

ROADS AND INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES UPDATE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report format and frequency for these reports were agreed as part of the previous Council. The purpose of the report is to provide a general update on key activities of the Service over recent months and to enable a discussion on key, high level topics and projects. As part of developing future committee structure and workplans the purpose and effectiveness of this standing item should be reviewed.
- 1.2 As part of the normal course of business we provide all members with regular weekly briefings on topical projects and ongoing service delivery. We have been doing this weekly for over 60 editions now and these prove to be a useful tool for regular service updates. They are all available as part of the wider resource portal on the Member Zone system which also includes specific topic briefing sheets and key policy documents. We are also in the process of developing a seminar programme on specific topics which we are hoping to make as interactive as possible with various site visits.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Area Committee note and consider the contents of this report, and provide feedback on the content, format and frequency.

3.0 DETAIL

COVID Absence/Resource Availability

- 3.1 For the period of the previous report two reports in March then June absence rates as a result of self-isolation requirements remained high in the case of the former report and tapered down more in line with pre-COVID trends in the latter report. This remains largely the case, and absence levels continue to be in line with pre-COVID trends, although there do remain a few isolated absences attributed to COVID, the overwhelming percentage of absences are non-COVID related
- 3.2 A more pressing issue in terms of resource availability is around recruitment

particularly for manual roles in our Operations team. We are finding that we are having to go out three or four times for some posts, and even then we continue to have some long-term unfilled vacancies. At the time of writing this report there are 18 vacant posts which we are trying to recruit to in our Operations team. Even in the posts we are successfully recruiting to, we are finding that we have far fewer applicants than we would have done for similar posts previously.

Capital Roads Reconstruction Programme

- 3.3 The focus of the roads reconstruction programme is to recover the network through the delivery of a mix of carriageway resurfacing schemes, patching/surface dressing and in-situ road surface recycling, which follow the principles set out within the Roads Asset Management Plan.
- 3.4 This Council has approximately £100M of backlog maintenance in the road network. This means that over £100M would need to be invested to bring the road network up to an A1 standard. Most councils are in a very similar position. Clearly in the current financial climate we are not going to see the level of investment required to bring the road network up to an A1 condition. However, over the last decade there has been a carefully applied strategy of delivering revenue and capital funding collectively and delivering a series of works designed to minimise reactive work, carry out right first time repairs wherever possible and to deliver surfacing techniques and specifications which maximizes the amount of repairs and resurfacing which is delivered. As with almost all council services there is insufficient funding available to treat all the sections of road that we'd like to do, the focus being on treating sections where we can maximise the financial return and in so doing reduce the amount of reactive repairs varied out. Unfortunately, the available funding means that almost all roads authorities, including Argyll and Bute, are unable to treat every section of road they would like to do.
- 3.5 The total programme for this financial year for roads reconstruction is £8 million Council capital allocation and £1.6million from the Strategic Timber Transport Scheme, which is used to match fund existing schemes on the council network where timber extraction is programmed to be carried out.
- 3.6 Oil and bitumen prices have increased significantly this year, and the situation with costs is highly fluctuating. Coated roadstone used for surfacing our road and footways has increased by approximately 20%. This will impact our programmes of work. A report detailing the implications of the recent price increases was presented to the June ED&I Committee.
- 3.7 The Council capital allocation for the OLI area is £2,972,850, and the scheme list is available on the Council website [here](#). As well as the programme itself, the online resources include financial values and short explanations of engineering methods/solutions.
- 3.8 Overall progress with the programme has been excellent and works remain on schedule. As well as the full programme [link above] which is updated monthly,

we provide weekly updates on schemes via our weekly briefing. At the time of writing this report 29 of the 39 individual schemes in OLI have been completed.

Winter Maintenance

- 3.9 The annual winter policy update is being reported to EDI in September. The proposed policy is largely unchanged from previous years and should it be agreed it will form the basis of the delivery of our winter maintenance activities over winter 22/23.
- 3.10 A key aspect of the winter service is the provision of public information on what we do and why we do it. There is a range of online resources available on the Council website [here](#).

Play Park Funding

- 3.11 Funding of £76,000 was allocated in financial year 21/22, with a further £79,000 this financial year. In order to provide for a meaningful programme of improvement works targeted at the high priority sites, as well as a works package with is attractive to what it is a limited supplier/contractor market, the funds have been rolled together into a single package. Sites were given a priority rating based on asset inspections and feedback from the Youth Forum, in compliance with the Scottish Government's grant requirements. The full list of prioritised sites was reported to EDI in June and is available [here](#). In this area the priority site is Tobermory.
- 3.12 An update on this was recently provided in the weekly briefing [Edition 61 5th August] which read: *The recent tender process failed to generate any bids. We requested feedback as to why there were no applications and we were advised that the timescales for completion of work were too short. A request for more time to complete was made and this is currently being assessed by our procurement team. A further re-tender process will be looked at this month.*
- 3.13 A further update will be provided on the day to the Area Committee on this matter.

Bridge Maintenance

- 3.14 The Infrastructure Design team continue to carry out bridge inspections to all approx 900 structures on a rolling programme across Argyll and Bute to ensure they are safe and fit for purpose. This inspection regime identifies necessary remedial works which are programmed for delivery.
- 3.15 The team were also successful in a highly competitive bidding process for the Scottish Government's £32million Local Bridge Maintenance Fund, receiving a funding award of £5,5million. The fund will be used to undertake proportionate works on bridges in need of repair, identified through our inspection programme/records.
- 3.16 There are three schemes identified in this area, a £1,194,000 scheme at Kilninver Bridge on the B844, which has an indicative siteworks start date of June 2023; a

scheme to the same value and indicative start date at Oude on the A816; and a third significant scheme over £1million at Pennyghael on Mull, also with an indicative siteworks start date of June next year. More details on these schemes will follow as the projects develop. The indicative programme for this fund for the whole Council area was reported to EDI in June and is available [here](#).

Dunbeg Bus Service

- 3.17 In our weekly briefing edition 65 [2nd September] we provided the following update: *We are continuing to work with colleagues at West Coast Motors to review the community feedback on the recent changes to the bus services in Oban and surrounding areas. We are hopeful that we will be able to provide a detailed update which will include further bus service changes next week. This should go some way to addressing many of the concerns raised as well as retaining the enhancements to the service which has been provided for the Dunbeg community.*
- 3.18 At the time of writing this report those arrangements have not been finalised – we would expect to provide a verbal update at the Committee meeting itself.

4.0 CONCLUSION

- 4.1 This report provides a general update to local members on recent Roads and Infrastructure activities.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Policy – various policies referred to within the body of the report
- 5.2 Financial – none
- 5.3 Legal – the Council has various statutory obligations which are the responsibility of RIS and set out in various Acts, such as the Roads Scotland Act 1984. The services provided are in line with our statutory obligations
- 5.4 HR – none known
- 5.5 Fairer Scotland Duty:
- 5.5.1 Equalities - protected characteristics – none known
- 5.5.2 Socio-economic Duty – none known
- 5.5.3 Islands – none known
- 5.6. Climate Change – none
- 5.7 Risk – none known

5.8 Customer Service - none

**Executive Director with responsibility for Roads and Infrastructure Services
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**Policy Lead for Roads and Transport
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For further information contact:

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