Updating the Well-Managed Highway Infrastructure Code of Practice: Key changes for highway engineers

AIA Sharing Best Practice

12th November 2026

UK Roads Leadership Group

SBP

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AtkinsRéalis

What we will cover in this session

01 The updated Code

What has changed and what remains

02 Key changes in Parts A and B

Principles, highway practice and service delivery

03 Beyond Parts A and B

A brief look at structures, lighting and tunnels

04 Using the platform

Finding key information and relevant guidance

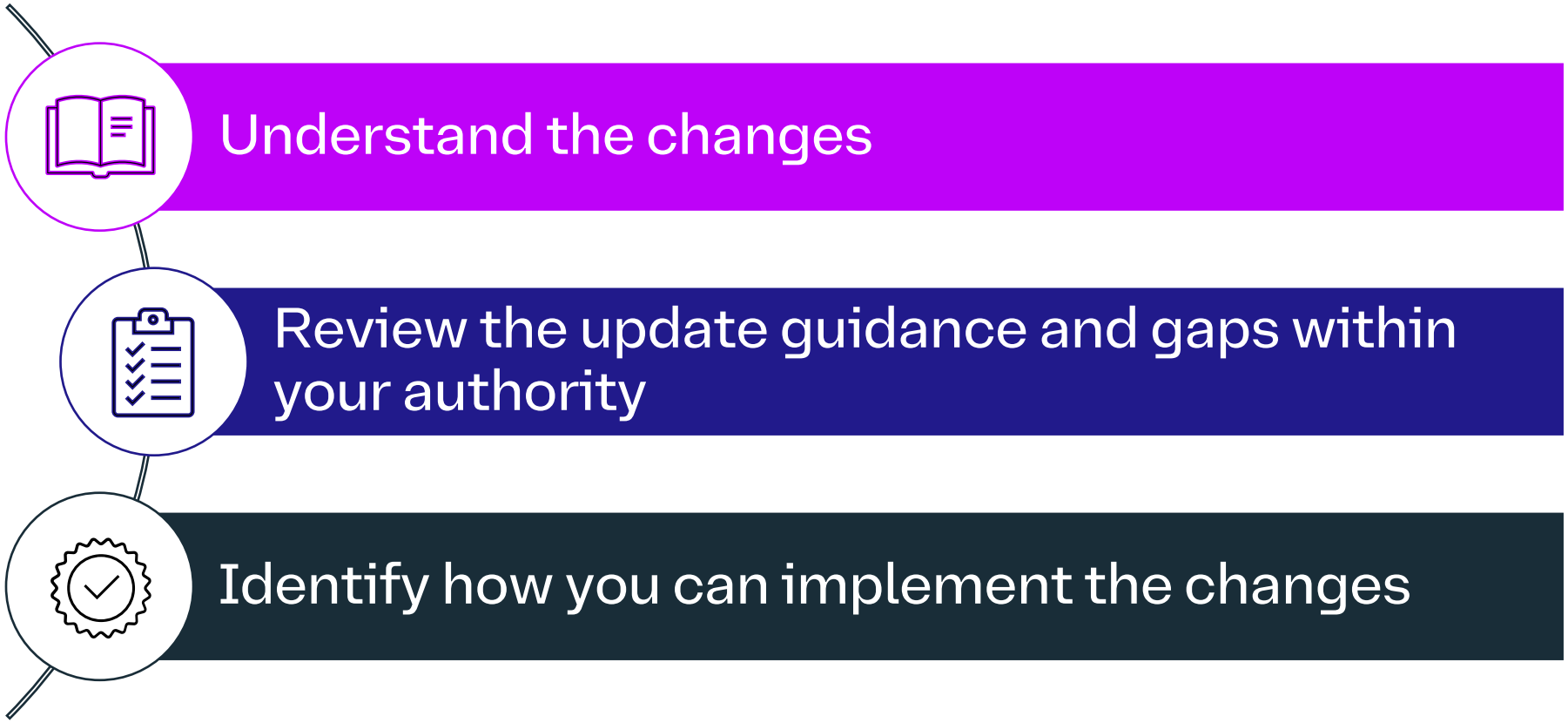
05 Resources and implementation

Supporting materials, skills and local capacity

06 Takeaways and discussion

Practical next steps, followed by questions

What does the updated Code mean for your highways service?



What has changed – and what remains?

Building on the 2016 Code

The 2026 Code retains the principles and foundations of previous Code.

Risk-based approach

Proportionate, locally determined decision-making remains central to the Code.

