



Title of Report:	Correspondence
Committee Report Submitted To:	Council Meeting
Date of Meeting:	3 October 2023
For Decision or For Information	FOR DECISION
To be discussed In Committee	No

Linkage to Council Strategy (2021-25)	
Strategic Theme	Cohesive Leadership
Outcome	Council operates as one effective and efficient corporate unit with a common purpose and culture
Lead Officer	Director of Corporate Services

Budgetary Considerations	
Cost of Proposal	
Included in Current Year Estimates	YES/NO
Capital/Revenue	
Code	
Staffing Costs	

Legal Considerations	
Input of Legal Services Required	YES/NO
Legal Opinion Obtained	YES/NO

Screening Requirements	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals.		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
	EQIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	Yes/No	Date:
	RNA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
	DPIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:

1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of the report is to present correspondence for Members' consideration.

2.0 The following correspondence has been received:

2.1 Colin Woods, Deputy Secretary for Transport and Roads Asset Management, Department for Infrastructure, dated 21 September 2023 (copy attached)

2.2 DfI Transport & Roads Update to Causeway Coast and Glens Council

Ahead of the updates the Divisional Roads Managers will be providing to Councils, Mr Woods like to offer some wider context, especially in relation to the Department's budgetary position and the impact that has on DfI's work.

3.0 Recommendation

It is recommended that Council consider the correspondence.



Department for

Infrastructure

An Roinn

Bonneagair

Department fur

Infrastructure

www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk

Clarence Court
10-18 Adelaide Street
BELFAST
BT2 8GB

Telephone: (028) 9054 7873

Email: [\[REDACTED\]@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk](mailto: [REDACTED]@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk)

Your reference:

Our reference:

Date: Thursday, 21 September 2023

**From the Transport and Road Asset Management Deputy Secretary
Mr Colin Woods**

David Jackson
Chief Executive
Causeway Coast and Glens Council

Via email:
[\[REDACTED\]@causewaycoastandglens.gov.uk](mailto: [REDACTED]@causewaycoastandglens.gov.uk)

Dear Mr Jackson,

DfI Transport & Roads Update to Causeway Coast and Glens Council

Ahead of the updates the Divisional Roads Managers will be providing to Councils, I'd like to offer some wider context, especially in relation to the Department's budgetary position and the impact that has on our work.

DfI's Financial Position and the impact on Roads Functions

The Department is managing a 14% reduction in its 2023-24 resource budget allocation when compared to 2022-23 on a like for like basis. Significant action has been taken to reduce spending across all areas, and fares and other charges have been increased to help sustain essential services. Having done all of that, the Department is still facing a large funding gap against its resource budget allocation.

In July 2023, the Department published on its website an Interim Consultation Report of the equality implications arising from a range of options on the possible reduction of services. This Report recognised the impact of these potential reductions to Winter Service provision, road maintenance and flood risk management to emergency levels only, and turning off streetlights, which would affect all road users and communities. It is important to note that these options are decisions which are not currently within the power of senior officials to take.

Due to the Department's budget position, we have had to take the decision to continue with a Limited Service on road maintenance activities such as defect repairs, like potholes, and gully emptying. At this stage it is planned that winter service will continue as before, though a large volume of vacancies and the impact of industrial action could place that service under additional strain.

The Department's 2023-24 Capital budget is also well below our requirement. The opening Capital budget for structural maintenance of the road network is £85m, which is welcomed but still falls well short of the £143 million required annually to maintain the road network in a reasonable condition. Budget has also been made available for things

like Local Transport Safety Measures, though our capacity is more limited than we may wish it to be. The constrained budget position also means that the Department is unable to fill posts becoming vacant through retirement or other departures; with over 400 vacancies in my Group alone you will appreciate how this impedes our ability to offer the level of services that we would wish across the full range of responsibilities.

The Strategic Direction for Transport

I am mindful of the need to develop our strategic and policy thinking to manage the impact of budget constraints and set out what the Department believes the future of transport should be. Later this year the Department hopes to publish a Transport Strategy for public consultation. It is an overarching framework which will inform the planning and delivery of transport infrastructure and services across Northern Ireland up to 2035.

While the historic focus has been on the how the network facilitates the movement of private cars, responding to the challenge of climate change and our new legal obligations to deliver net-zero by 2050 means that we need to think hard about how we view and engage with the transport network.

Through the Climate Change Act (NI) 2022 the Assembly has set out a target of net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, along with interim targets including at least a 48% reduction in net emissions by 2030. There is a legal requirement on all Northern Ireland departments to exercise their functions, as far as is possible, in a manner consistent with the achievement of the targets of the Act and carbon budgets set under it.

Given that transport is the second highest emitter of greenhouse gases, DfI and its partners have a major role in ensuring Northern Ireland is able to achieve the overall target. The rapid decarbonisation of transport represents the single greatest challenge facing the planning and management of our transport network since it developed into the modern network we recognise today. As such, the decarbonisation of transport is likely to be the single largest strategic driver for our work over the next decade. The Transport Strategy will aim to support this strategic direction for all involved in the transport sector. The scale and pace of the change necessary to reduce our transport emissions to the levels necessary should not be underestimated.

It will be crucial for the Department and local government to work together to deliver the aims of Transport Strategy. The emerging Transport Plans, which will link in with the development and timing of your Local Development Plan, are a key delivery mechanism. They will seek to apply the carbon and modal hierarchies in a pragmatic way to deliver proposals for a multimodal sustainable transport network across Northern Ireland that will support the development of local communities and economies. This approach will describe how active travel and improved public transport can retain and enhance the function of the transport network.

Development of Active Travel Infrastructure

The Climate Change Act states that, *“The Department for Infrastructure must develop sectoral plans for transport which set a minimum spend on active travel from the overall transport budgets of 10%”*. This obligation is a significant increase in active travel spend and extensive efforts are being made to ensure that we scale up our delivery capacity

from a relatively small base. We must also fully understand the consequential impact on other areas of transport spend that may need to be reduced in order to provide the investment in Active Travel.

The Department is working closely with Councils to better understand their five-year Active Travel programme and developing an appropriate grant and support framework for the delivery of greenways. We have commissioned a Northern Ireland wide Active Travel Network Delivery plan which is due for consultation in 2024. When complete, this will provide a firm basis for the prioritisation of the delivery of high quality active travel infrastructure within, and connecting, our towns and cities. The plan will complement and take account of the Belfast Cycle Network Delivery Plan and the greenways network. Steps are currently being taken to ensure increased planning, design and delivery resource moving forward, including additional consultancy support capacity.

Strategic Asset Management Plan for the Road Network

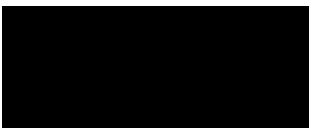
All of this activity takes place in the context of the budget challenges that I have already described, as well as all of the other work that goes into managing an asset worth over £30Billion. The underinvestment in the road network over the past decade increases the need for a sound strategic approach to the allocation of resources, and the delivery of services.

The Department plans to consult with the wider public this year to gain views on a Strategic Assessment Management Plan for the Road Network Asset. The draft Plan aims to outline the key principles that will guide the work of the Department in the development of its maintenance and development functions at an operational level. Understanding our approach to managing the road network at a strategic level will complement other strategic transport plans, ensure we are thinking consistently about the key drivers for change, and inform the implementation of future transport planning decisions.

Hopefully, the document and subsequent consultation will generate comment on aspirations for a future road network, whilst balancing constrained resources, an expanding asset base, maintenance backlogs, and current levels of service delivery.

If it would be helpful in engaging with these matters, I would be very happy to accompany my colleague Alan Keys when they present their annual report to the Council at the annual meeting, when arranged, and to try and answer any additional questions that you may have.

Yours sincerely

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of Colin Woods.

COLIN WOODS