Sandwell
Metropolitan Borough Council

Report to Cabinet

12 March 2025

Subject:	Highway Infrastructure Funding to Improve the Management of Assets in Red Risk Condition
Cabinet Member:	Cabinet Member for Environment and Highways Councillor Keith Allcock
Director:	Executive Director of Place Alan Lunt
Key Decision:	Yes
Contact Officer:	Barry Ridgway, Group Manager – Highway Services barry_ridgway@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations

For the reasons set out in the report, it is recommended that Cabinet:-

1.1 approve the allocation of £2,500,000 additional capital budget in 2025/26 to supplement existing Highway Services capital budgets, to be funded through prudential borrowing;

1.2 approve the primary objectives, which comprise to:

- increase the proportion of carriageway maintenance directed to un-classified carriageways to arrest and reverse the deterioration in the condition of unclassified roads.

- increase the funding of footways in order to arrest and reverse the deterioration in the condition of footways in red risk condition.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

2.1 A capital requirement of £2,500,000 is required in 2025/26 to stabilise the condition of the highway infrastructure.

2.2 An upward pressure is identified with the capital allocation for 2025/26 to ensure stable asset condition. This will be managed through considered application of risk-based investment decisions.

Evaluation of Funding Requirement to Stabilise Red Risk Conditions

Introduction

2.3 In 2018 the Cabinet approved Sandwell MBC's (SMBC) Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Plan (HIAMP) which defines the Council's Polices, Strategies and Plans for the maintenance of the highway network. The HIAMP has been developed in a way aligned and consistent with national best practice and the relevant supporting policies and strategies.

2.4 More detailed two-year maintenance and improvement plans have been developed covering all the main highways asset groups: carriageways; footways; bridges and associated structures; vehicle restraint systems (VRS), Traffic Signals and Streetlighting.

2.5 These plans have been developed to cover the remaining two years of the five-year City Regional Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS 1) using a combination of network condition data, structural conditional assessments, local knowledge, highway safety inspections and engineer site visits, customer feedback and guidance issued by the Department for Transport (DfT). It is dynamic in nature and will be updated to reflect the impact from new asset condition or other data on risk or prioritisation as it becomes available.

2.6 No UK Local Highway Authority as asset owner, SMBC included, has the funding desired to undertake all the maintenance and improvement works it would ideally wish to. As a result, Sandwell undertake a risk-based approach aimed at maximising the improvement we can make to the network with the funding available, identifying potential funding gaps and seeking opportunities to supplement funding through grant applications.

2.7 The two-year plans have been produced to ensure maximum efficiency and cost benefit. It is anticipated that the second round of CRSTS (CRST2) will be available after 2026/27. Final allocations will be confirmed in due course. Taking each of the named asset groups in turn:

Carriageways

2.8 Sandwell's road network is by far the largest and most valuable of the Council's assets. The Whole of Government Accounts was last completed in 2020-21 when the Gross Replacement Cost for all Sandwell highway assets combined was £3,967,613,000 (£3.9bn). The process has been under review by DfT/CIPFA since then.

2.9 When constructed from new, carriageways are normally designed to last approximately 20 years before a replacement is required. The length of our road network is currently 889 km, consisting of Classified (sub-divided into: Principal A Roads, B Roads, C Roads), Unclassified Roads and Back Lanes.

2.10 All our network is maintained to keep it in a safe and serviceable condition through a combination of:

- Regular highway safety inspections, as well as ad-hoc inspections in response to customer enquiries, and:
- annual condition surveys which are used to develop our annual maintenance programme.

Sandwell's Classified Carriageway Network

2.11 The condition of our classified road network has remained stable at a good level of condition, that compares well on a national basis.

2.12 Additional information related to the condition of the Boroughs Classified Carriageway can be found within Appendix One. The priority objectives over the next two years for classified carriageways are:

- to maintain the condition of the classified carriageway network.

- to explore the use of innovative highway imagery and materials to drive greater efficiencies.

Sandwell's Un-Classified Carriageway Network and Backlanes

2.13 Sandwell's unclassified carriageway network, sometimes referred to as our local or residential carriageway network, comprises approximately 75% of the entire carriageway network.

2.14 There are datasets for the unclassified carriageway network, which is used to determine road condition. Additional information relating to the condition of the Borough's unclassified roads covering the period 2015/16 to 2023/24 is shown in Appendix One. In summary, the unclassified road network has been broadly stable with a trend towards slight deterioration. The priority objectives over the next two years for our unclassified carriageways are:

- to seek additional capital support to arrest the deterioration in the unclassified roads, and;
- maintain the condition of our unclassified carriageway network in a satisfactory state.

Footways

2.15 Sandwell is responsible for the maintenance of approximately 1,440 km of footways, with a value of circa. £283m. Consisting of a combination of some very busy pedestrian areas, busy shopping areas, routes to local shopping centres, footways through urban areas and low usage, short estate roads and cul-de-sacs.

2.16 Trip hazards on footways caused by uneven surfaces, particularly caused by 'paving slabs' and tree root damage are a key concern at all times whilst the problems of weeds, standing water and ice tend to be more seasonal.

The benefits of maintaining footways in a good condition include:

- Improved safety for vulnerable road users,
- Ensuring footways are accessible to all and support inclusive mobility,
- Supporting the modal shift towards more active travel including walking, running and cycling, culminating in environmental benefits and reduced traffic congestion,
- Active travel can improve health, wellbeing, and fitness.

2.17 The condition of the footway network in Sandwell is monitored as part of routine and ad-hoc highway safety inspections and through an annual Footway Network Survey (FNS). The information collated as part of these inspections and surveys feeds into the authority's annual planned footway maintenance programme.

Detailed information on the Borough's footway condition can be found in Appendix One.

2.18 Preventative maintenance is reducing the number of footways in amber risk condition but there is still a gradual upward trend in red risk condition.

The priority objectives over the next two years for our footways are:

- Continue to manage the risk from trip hazards identified through a combination of Highway Safety Inspections and other reported defects,
- Continue to develop a footway maintenance plan to inform future minimum and preferred funding requirements, enabling improved planning and prioritisation, based on existing data,
- Continue to focus preventative maintenance on reducing the number of footways in amber risk condition,
- Seek additional capital funding to reverse the upward trend in footways in red risk condition.

Street Lighting

2.19 There are around 30,850 columns in the Borough with an average age of around 40 years, compared to a design life of between 25 and 40 years depending on the column type. The fundamental purpose of providing public lighting is to help create a better environment, promote healthier lives and make those that feel more vulnerable feel safer. As such, this supports many of the objectives outlined in the Corporate Plan.

The benefits of providing good street lighting are:

- It reduces the risk of road accidents,
- It discourages criminal and anti-social activity, improving how safe people feel,
- It supports the Borough's aim to create more Sustainable Communities.

2.20 Street Lighting is subject to the following inspection regimes:

- electrical testing is carried out every 6 years,
- structural visual inspection every 6 years,
- structural testing of steel columns is undertaken every 5 years, unless identified as a higher risk.

2.21 Although street lighting columns are typically passing the required inspections, we would expect, based on age profile, a minimum of 2% of the streetlighting stock to require replacement every year. The results of our structural testing surveys supports this assessment.

2.22 £1.12m of capital funding for the planned and reactive replacement of street lighting columns informed by our testing regime is planned from 2025/26.

2.23 The existing capital funding has permitted the acceleration in the modernisation of streetlighting lanterns, such that circa 95% of the Borough's street lighting lanterns are now be converted to LED.

The priority objectives for our street lighting over the next two years are:

- complete the replacement of 6,705 SON streetlights.
- continue with the planned and reactive replacement of street lighting columns informed by our structural inspection regime,
- develop proposals for 'part-night lighting for consideration, as per the MTFP.

Vehicle Restraint Systems

2.24 Surveys have identified vehicle restraint systems that are significantly deficient in comparison to the modern standards appropriate for current vehicle weights and speeds. Many of these "crash barriers" are located on dual carriageways built between 1970 and 1972. A 7-year programme to upgrade vehicle restraint systems to modern standards is recommended to commence in 2024/25 at a cost of £250,000 per year.

2.25 Sandwell commissioned Jacobs to undertake a survey of Sandwell's vehicle restraint systems (VRS). The survey took place over August and September 2023, with each barrier locations

being inspected for condition, type, and for compliance to Highways Structures & Bridges Design CD377 Requirements for Road Restraint System, formerly known as TD 19/06.A programme of repairing/upgrading has been designed to bring the VRS into compliance with the requirements of CD377, this has been phased over a 5-year timescale with a budget impact of £250,000 per financial year.

Bridges and Structures

2.26 Sandwell Council is responsible for 172 bridges as well as many retaining walls, culverts, subways and other structures: 742 in total. Although the Council is responsible for the majority of road and footbridges in the Borough, there are a significant number of bridges that are owned and maintained by other organisations, such as Network Rail and the Canal and River Trust (formerly British Waterways Board).

2.27 It is essential to ensure that all our bridges remain in good, safe condition and are accessible to all road users. We manage our bridges and structures through a programme of:

- Planned inspections,
- Structural reviews,
- Planned major maintenance schemes.

2.28 As for other Asset types, SMBC is obligated to submit a valuation return which relates to highways assets, including highway structures, on an annual basis. Sandwell use the Structures Asset Management Planning Toolkit to support long term decision making in respect of bridges and structures. The application of the Structures Asset Management principles and the outcome from the programme of bridge inspections has resulted in a capital need of £1,489,000 in 2025/26 to maintain Borough's bridge stock in good condition. Further commentary on the condition of the Borough's bridge stock and A discussion on the bridges currently the maintenance responsibility of The Canal and River Trust can be found in Appendix One.

2.29 The priority objectives for bridges and structures over the next two years are:

- Continue to manage the condition of the Councils bridges and structures through a combination of Inspections and other reported defects,
- Continue to focus preventative maintenance on reducing the number of bridges in structures in poor and fair (amber risk) condition,
- Subject to funding, it is planned that the Dudley Port Bridge, Tipton will move into detailed design, with a view to commencing construction in 2025.

Traffic Signals

2.30 As a responsible local Highway Authority, SMBC provides and maintains 247 traffic signal sites within the Borough. The priority objective is to provide and maintain all traffic signals and controlled pedestrian crossings to a high standard to ensure the safety of all road users and to ensure the efficient operation of the highway network.

2.31 Annual inspection of traffic equipment is carried out by the asset contractor with defects managed through the TRAMMS system. Highway Safety Inspectors provide an overview of condition as part of their routine safety inspections.

2.32 Allocated maintenance funding for traffic signals is minimal. The Council are reliant on securing additional maintenance funding through DfT and/or TfWM grants. In 2021/22 the Council were successful in securing £355,000 of funding for the replacement of life expired traffic signals on the Key Route Network. And in 2023/24 were successful in securing a further £500,000 as part of the DfT Traffic Signal Obsolescence Grant and Green Light Funds.

2.33 Sandwell are reliant on securing this level of funding each year to avoid the potential for us to build a significant future maintenance budget capital it is recommended that allocation of £500,000 should be made for proactive traffic signal replacement in 2025/26.

2.34 Sandwell is currently transitioning traffic signal illumination to LED lighting, with around 55% of traffic signals in Sandwell now LED.

2.35 A summary of the capital funding requirement to stabilise red risk conditions, together with proposed funding sources is set out below.

		2024/25 (£)	2025/26 (£)	2026/27 (£)
Expenditure	**Description**			
Lifecycle Modelling: Total Annual funding needed to stabilise red risk condition	Carriageways	8,462,880	6,827,844	6,952,655
	Footways	3,310,000	3,344,952	3,544,329
	Street Lighting	150,000	1,120,000	1,120,000
	Vehicle Restraint Systems	250,000	250,000	250,000
	Bridges and Structures	1,289,000	1,489,000	1,000,000
	Traffic Signals	100,000	500,000	500,000
Subtotal		**13,561,880**	**13,531,796**	**13,366,984**
Inflation Assumption		N/A	Included within above as a result of procurement of multi-year contracts	2.30%
Inflation value		N/A	N/A	307,441
Total Expenditure Requirement		**13,561,880**	**13,531,796**	**13,674,425**
Existing Funding	**Description**			
DfT Funding Secured (Grant Funding)	Maintenance Block	4,741,000	4,741,000	4,741,000
	Network North Funding	509,000	1,695,244	3,476,500*
	Challenge Funding	596,000	0	500,000*
Council Funding Secured	Steet Lighting Capital Funding (Prudential Borrowing Annual Allocation)	275,000	275,000	275,000
	Street Lighting (Prudential Borrowing Allocation Brought Forward)	1,840,416	0	0
	Council Gap Funding (Prudential Borrowing, including Brought Forward Allocation)	5,002,941	0	0

	Highways Revenue Contribution to Capital Costs	2,700,000	2,700,000	2,700,000
Total Existing Funding Available		**15,664,357**	**9,411,244**	**11,692,500**
(Surplus)/Deficit of Existing Funding Available		(2,102,477)	4,120,552	1,981,925
Proposed Reprofile of Surplus 2024/25 Funding		2,102,477	(1,620,552)	(481,925)
Additional Capital Funding Required (Additional Prudential Borrowing)		**0**	**2,500,000**	**1,500,000**

***** There is significant uncertainty regarding government funding commitments for highway maintenance for 2026/27 and assumptions applied which will be revisited as part of a further Report to Cabinet produced in late 2025/2026).

2.36 Data collected on the condition of all asset types that comprise the wider highway network has been collected over many years in order to develop a sophisticated set of lifecycle modelling and deterioration tools. These tools enable different capital maintenance scenarios to be modelled to determine which provides the best long-term outcome that will deliver the objective of stabilising the proportion of assets in red risk condition.

2.37 Lifecycle modelling has been undertaken and has determined that total capital requirement of £13,531,796 is needed for the year 2025/26 to arrest the gradual increase in assets in red risk condition.

2.38 Capital Funding of £6,711,244 has been secured and a further £2,700,000 of revenue contribution has been assumed from various income streams to reduce the request for further capital support to the maximum extent. This results in a £2,500,000 funding gap needed to supplement existing Highway capital budgets for 2025/26. This reduces to £1,500,000 for 2026/27 and £1,000,000 for each of the two following years.

2.39 During October 2023, Cabinet approved an additional capital budget allocation for 2024/25 of £1,901,550 for assets in red risk condition. Without further budget for 2025/26, total funding will not be sufficient to arrest the decline in the condition of highway assets.

Provisional Programmes

2.40 A provisional programme for 2025/26 has been identified for each of the following:

Carriageway Resurfacing Programme
Carriageway Surface Treatment Programme
Carriageway Patching Programme

Footway Resurfacing Programme
Footway Surface Treat Programme

A detailed list of provisional schemes is attached as an Appendix Two.

2.41 The provisional carriageway and footway programmes for 2025-26 identify the schemes that are planned using both the secured funding and those additional schemes that would be possible based on receiving an additional capital budget allocation of £2,500,000 for 2025-26. The schemes shaded in red are the schemes which would be deprioritised should the additional allocation not be approved.

2.42 These are provisional programmes and may be subject to change in light of new data amending the assessment of risk and/or engineering judgement.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan

Growing Up in Sandwell	Best start in life for children and young people: Good, well maintained highway infrastructure will encourage more walking and cycling increasing personal wellbeing, improving road safety and promoting cleaner air quality.
Living in Sandwell	The highway environment plays an important role in the life of Sandwell's communities, particularly the positive opportunities that they can bring through improving social inclusion and interaction. Good quality highways infrastructure will make our communities feel safe, more protected and confident in their homes and neighbourhoods.

Thriving Economy in Sandwell	Well maintained highways bring increased economic and physical activity as well as mitigating against the likelihood of accidents and combatting wear and tear on our infrastructure. Highways are the arteries of Sandwell communities. They connect residents to employment, education, local services and indeed the wider world, enable economic growth, social mobility and are vital in ensuring good health outcomes. The recent Enventure survey was conducted to gain insight from residents to support Sandwell Council in the development of the budget proposals and future spending priorities. The survey found that "Maintaining Roads and Pavements" was selected as important by high proportions of respondents in both the representative survey (72%) and the online survey (79%).

4 Context and Key Issues

4.1 The Council has a statutory duty to maintain the highway in a condition that is fit for purpose as far as is reasonably practicable. The Council also has a duty of care to all road users and the wider community. These duties are not absolute but must be undertaken on reasonable grounds, with due care and with regard to the relevant considerations set out in best practice national guidance, such as the 'Well Managed Highway Infrastructure - A code of Practice'.

4.2 The 2018 Cabinet approved SMBC's Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Plan (HIAMP) defines the Council's Polices, Strategies and Plans for the maintenance of the highway network. The HIAMP has been developed in a way aligned and consistent with national best practice and the relevant supporting policies and strategies.

4.3 A key aspect of the current HIAMP is the development of lifecycle plans. The funding request recommended in this report is consistent with the risk based, long term planning approaches derived from using lifecycle plans for key strategic assets.

4.4 With the Cabinet report of October 2023, It was agreed a further report to Cabinet would be produced in the Autumn of 2024 to both evaluate the condition of key highway asset groups after undertaking a further round of condition surveys and identify the resultant budget requirement for 2025/26.

5 Alternative Options

5.1 No alternatives are recommended. Existing budgets are not sufficient to stabilise the deterioration of red risk assets without ongoing Council support.

5.2 The recommended Council Capital investment mitigates the risks of failing to meet the statutory duties of the Council as Local Highway Authority and Local Traffic Authority as a consequence of the escalation of red risk condition.

5.3 Any alternative option in respect of a decision not to provide capital to gap fund the replacement of high risk life expired infrastructure is not recommended for the following reasons:

- Extensive carriageway damage is more expensive to repair escalating the financial cost of addressing the capital maintenance backlog;
- Failure of crash barriers to restrain vehicles may result in additional road traffic casualties;
- Failure of traffic signals may result in a breach of the Network Management Duty;
- Extensive footway damage may result in greater trip and fall risks as well as increasing repair costs escalating the cost of any backlog further;
- Bridge failures can result in prolonged road closures, diversion and risk of accidents, as seen for the Station Road Bridge failure.
- Failure to comply with the policies, strategies and plans set down in the Cabinet Approved HIAMP exposes the Council to increased levels of claims from third parties for injury and damage.
- Reputational damage associated with the above, the associated public complaints and failure to achieve corporate objectives.

6 Implications

Resources:	Asset management and maintenance is an area of work that the Council's Highways Teams have a successful track record of delivery in. It takes place at multiple locations across the Borough and will be managed by governance arrangements that have successfully delivered these programmes of work previously. Corporate procurement officers will assist Highway Services officers using existing collaborative West Midlands Maintenance Framework Contracts. The financial implications are set out in the recommendations and discussed throughout the report. Provision has been made within the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy, as approved by Cabinet and Council in February 2025, for the revenue costs associated with the prudential borrowing set out in this report.
Legal and Governance:	The principal statutory duty imposed on local highway authorities to maintain the highway at public expense is set out in Section 41 of the Highways Act 1980. The Traffic Management Act 2004 imposes a Network Management Duty on a council as the Local Traffic Authority to manage the authority's road network to facilitate as far as reasonably practicable the expeditious movement of traffic. Section 39 of the Road Traffic Act 1988 requires each Local Authority carry out studies into accidents arising out of the use of vehicles and, in the light of those studies, to take such measures as appear to the authority to be appropriate to prevent accidents; including the construction, improvement, maintenance or repair of roads for which they are responsible. The recommendations in this report will support these statutory duties.

Risk:	The recommended Council Capital investment mitigates the risks of failing to meet the statutory duties of the Council as Local Highway Authority and Local Traffic Authority as a consequence of the escalation of red risk condition. The alternative option in respect of a decision not to provide capital to gap fund the replacement of high risk life expired infrastructure is not recommended for the following reasons: • Extensive carriageway damage is more expensive to repair escalating the financial cost of addressing the capital maintenance backlog • Failure of crash barriers to restrain vehicles may result in additional road traffic casualties • Failure of traffic signals may result in a breach of the Network Management Duty • Extensive footway damage may result in greater trip and fall risks and insurance claims, as well as increasing repair costs escalating the cost of any backlog further • Bridge failures can result in prolonged road closures, diversion and risk of accidents, as seen for the Station Road Bridge failure. • Increased likelihood of insurance claims for damage or injury. • Reputational damage associated with the above, the associated public complaints and failure to achieve corporate objectives.
Equality:	There are no specific equality issues regarding the proposals contained in this report. The requirements of the Equality Act 2010 are included in the Framework Agreement Documentation to draw attention to the detail of, and the need to comply with, the Act.
Health and Wellbeing:	The Highway environment plays an important role in the life of the community, particularly the positive opportunities

	that they can bring from social inclusion and interaction. Good highway infrastructure discourages criminal and anti-social activity, reducing the fear of crime, supporting the increased use of public transport, delivery of carbon reduction savings and the associated benefits outlined in the Corporate Plan.
Social Value	Highways are the arteries of our communities. They connect our residents to employment, education, local services and indeed the wider world. They enable economic growth, social mobility and are vital in ensuring good health outcomes. The recent Enventure survey was conducted to gain insight from residents to support Sandwell Council in the development of the budget proposals and future spending priorities. The survey found that "Maintaining Roads and Pavements" was selected as important by high proportions of respondents in both the representative survey (72%) and the online survey (79%). The contracts that deliver this work maximise additional value to Sandwell communities through the inclusion of Social Value requirements.
Climate Change:	Well maintained highways support climate change objectives through the supporting more active travel choices, delivery of carbon reduction savings and associated benefits outlined in the Corporate Plan.
Corporate Parenting:	Good, well maintained highway infrastructure promotes improved physical and mental health and the well-being of children and young people through more walking and cycling, improving road safety and promoting cleaner air quality.

7. Appendices

Appendix 1 - Detailed Information Related to Sandwell Highway Assets

Appendix 2 - Potential Carriageway and Footway Programmes

Glossary Of Terms:

SCANNER stands for, Surface Condition Assessment for the National Network, is the leading carriageway road condition assessment method prescribed by the DfT.

Griptester is used to measure skidding resistance on carriageways

Backlanes comprise alleys, back-alleys, service, or access roads, normally behind houses or commercial properties.

TR22 inspections:

refers to the guidance document produced by the Institute of Lighting Professions covering the non-destructive testing of lighting columns.

SON Street lights are type of high-pressure sodium streetlight.

Structures Asset Management Planning Toolkit:

The Structures Asset Management Planning Toolkit comprises both a recognised methodology and other information to support bridge engineers and managers in the management financial planning, prioritisation of needs, lifecycle planning and asset valuation of bridges. The custodian of this document is the UK Bridges Board. The **Structures Asset Planning Dashboard** displays the outcomes from the application of the Planning Toolkit principles.

TRAMMS: Is a software tool to assist with monitoring and managing traffic signals and associated defects remotely.

Key Route Network:

The Key Route Network is a collection of the busies routes in the Borough, supported through a evidenced review and over which TfWM have shared responsibility for oversight.