New Part E: Tunnels

A new Part introduces dedicated guidance for tunnel asset management.



Implementation guides



Quick guides



Updated recommendations



Digital platform



Expanded content



Case studies

Part A – Overarching principles

A.1 Scope of the Code

Full asset lifecycle scope, with periodic review against the Code

A.2 Legal framework

Updated to the latest national requirements since 2016 across UK countries

A.3 Network strategy

Greater view of the network as a whole; new topics on AI, innovation, workforce capability

A.4 Risk-based approach

Expanded guidance: more explicit evidence, governance, competence and communication

A.5 Network knowledge

Information management, asset knowledge, network performance and organisational knowledge

A.6 Resilience and adaptation

Broader all-hazards approach, with signposting to specific industry guidance

A.7 Finance and investment

Outlines funding sources, governance, reporting, valuation, making the case

A.8 Sustainability

Covers three pillars of sustainability: economic, environmental, social

A.9 Procurement and delivery

Expanded section on delivery models, contract management and assurance, and capability

Part B – Highways

B.1 Scope

Expanded active travel scope and clearer third-party responsibilities

B.2 Legal framework

Fuller UK legal coverage, rights of way and emergency planning links

B.3 Asset strategy

Clearer measurable objectives, governance and active travel guidance

B.4 Risk-based approach

Documented risk framework links user needs, maintenance priorities and repair choices

B.5 Asset knowledge

Clearer inspection and survey categories, wider asset coverage and data assurance

