

Item 8 - Question Time

To the Chair of the Environment, Development & Infrastructure Committee

“What measures does the Administration intend to take to improve the condition of Highland roads?”

Response to Mr R MacWilliam

Council agreed to invest an additional £2.7m per year in 2016 as additional funding to the capital programme for road maintenance. During the review of the capital programme in March 2018, this increased sum was maintained at its current level of 7.2m per year for the next 5 years. When agreeing the capital programme in March 2018, an additional £1m was brought forward from 2019/20 to help address some of the damages from the 2017/18 Winter, increasing the investment to £8.2m this year.

During the debate on capital in March, Council agreed the following:

“In recognising the significant damage to roads caused by the current adverse winter, and particularly the strain that the cost of these repairs placed on the Council budget, to work with all political groups throughout the 2018/19 financial year to identify ongoing savings through better cost management and realisation of project underspends in order to fund these vital road repairs”.

As a result, an additional £1.5m was reallocated to roads this year from an over provision in ICT funding, giving a total road maintenance capital investment in 2018/19 of £9.7m. This is the largest single capital investment in road maintenance for several years. However, as reported to EDI committee on 16 August 2018, the required sum to reach ‘steady state’ per annum (that is not getting any better or any worse) is 21.7m (from the Society of Chief Officials for Transport in Scotland – independent survey of all 32 Local Authorities). Any further capital underspends elsewhere in the current capital programme will continue to be redirected to road maintenance.

The Council also agreed in March *“to commit to a major lobbying campaign to bring in additional money for schools and roads and to call on all MPs and MSPs to publicly commit to supporting this case for investing in the Highlands”.* This lobbying continues through contact between the Council Leader, the Chair of EDI and relevant Ministers.

In addition, and as reported to the August EDI committee, the Northern Roads Collaboration Joint Committee is now up and running and will seek to bring added value to road maintenance through shared resources, knowledge and practice. This is the first of its kind to be agreed in Scotland and further proposals will be shared at committee going forward.