

BRIEFING NOTE: HIGHWAY GULLY EMPTYING and CLEANING SERVICE

Briefing Note of the Chief Executive and Director of Environment

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1. Purpose of the Briefing Note

- 1.1 To brief Members on what is involved in Highway Gully Emptying and Cleaning and associated highway fault reporting.

2. Background

- 2.1 Members requested a written bulletin in response to Notice of Motion 16C proposed and seconded at Full Council on 21 March 2017:
“Whilst noting that the Enhanced Maintenance Programme brought for the current financial year was to also undertake a one-off clearance of gullies Council notes that many are still outstanding and thus requests that the Highways Cabinet panel undertakes a review of this process that has meant an 18 month cycle of gully cleaning and also to review if this is cost effective or adequate. As part of the review the Highways Cabinet Panel should review the inability of reported faults being shown on the fault reporting system.”

3. Detail

- 3.1 The current drainage maintenance regime was endorsed in January 2011 by the Highways & Transport Panel. Emptying and cleaning of Hertfordshire’s 168,624 gullies is undertaken by the county council’s term maintenance contractor Ringway under the HST Contractor Directed Service as part of the Cat 5 service:
- 154,673 gullies cleaned on an 18 month cycle
 - 6,828 vulnerable gullies cleaned on a six cycle
 - 7,123 gullies on high speed roads cleaned on a 12 month cycle
- 3.2 The approach incorporates risk management for vulnerable gullies and gullies on high speed roads These frequencies are applied to whole sections of road rather than on a single gully basis as this is more cost effective. Where safe to do so activities are coordinated to share traffic management and minimise disruption to the travelling public e.g. gully cleaning and grass cutting on high speed roads.
- 3.3 Benchmarking with other Local Highway Authorities (LHA’s) in the eastern and southern regions has been undertaken. The approach

described in 3.2 above is similar to other LHA'S (with frequencies ranging from 3 to 36 months) and is considered to be adequate.

- 3.4 Ringway undertake all cyclical cleanses within a Member Division before moving on to the next one. The Cat 2 dig out programme is developed using intelligence from cyclical cleaning and notifications from customers and follows the sequence of Cat 5 cyclical cleaning.
- 3.5 For the current 2017/18 financial year approximately 114,000 gully cleans are programmed as part of the Cat 5 Cyclical Routine Maintenance service at a target value of £880k. This equates to around £7.72 per gully (includes for the cost of waste disposal and transport but not traffic management) which is generally in line with other LHA's.
- 3.6 Since 2015, a number of changes have been implemented to improve the performance of the Routine Maintenance Service and help keep the roads free from flooding. These changes include:
 - Erecting notices in residential areas in advance of the gully emptying and cleaning works, to improve communication and reducing the risk of vehicles blocking access to the gullies;
 - Co-ordinating the works with the Borough's and Districts to encourage the undertaking of a "deep cleanse initiative" of difficult to access roads;
 - Adopting an electronic system utilising GIS data, to allow localised flooding and gully digs outs to be easily identified;
 - The creation of a drainage community, to effectively co-ordinate the delivery of the Cat 2, Cat 4 and Cat 5 works;
 - Deliver a programme of gully dig outs.
- 3.7 The gully emptying and cleaning service has now stabilised and has been in the performing zone (i.e. programme conformance and cleaning audit) for the last two years and the current cyclical cleaning programme is on track.
- 3.8 5,629 gullies (4.6% of the total number of gullies attended) were dug out (by hand) during 2016/17 as part of the Cat 2 programme (3,097) and Enhanced Maintenance Programme (2,532) at a total cost of £278,635. This equates to around £49.50 per gully.
- 3.9 The number of gully dig outs remaining has been reduced to less than 2% of the total number of gullies in all Member divisions. This was achieved at the end of March 2017. The number of dig outs outstanding at the end of 2016/17 was 1,031. Ringway will revisit and dig out the 1,031 gullies during the current 18 month cycle.
- 3.10 Given the scale and nature of the gully emptying and cleaning service, there will always be blocked gullies. However, the strategy is to manage and maintain the number of gully dig outs at a level that is

affordable and sustainable, whilst balancing the needs of the customer, the asset, the network and associated risk.

3.11 Whilst the number of public notifications of blocked gullies has reduced during 2016/17, it is acknowledged that there is a need to improve the customer journey.

3.12 Hertfordshire County Council's fault reporting system currently allows customers to select a blocked gully but this triggers a notification rather than a fault report. The notification informs the customer 'This gully is on a cyclical programme of cleaning works to be cleaned but notified blockages are considered when preparing the programmes and so we have recorded the blocked gully'. It is less than obvious to the reporter that a fault has been logged. A notification email is sent to Ringway, who manually transfer the data to a spreadsheet which feeds into the Cat 2 dig out programme (as described in 3.4). This process requires manual intervention and lacks transparency.

3.13 A minor change to the system is in development that will more fully automate the reporting of a blocked gully. The fault will automatically be transferred into the Cat 2 defect pool and then gets closed by the system. Customers will be informed that the fault has been transferred. This change:

- Makes it clearer to the customer that the required gully dig out has been logged as a fault.
- Ensures that faults are transferred into the Cat 2 defect pool
- Enables the dig out to be monitored and programmed for treatment

This change is currently being progressed and is planned to be implemented within the current () financial year. This planned change will not affect a customer's ability to report flooding.

3.14 Moving forward, Ringway are currently developing and trialling their electronic system utilising GIS data, to enable efficient collection of data at a gully drain asset level, allow localised flooding and gully digs outs to be easily identified; improve scheduling, coordination of activity and efficient and effective delivery of the service. The vision is to develop this into web map based information to better inform customers on a self-serve basis. Information available to customers could include, gully status, date of last clean, planned next clean and defects noted.