B.6 Resilience and adaptation

New Part B section covering all hazards beyond snow and ice

B.7 Finance and investment

New highway section linking lifecycle models, performance and whole-life cost

B.8 Sustainability

Expanded carbon, biodiversity, inclusive access and durable interventions

B.9 Winter Service

Streamlined content signposts NWSRG practical guidance

Beyond A and B: the wider picture

Part C - Structures

Dedicated asset strategy section

Expanded risk-based programming and asset knowledge sections

Part D - Lighting

Dedicated lighting asset strategy section

Clarified RBA and asset knowledge sections

Part E - Tunnels

New Part since 2016

Content developed in line with sections in remaining asset Parts

Recommendations

40 **Practitioner**

Support practical delivery through proportionate, risk-based asset management

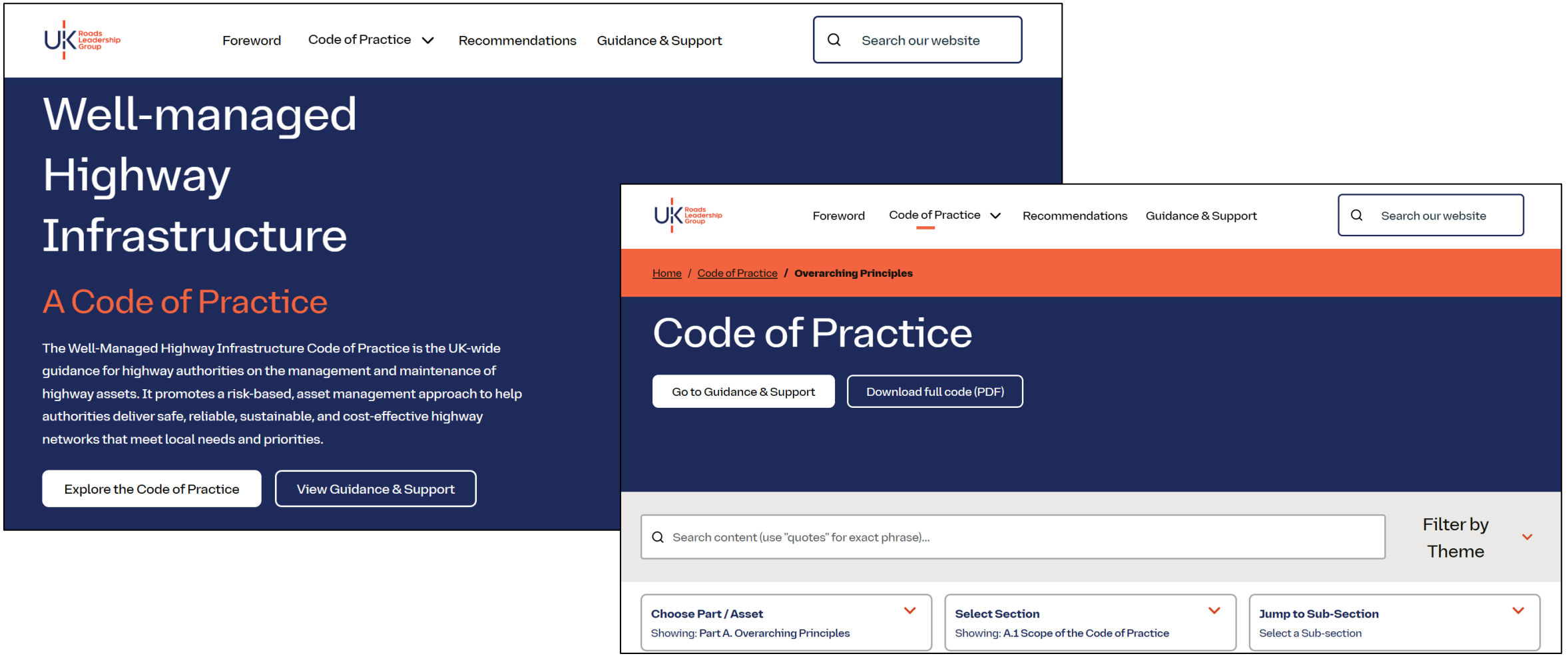
5 **Senior leader**

Provide ownership and governance, accept risk and secure resources and competence

5 **UKRLG**

Keep the Code current, develop guidance, share learning, build capability and champion investment

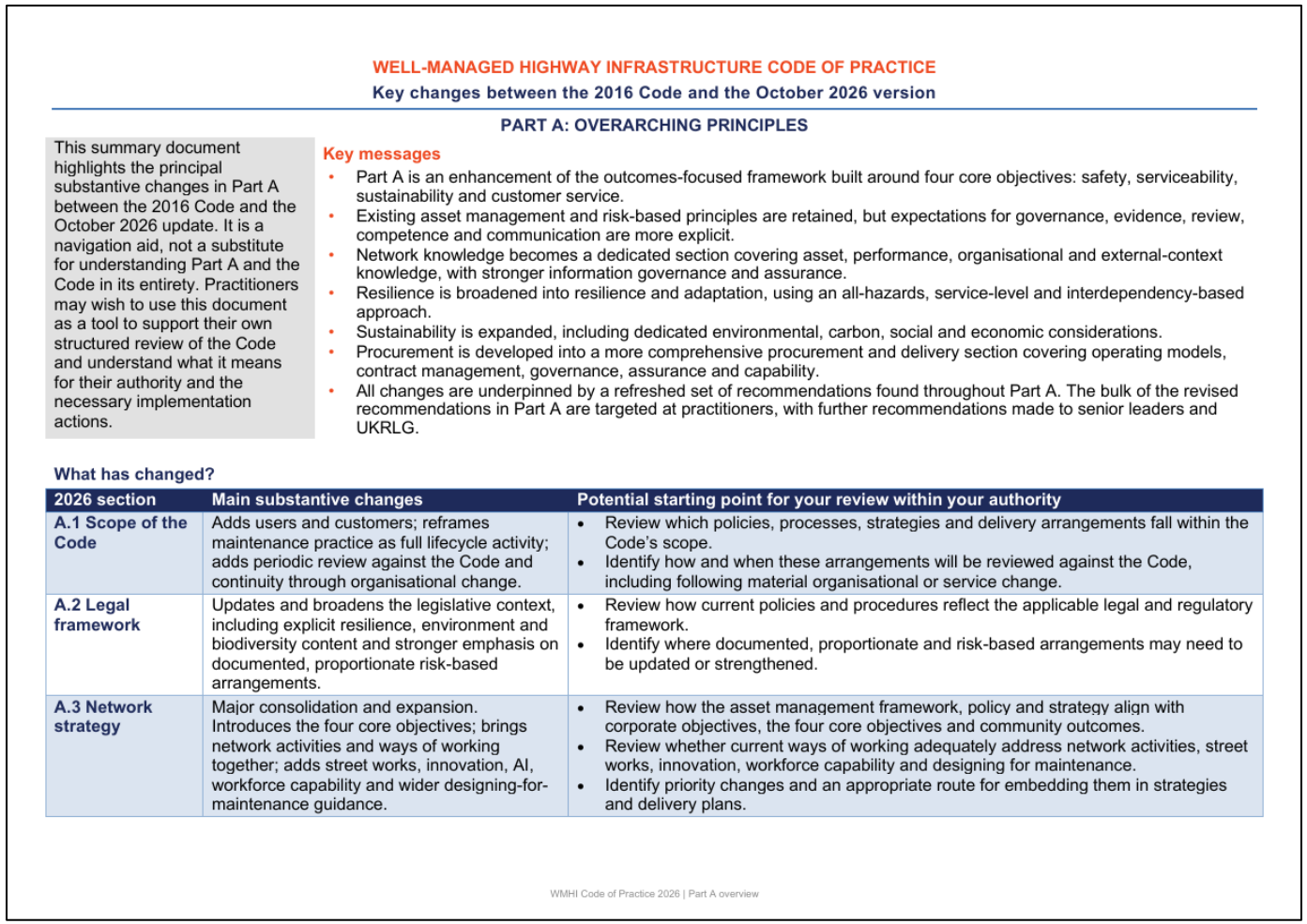
How to use the new Code



What support is available?

Implementation guides

- Outline the key messages in each Part of the Code.
- Identify the key changes in each section.
- Provides prompts to help authorities with their own internal review of the Code.



WELL-MANAGED HIGHWAY INFRASTRUCTURE CODE OF PRACTICE

Key changes between the 2016 Code and the October 2026 version

PART A: OVERARCHING PRINCIPLES

This summary document highlights the principal substantive changes in Part A between the 2016 Code and the October 2026 update. It is a navigation aid, not a substitute for understanding Part A and the Code in its entirety. Practitioners may wish to use this document as a tool to support their own structured review of the Code and understand what it means for their authority and the necessary implementation actions.

Key messages

- Part A is an enhancement of the outcomes-focused framework built around four core objectives: safety, serviceability, sustainability and customer service.
- Existing asset management and risk-based principles are retained, but expectations for governance, evidence, review, competence and communication are more explicit.
- Network knowledge becomes a dedicated section covering asset, performance, organisational and external-context knowledge, with stronger information governance and assurance.
- Resilience is broadened into resilience and adaptation, using an all-hazards, service-level and interdependency-based approach.
- Sustainability is expanded, including dedicated environmental, carbon, social and economic considerations.
- Procurement is developed into a more comprehensive procurement and delivery section covering operating models, contract management, governance, assurance and capability.
- All changes are underpinned by a refreshed set of recommendations found throughout Part A. The bulk of the revised recommendations in Part A are targeted at practitioners, with further recommendations made to senior leaders and UKRLG.

What has changed?

2026 section	Main substantive changes	Potential starting point for your review within your authority
A.1 Scope of the Code	Adds users and customers; reframes maintenance practice as full lifecycle activity; adds periodic review against the Code and continuity through organisational change.	• Review which policies, processes, strategies and delivery arrangements fall within the Code's scope. • Identify how and when these arrangements will be reviewed against the Code, including following material organisational or service change.
A.2 Legal framework	Updates and broadens the legislative context, including explicit resilience, environment and biodiversity content and stronger emphasis on documented, proportionate risk-based arrangements.	• Review how current policies and procedures reflect the applicable legal and regulatory framework. • Identify where documented, proportionate and risk-based arrangements may need to be updated or strengthened.
A.3 Network strategy	Major consolidation and expansion. Introduces the four core objectives; brings network activities and ways of working together; adds street works, innovation, AI, workforce capability and wider designing-for-maintenance guidance.	• Review how the asset management framework, policy and strategy align with corporate objectives, the four core objectives and community outcomes. • Review whether current ways of working adequately address network activities, street works, innovation, workforce capability and designing for maintenance. • Identify priority changes and an appropriate route for embedding them in strategies and delivery plans.

WMHI Code of Practice 2026 | Part A overview

Code of Practice

What support is available?

Quick guides

- Provide high-level summaries of key topics within the Code
- Aimed at non-technical audiences: senior leaders, wider council teams, interested members of public
- Training resource for new staff
- Topics include:
    - Asset management fundamentals
    - Risk-based approach
    - Managing highway infrastructure
    - Sustainability
    - Resilience and adaptation
    - Innovation

