager, the Equal Opportunities Officer and L Rowan, Committee Services Officer have been consulted and any comments taken into consideration.

**8. CONCLUSIONS**

- 8.1 **The report highlights our current most up to date RCI position and whilst it can be seen that the latest figures have increased slightly there are mitigating factors referenced that may have influenced this.**

Author of Report: Mark Atherton, Roads Maintenance Manager

Background Papers:

Ref: