

Report to: Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 11 February 2008

Subject: Progress on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Reviews for Utilities, Traffic Calming and Invasive Weeds

Report of: Director of Environmental Services

Contact officer: Neil Fearnley Telephone: 01942 404303

Purpose/summary: To provide an update on previous Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviews: (1) Utilities Review; (2) Traffic Calming and (3) Invasive Weeds.

Alternative options considered and reason for selecting the one recommended: Not applicable.

Recommendation/decision: That Members note the progress and improvements made following each of the Reviews.

Key Decision: This report does not involve a key decision.

Risks/Implications:

Financial:	Within existing budgets
Staffing:	Within existing resources
Policy:	Local Transport Plan (Traffic Calming)
Equal Opportunities - has a Diversity Impact Assessment been conducted?	No
Wards affected:	All

Property Implications – Does the proposal involve a reduction, addition or change to the Council’s asset base or its occupation?

No

If yes have the property implications been agreed with the Corporate Property officer?

Does this proposal have significant implications for the Council and the local population? Yes. The report addresses safety measures.

Does this proposal involve a new policy or procedure or significant changes to an existing policy or procedure? No

Has the Director of Legal and Property Services confirmed that the recommendations within this report are lawful and comply with the Council’s Constitution? **No ***

Has the Director of Finance and IT confirmed that any expenditure referred to within this report is consistent with the Council's budget? **No ***

Are any of the recommendations within this report contrary to the Policy Framework of the Council? **No ***

* delete which applicable

For Cabinet reports only:

Categorisation of the report:	x
Discussion leading to a decision	
Monitoring	
Sharing for corporate understanding	

Discussion	
Decision	
Information	

Tracking/Process:

	Consultation	Ward Members	Partners
Panel	Overview & Scrutiny	Cabinet	Council
	11 February 2008		

Proper Officer Neil Fearnley

Date 30 January 2008

1.0 Report Background:

This report provides an update on the positive action taken following three Overview and Scrutiny reviews relating to services carried out by the Environmental Services Department.

2.0 Utilities Review

2.1 Background:

2.1.1 In October 2003 Overview and Scrutiny Select Committee Number 2 produced its findings in the report "The Utilities Review".

2.1.2 The review covered the partnership working arrangements between United Utilities Network Connections and Wigan Council, relating to the provision of the electrical service connections that power the street lights, road signs and various other pieces of equipment on the highway network of the Borough.

2.1.3 The review concentrated on two key aspects:

- (i) reducing the time taken for United Utilities to make electrical service connections to street lighting columns (via a Street Lighting Agreement) and;
- (ii) an alternative approach for upgrading concrete street lighting columns without having to interfere with the electrical connection thus avoiding delays, criticism and safety issues. This initiative was termed the Tameside Slipper, in recognition of the Council that promoted the idea.

2.2 Street Lighting Agreement.

2.2.1 As a result of the Overview and Scrutiny review significant reductions in the time taken for providing electrical service connections were achieved. This was done by developing closer working relationships with United Utilities, introducing a Street Lighting Agreement between both parties and monitoring performance.

2.2.2 This has since developed further as Wigan Council and United Utilities have now signed up to the national Service Level Agreement (SLA), produced by The Office of Gas and Electricity Markets (OFGEM) who is the industry Regulator.

2.2.3 In addition to this a Street Lighting steering group has been set up between GMADE (Greater Manchester Councils) and United Utilities to liaise on workload, programming and performance monitoring. Wigan Council has played a key role in establishing and attending this group.

2.2.4 United Utilities performance in providing service connections is currently meeting the minimum standards laid down by OFGEM in the SLA. This requires 60% of service connections to be completed within 15 days and 90% to be completed in 30 days.

2.2.5 Wigan Council continues to highlight that the Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) are 'minimum' standards and constantly seeks improvements in United

Utilities' performance. OFGEM in turn closely monitors performance of the KPI's and will publish a further performance / progress report in the summer of 2008. If performance remains poor, OFGEM will consider introducing incentives through their price control review.

2.3 Tameside Slipper

2.3.1 Members will recall that the Tameside Slipper was used to upgrade concrete lighting columns by cutting off the column to leave a stump. A steel column was then sleeved over the stump. The advantage of this approach was that there was no need to involve United Utilities for disconnecting and reconnecting their service supply, giving an efficient and cost effective way of extending the life of the lighting column.

2.3.2 Trials of the Slipper have taken place at three sites in the Borough and these have been monitored over a 2 year period with no significant variation in the number of faults on these installations, when compared to other standard installations. However, there are signs that the remaining section of the old lighting column stump has continued to deteriorate in several of the installations. A specialist test consultant is to undertake a structural inspection and test of the Tameside Slipper column and its foundation. These tests should be completed by the end of March 2008.

2.3.3 In April 2006 BW Installations, designer of the Slipper, commissioned a series of design calculations for the Slipper and its foundation, to seek compliance with the requirements of British Standard BS EN40. These calculations showed that the foundations needed to be substantially strengthened to satisfy the Standard. The size of the recommended foundation would be impractical in a standard footway, taking up half of its width and interfering with other utility companies' equipment.

2.3.4 Since then BW Installations has ceased trading in the supply and installation of the Tameside Slipper. Contact has been made with several other suppliers who indicate that they do not manufacture a slipover lighting column as a standard product, as there is no demand for it.

2.3.5 In addition, over the last 5 years, the priority for street lighting column replacement programme has focused on the main road network. The majority of these columns cannot be replaced using the Tameside Slipper due to them being over 6m in height. It is unlikely therefore, that the Tameside Slipper will be used again.

2.4 Future Developments

2.4.1 Historically, all unmetered service connections into street lighting equipment have been controlled and provided by United Utilities, as the Local Distribution Network Operation (DNO) giving them a monopoly of the market. In 2002, OFGEM first proposed that the market should be opened up with Independent Connection Providers (ICP's) being used to provide some of the unmetered electrical connections to street lighting equipment.

2.4.2 Initially there was a shortage of ICP's in the market place, however, with the support and encouragement of OFGEM, there are now a number of accredited ICP's.

2.4.3 Wigan Council is now in a position to evaluate another alternative service delivery option. The benefits to Wigan Council of employing an ICP are:

- **Improved Performance** – by controlling all works associated with replacing lighting columns.
- **Less Disruption** – potential to operate a ‘one stop’ shop where lighting units can be installed, connected and removed **on the same day** with only one visit to site.
- **Cost Savings** – procuring the connections service through a competitive tendering process will offer the opportunity for the cost of connections to be reduced, compared with the current rates.

2.4.4 It is intended to undertake a number of trial lighting improvement schemes by using ICPs. This will take approximately 6 months to set up the necessary tripartate agreements between Wigan Council, the ICP’s and United Utilities. The trials should take place in 2008 / 09 financial year.

2.4.5 The trial schemes will be evaluated and (if successful) a competitive procurement process will be undertaken for the future provision of the electrical connection service.

3.0 Traffic Calming

3.1 Background:

3.1.1 In July 2002, Overview and Scrutiny Select Committee Number 2 produced its findings in the report “Traffic Calming”. The review aimed to understand the planning, implementation and monitoring of traffic calming in residential areas and around schools.

3.1.2 An area-wide approach is taken when identifying accident patterns involving vulnerable road users in urban areas. Accidents involving child pedestrians and cyclists do not tend to cluster at easily treatable single site locations and solutions to these problems often involve the introduction of a series of measures across the area. Area-wide schemes aim to reduce vehicle speeds and remove or mitigate the effects of through traffic by the introduction of traffic calming or traffic management measures.

3.2 Progress Since the Review

3.2.1 In February 2005, the former Director of Engineering Services presented a report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which provided a position statement on the Traffic Calming Action Plan. The main recommendation from the Review was to consider a points based system for prioritising requests for traffic calming.

3.2.2 In June 2006, a report was approved by Cabinet setting out an assessment and prioritisation tool for Wigan. Various criteria are used as part of the assessment process and points allocated accordingly, to provide an overall score for each area. The criteria used include the following:

- Accident and casualty records over the latest 3 year period.
- Presence of pedestrian generators such as schools, health care facilities, shops, leisure facilities etc.
- Traffic flows and speeds.
- Housing density.
- Index of deprivation.

3.2.3 This points based system is updated on an annual basis in order to identify those areas in the Borough having the worst problems, so that any funding which is available through the Local Transport Plan process can be targeted to these areas. A full consultation with the local community is carried out prior to implementation of a scheme to gain their views and support.

3.2.4 Using the new prioritisation tool, traffic calming was introduced in two areas in 2006 / 07: Higher Folds Area and Shakerley Area. These schemes need to have been operational for twelve months to be properly evaluated to assess whether they are meeting the casualty reduction objective.

3.2.5 To demonstrate the effectiveness of traffic calming schemes, there are examples of schemes that have been in operation for over twelve months that are showing a positive impact.

- **Ennerdale Road, Astley** – Three recorded collisions in the 3 years prior to introducing the scheme. None in the 12 months since.
- **Rose Avenue Area, Beech Hill** – 9 recorded collisions in the 3 years prior to the scheme. 2 in the 3 years afterwards.

3.3 Road Casualty Statistics

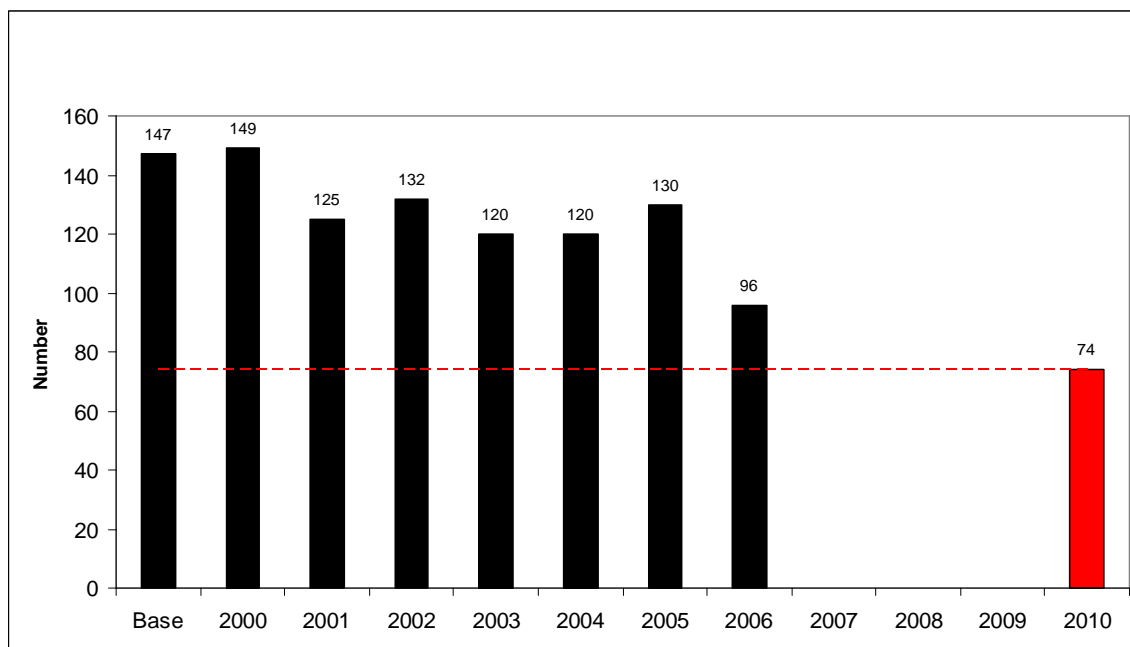
3.3.1 The reduction in accidents achieved through traffic calming measures contribute towards the Council's performance against the targets for reducing accidents set by Government in March 2000. The targets were:

- 40% reduction in the number of people killed or seriously injured in road accidents by 2010.
- 50% reduction in the number of children killed or seriously injured in road accidents by 2010.
- 10% reduction in slight injuries by 2010.

3.3.2 Our progress towards national targets for the different categories is:

- **All killed and seriously injured casualties:**

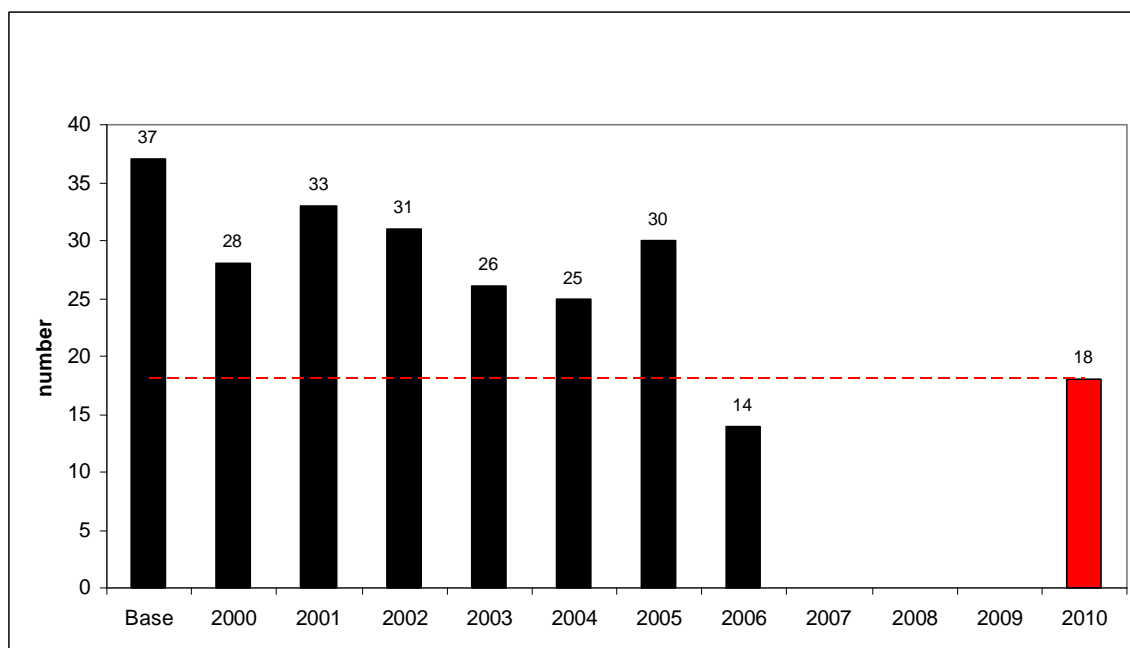
When considering the figures for all killed and seriously injured (KSI) casualties, our base was 147; therefore our target for 2010 is 74. Graph 1 illustrates our progress to date.



Graph 1 – All killed and seriously injured casualties (Wigan)

- **Child killed and seriously injured casualties**

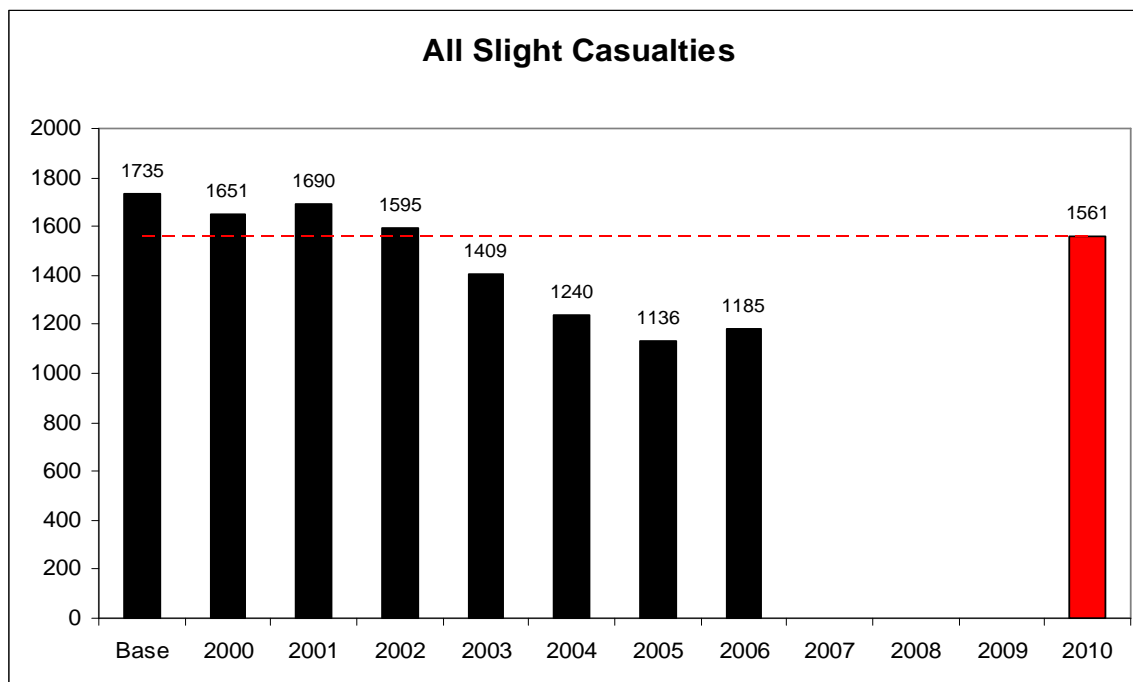
When considering the figures for child killed and seriously injured (KSI) casualties, our base was 37 casualties; therefore our target for 2010 is 18. Graph 2 shows a downward trend.



Graph 2 – Child killed and seriously injured casualties (Wigan)

- **Slight casualties**

The figures for slight casualties show a downward trend and since 2003 the figure has been below the 2010 target figure.



Graph 3 – All slightly injured casualties (Wigan)

3.3.3 The killed and seriously injured casualty statistics have been showing a downward trend, as detailed in the graphs above. The 2006 figures for both KSI and Child KSI have shown a dramatic reduction compared to the previous year. 2007 figures are not finalised yet, however, indications show that the reduction seen in 2006 has been maintained in 2007.

3.3.4 These marked reductions have been as a result of an holistic approach through engineering, education, training, publicity and enforcement. By putting systems in place, such as the prioritisation tool for area wide traffic calming, as proposed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, investment can be targeted in the right places with the aim of further reducing accidents and casualties.

4.0 Invasive Weeds

4.1 Background:

4.1.1 Overview and Scrutiny Select Committee No.2 considered a report on Japanese Knotweed and other Invasive weeds on 5 March 2007.

4.1.2 The report was approved by Cabinet on 14 April 2007, where it was also confirmed that the Director of Environmental Services should be the Chief Officer tasked with delivering the action plan that would develop a “One Council” approach to dealing with the problem of invasive weeds.

4.2 Update on Progress

- 4.2.1 Progress to date has been positive with the key Council Departments dealing with the problem having been identified.
- 4.2.2 Advice and guidance is now publicly available on the Council web site with contact points for further advice given. This is updated on a regular basis to ensure that best practice is adopted.
- 4.2.3 The web site covers the legal aspect by clarifying that individual landowners are responsible for carrying out treatment of invasive weeds on their land. It confirms that the Council do not have power to force landowners to take action.
- 4.2.4 Information is being recorded on sites that suffer from invasive weeds as they are reported to the Environmental Services Department. It is intended that this information along with that recorded by other Departments can be brought together on one software package. Ideally this should occur once the Council has moved towards one Department taking responsibility for all unified land owned by the Council.
- 4.2.5 Despite the lack of additional resources made available to support the action plan, it is felt that good progress has been made in gathering data and offering guidance to landowners having to deal with the problem of invasive weeds.

Proposals:

Report for information only.

Alternative options considered and reason for the recommended option:

Not applicable.

Conclusions:

Members are asked to note the progress and improvements arising from the reviews that they have undertaken.

