

PUBLIC REALM DIVISION

Review of Highways Maintenance

Response to Environment, Transport, Communities & Citizenship
Scrutiny Sub-committee

11 September 2012

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Environment, Transport, Communities & Citizenship Scrutiny Sub-committee have held a series of meetings to discuss and explore various issues surrounding Highways Repairs and Maintenance and Highway project delivery.

As a result of the Sub-Committee's deliberations, 2 areas for improvement with recommendations were identified by Members

- Public information
- Contract Monitoring and Key Performance Indicators

This briefing note sets out the Division's response to those recommendations. The Scrutiny Sub-committee's report is attached in Appendix 2 for reference.

2. PUBLIC INFORMATION

Four aspects of Public Information were identified as requiring improvement

- The visibility of information signage at road works
- The street works register on the council's website
- The letters that are put through local residents' doors
- Clarity of web based information and customer access

Recommendation 1

That a review is undertaken of the information provided on the street works register to make entries comprehensible and timely.

It is recognised that some text in these public notices do contain a level of technical information which lacks clarity for members of the public. The Network Management team is currently reviewing the way data is taken from applications and posted to the public register. This is being done against a backdrop of work being led by TfL who are also further developing a London Wide web based solution.

TfL already provide a fully searchable mapped system where customers can have a greater level of access which allows the user to have individually configured email alerts by area, works type etc. The Division is committed to re-working the type and form of information that is on the Southwark website so that the links to the London wide information are more clearly explained and accessible. The completion is expected to be within 6 months.

Recommendation 2.

That the council refreshes its signage for all road works undertaken on behalf of the council.

It is recognised that currently there is a lack of consistency in 'on site' message and branding. However, it is the Division's intention in conjunction with the Council's communications team to develop a 'brand' for highways works and improvements.

The specification of the new Highways Contract sets out the importance of branding for the future service and a provision has also been made within the specification for suppliers to provide costs for any such signage.

All development work will take place during the mobilisation period of the new contractor with a view to it being rolled out in line with the start of the new contract in April 2013.

Recommendation 3.

That organisations are encouraged to remove road signage as soon as work is complete.

The requirement to remove signage on completion is a legal requirement under s 74 of the New Roads and Streetworks Act 1991 and is also a condition of the works permit issued by the Council. Fifteen percent of all open sites and all completed works sites are inspected.

The Council has enforcement powers by way of levying daily charges, fixed penalty notices and prosecution. In the first six months of 2012, 108 sites (1.6 %) failed to clear on time resulting £122,550 of additional daily charges. At the same time the council has issued 695 fixed penalty notices levying a total of £66,520 in fines.

The Council has also prosecuted two companies, Thames Water and Clara Vale Construction Limited for working dangerously on the public highway and for an illegal road closure. Both companies were sentenced at Tower Bridge Magistrates Court and ordered to pay fines and costs totalling £4,628.65. A further ten cases are currently being processed

Recommendation 4.

That the new contract requires a high quality of communication, with appropriate sign-off within the public realm division.

In addition to the general 'On Site' brand a provision has also been made within the new contract for site specific information notices and notice boards. This information can include anything the Client requires but it is our expectation the minimum it will include is information providing the phone numbers and web contact detail with additional information added as required. It is also a requirement of the new contractor to be a member of the Considerate Constructor Scheme.

A new suite of communication literature will be delivered as part of the new contract. This will include letters to residents, consultation documentation and web information. Again the development of this information will take place in conjunction with the new supplier and will be rolled out as part of the new contract from April 2013.

Approval of the literature will be by the Head of Public Realm and once developed will be subject to document control.

Recommendation 5.

That the council's website is reviewed so that there is clear information on it as to the thresholds for repairs.

This recommendation is noted. The Division is already committed to developing improved information on not only intervention or threshold levels but the response times and treatment type and method for repairs. It is expected that the information will be prepared for posting to the web site before the end of this calendar year.

3. CONTRACT MONITORING AND KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Contract monitoring and Key Performance Indicators were identified as requiring improvement and one recommendation was given and is set out below.

Recommendation 6.

We would emphasise the need for the new set of KPIs to measure the quality of the work, communication with residents, and to capture and penalise poor performance.

As part of the preparation for the new Highways Contract a new suite of KPIs have been prepared. (Appendix 1). These KPIs include various on quality of operative compliance (H&S and considerate constructor compliance) site compliance (again H&S and considerate constructor compliance) and work delivered on site

Prior to all major works contractors will be required to agree a programme of engagement with residents and businesses. This is not limited but may include pre-notification letters, named contact officers during works and post works customer satisfaction surveys. The contractor will be required to maintain a register all contacts / complaints, from which ever source, and provide a monthly analysis of reasons and proposals for improvement. The captured information is the basis for a key performance indicator 23 .

Further more there has been the introduction of a 'critical default' as part of the contract's performance mechanism. A critical default notices identifies areas of substantial performance or contractual failure and requires the contractor to provide written explanation of any actions or incident along with an improvement plan. Failures previously were recognised but a process for a formal improvement plan was not in place. Within the new contract we can formally request written improvement plan (which we can reject as unacceptable), record trends in any defaults (critical or otherwise) as well as monitoring the implementation.

4. CONCLUSION

Officers consider that with the work which has been completed in the preparation of Highways documentation and specification, the work which is planned or taking place for web site improvements and the preparation of a new suite of Key Performances indicators, that the recommendations from the Scrutiny Sub-committee will be met and service improvements will follow.

Des Waters

Head of Public Realm

Appendix 1

Key Performance Indicators to be used in the new Contracts

KPI Nr	PI Title	Measuring
1	Percentage of Cat 1 defects permanently repaired on time	Quality
2	Percentage of Cat 2 defects permanently repaired on time	Quality
3	Completion of Ordered Works to timescale	Programme
4	Percentage of works complying with the TMA requirements	Contract Compliance
5	Percentage of acceptable H&S file information received within 4 weeks of scheme completion	Contract Compliance
6	Percentage compliance to updating Employer asset inventory systems accurately	Contract Compliance
7	Early Warning Register	Contract Compliance
8	Early Warning Response	Contract Compliance
9	Compensation Event Register	Contract Compliance
10	Compensation Events Response	Contract Compliance
11	Personal Injury Reporting	Safety / Contract Compliance
12	Utility Strikes	Safety / Contract Compliance
13	Site compliance	Safety / Quality / Contract Compliance
14	Operative compliance	Safety / Quality / Contract Compliance
15	Quality of workmanship	Quality
16	Correct Identification and Prioritisation of Defects	Quality / Contract Compliance
17	Percentage of ECO's attended and appropriate action taken on time.	Programme / Safety
18	Percentage of Safety and Service Inspections completed on time	Programme / Safety
19	Percentage of Cat 1 defects repaired on time	Programme / Safety
20	Percentage of Cat 2 defects repaired on time	Programme / Safety
21	Percentage of salt treatments completed within required time	Programme
22	Percentage of Principal and General Inspection reports delivered and accepted on time for Bridges and Other Structures	Programme
23	Level of Customer Complaints	Customer Care
24	Response to Request for Task Order Proposal	Contract Compliance
25	Completion of Ordered Works to timescale	Programme

Appendix 2

Review of Highways Maintenance

Report of the Environment, Transport, Communities & Citizenship Scrutiny Sub-committee

Introduction

- 1.1 Roads are one of those parts of the borough's infrastructure that we only notice when there are problems – no-one emails their ward councillor to comment on how smooth the road is but we all notice potholes, or road works that appear unnecessary or go on for weeks, with apparently slow progress.
- 1.2 The council will be procuring its new highways maintenance contract over the next few months, with the contract to run from April 2013. The sub-committee chose this topic in order to provide a ward member perspective that the cabinet member and the group of officers working on the contract could take into account when designing the specifications of the new contract.
- 1.3 Members of the sub-committee spent some time talking about their experience as ward members – most councillors receive complaints about roads, and many of us have had frustrated residents complaining about large schemes of work that cause disruption to people's daily routines. We drew on best practice advice in the 2011 Audit Commission report "Going the Distance" and the Department for Transport's December 2011 interim report from their Highways Management Efficiency Programme and we spoke extensively with our own officers, in particular, Mick Lucas, Public Realm Asset Manager, who the sub-committee would like to thank for his time and effort.
- 1.4 Three areas of thought emerged from our work: the quality of public information; contract monitoring – getting the key performance indicators right; and striking the right balance between planned and reactive maintenance. All this is of course set in the context of hugely constrained public finances – the sub-committee was realistic about the fact that highways maintenance will inevitably struggle for investment, given the other demands on the council's capital budgets.

Public information

- 2.1 This struck the sub-committee as a relatively easy area for improvement. The most visible channels of information are signage at road works, the street works register on the council's website, and the letters that are put through local residents' doors when a scheme is about to take place. In all three cases it is not clear enough who is trying to communicate what, and to whom, and this seemed a missed opportunity to improve understanding of why work is being done, which may contribute to public satisfaction. The site signage and the street works register often include technical language or code that is incomprehensible to the non-engineer and would not assist a member of the public trying to find out why a road on their route to work was being dug up. The below example is typical of the quality of information on the register. We are aware that this information is provided by a range of authorities and utility companies directly to the register, so it will require some reworking of processes to improve it.

Street Name	QUEENS ROAD
Location	O/S 223-225 IN C/W
Start Date	2012-03-27
Estimated Completion Date	2012-04-10
Organisation Name	London
Work Type	EToN 4: Immediate - Emergency
Work Status	In Progress
Work Reference	W108477489-02028
Map	View Works

RECOMMENDATION:

1. That a review is undertaken of the information provided on the street works register to make entries comprehensible and timely.
- 2.2 Signs at sites where road works are taking place can also be improved. We noted that some organisations are much bolder about asserting their brand, e.g. "Thames Water - we are working to improve our water network".

RECOMMENDATION:

2. That the council refreshes its signage for all road works undertaken on behalf of the council.
3. That organisations are encouraged to remove road signage as soon as work is complete.
- 2.3 Letters about traffic management schemes would benefit from being reviewed. Letters are typically hand delivered to residents whose roads are affected by a scheme, and we heard mixed reports on the quality of these letters.

RECOMMENDATION:

4. That the new contract requires a high quality of communication, with appropriate sign-off within the public realm division. This should provide public contact points and any variables that are known from the outset of the works, e.g. if the completion of the work requires dry weather.
- 2.4 Given the context of dwindling public finances, we also think it is important to be realistic about reactive repairs, most typically potholes. Officers explained to the sub-committee that on receiving a report of a pothole, highways inspectors assess them against a threshold, and we currently do not feed back to residents whether the threshold has been met. We do not suggest an expensive administrative system but we recommend that this area is reviewed so that there is clear information on the council's website as to the thresholds for repair. We saw an example on Gloucestershire County Council's website, for example, which explains that potholes must be the depth of a golf ball and the size of a large dinner plate.

RECOMMENDATION:

5. That the council's website is reviewed so that there is clear information on it as to the thresholds for repair.

Contract monitoring and Key Performance Indicators

- 3.1 It was not evident to us that the current contract has been sufficiently tough when schemes go badly. We are aware that the officer team preparing the specification is working on a new set of key performance indicators (KPIs) based on the experience of monitoring the previous contract. We would emphasise the need for the new set of KPIs to measure the quality of the work, communication with residents, and to capture and penalise poor performance.