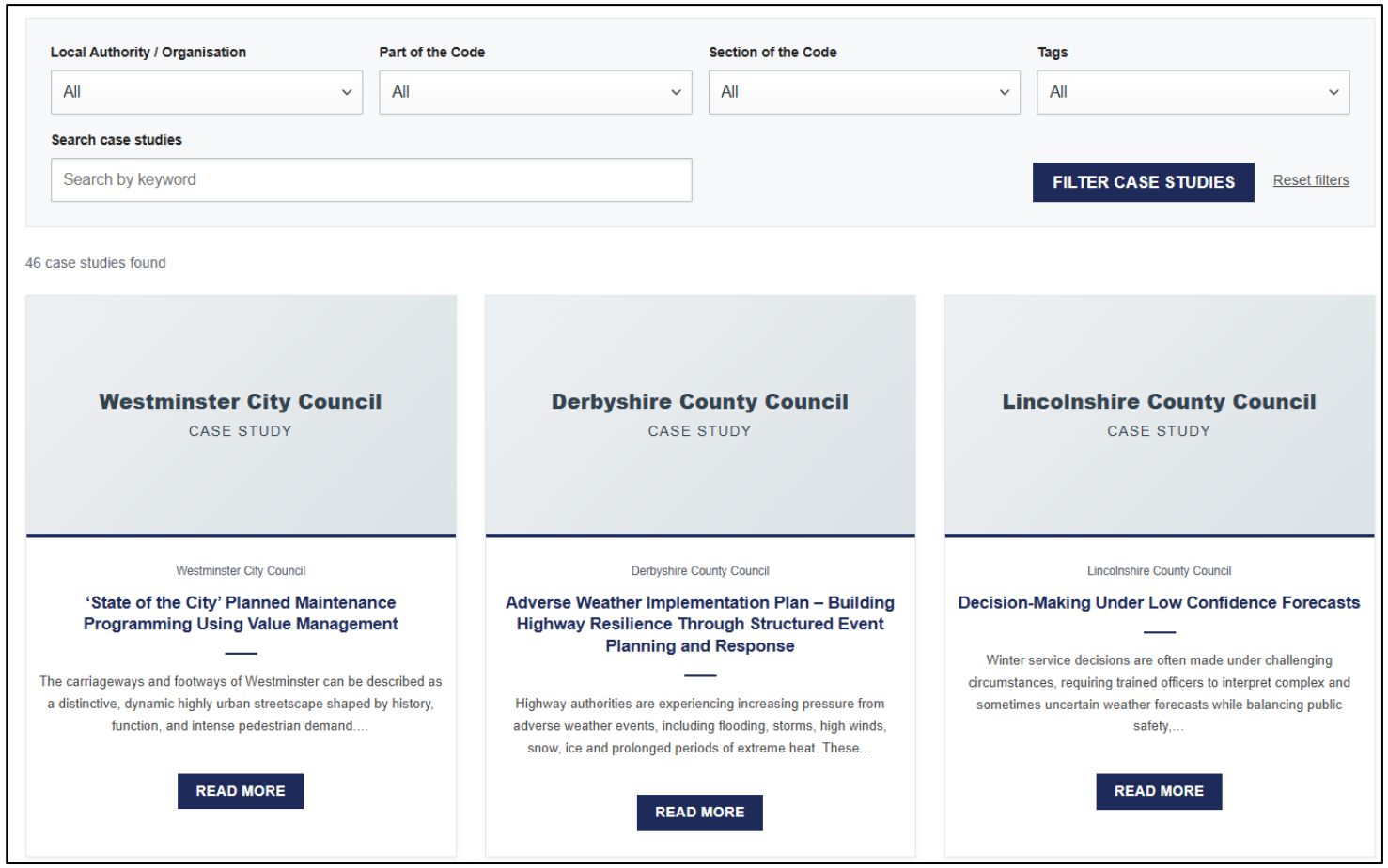


Code of Practice

What support is available?

Case studies

- Accessible through the updated UKRLG website
- Examples of how authorities are already delivering on aspects from the Code
- Indicative examples only; not the way things must be done



What you can take away from today

Understand the changes

- Materials shown today
- Digital platform
- Support resources e.g. implementation guides

Review the update guidance and gaps within your authority

- Compare against the recommendations

Identify how you can implement the changes

- Identify owners for each Part / section / topic
- Quick guides for buy-in around your council

Access the Code here:

Code of Practice

Additional information: embedment period

Note: this slide has been added after the Q&A and was not originally included in the presentation.

Question: What is the embedment period for the new Code of Practice?

Response from UKRLG:

It is anticipated that implementation and embedment of the Code will take place progressively following its launch in Autumn 2026. Organisations are encouraged to develop an implementation roadmap, prioritising recommendations based on risk, operational needs and available resources, with the aim of embedding the Code within their policies, procedures and practices by 31 March 2029.Where a local authority decides to deliver services in a way that does not conform with the Code, it is highly recommended that this decision is subject to a robust democratic decision-making process. The decision should be fully documented, including the rationale for the non-conformity, the evidence considered and any associated risks or implications. This will help provide a clear and transparent record of how and why the decision was reached.

thank you

Access the Code here: