

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

MONDAY 18 DECEMBER 2017 AT 2.00PM

HIGHWAYS DRAINAGE GULLY EMPTYING AND CLEANING SERVICE

Report of the Director of Chief Executive & Director of Environment

Author: Peter Simpson, Senior Asset Manager & Team Leader
(Operations), (Tel: 01992 658170)

Executive Member: Ralph Sangster (Highways)

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1. To seek Cabinet's agreement to the proposed revisions to the gully emptying and cleaning service and to the changes to the highway fault reporting system..

2. Summary

- 2.1 The Council has stabilised the gully emptying and cleaning service through the implementation of a number of 'interventions'.
- 2.2 The gully emptying and cleaning service has been in the performing zone for the last two years and gully dig outs have reduced blocked gullies to less than 2% of the total number of gullies in each Member division.
- 2.3 The report proposes revisions to the gully emptying and cleaning service.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 The Highways Cabinet Panel considered a report on this item of business at its meeting on 16 November 2017. The Panel recommended to Cabinet

"That Cabinet agrees to:

- i. approve the proposed revisions to the gully emptying and cleaning service as set out in the report; and*
- ii. Approve the proposed changes to the highway fault reporting system as set out in the report."*

4. Background

- 4.1 The Highways Act 1980 empowers the County Council as Highway Authority to construct or lay drains for the purpose of draining the highway

or preventing surface water from flowing on to it. The Act also imposes a duty to maintain and to ensure so far as reasonably practicable, the safe passage along a highway.

4.2 The strategy and Drainage asset is maintained through several service streams and programmes:

- **Cat 1 Emergency/Urgent Works**; placing flood warning signs, cleaning up after flood events and minor reactive repairs.
- **Cat 2 Reactive Maintenance**; minor repairs and /or adhoc clearance of non-functioning drainage assets such as gullies, pipework, soakaways, grips and ditches and investigation and escalation of more significant and complex issues.
- **Cat 4 Drainage Schemes**; more significant and complex drainage repairs or major improvement works.
- **Cat 5 Cyclical Routine Maintenance**; cyclic emptying & cleaning of drainage assets including regular cleaning of gullies and adhoc clearance of grips & ditches.

5. **Current Approach to the gully emptying and cleaning service**

5.1 The current approach is described in the Briefing Note, attached at Appendix 1, that was sent to all County Councillors on 10 October 2017. This was in response to Motion 16C that was considered at County Council at its meeting on 21 March 2017.

6. **Review of the Service**

6.1 Workshops have been held between the County Council and Ringway, the County Council's highways contractor to review and challenge the current approach.

6.2 Benchmarking with other Local Highway Authorities (LHA) in the eastern and southern regions has also been undertaken. The County Council's approach is similar to other LHA'S. The total cost to empty and clean gullies is generally in line with other LHA's.

6.3 Ringway obtained consent from the Environment Agency in July 2017 to operate a de-watering / gully waste recycling facility at Corey's Mill depot in Stevenage. This invest to save initiative would reduce the cost of waste disposal and transport. This is being explored as part of the discussions around the proposed extensions of the contract with Ringway.

6.4 A risk evaluation exercise has been undertaken in consultation with the County Council's finance, legal and insurance sections to ensure the safety of highway users and maintainability of highway assets is not compromised. The County Council insurers have reviewed the proposals set out in this report and advised that this change appears to be in line with the incoming new highways code of practice which requires Authorities to adopt a risk based approach to their highways asset management regimes.

- 6.5 The number, amount paid and amount held in reserve in respect of all open insurance claims going back six years regarding flooding and drainage are in general relatively low, with figures and trends subject to continuous monitoring. Figures shown in the table below:

Year	Number	Paid	In Reserve
2012	24	£27,768	£7,413
2013	27	£19,088	£900,999
2014	39	£1,947	£0
2015	38	£27,480	£367,760
2016	31	£3,926	£500
2017	7	£0	£111
Total	166	£80,209	£1,276,783

Note: £900,999 and £367,760 relate to single claims regarding flooding to properties.

- 6.6 The review identified that whilst the current drainage maintenance regime is stable and in the performing zone, it is not as effective or efficient as it could be. The current 18 month cycle means that a number of gullies are still being cleaned, whether they need it or not. At the same time, there may be gullies that require more frequent cleaning.

7. **Proposals for revisions to the gully emptying and cleaning service**

- 7.1 The aim is to make the best use of available resources to deliver better outcomes for highway users. It is proposed that:

- From 1 October 2018, gully emptying and cleaning frequencies will start to be changed based on silt levels (see 7.2 below).
- Gully emptying and cleaning frequencies for vulnerable gullies and those on high speed roads will not be changed (see 7.2 below).
- From 1 April 2018, blocked gullies will be cleared within 12 months of being reported / identified (see 7.3 below).
- From 1 April 2018, the public will be able to report blocked gullies (see 7.5 below).
- Gullies and their status will be electronically mapped using GIS data. This will be available for the public to view via web maps from 1 October 2018 (see 7.6 below).

7.2 Gully emptying and cleaning frequencies

- 7.2.1 A data driven approach will be adopted for all 168,624 gullies. This is to ensure only gullies that need cleaning are emptied (other LHA's e.g. East Sussex have adopted this approach). Based on sound asset information this would be derived from:

- Silt levels adopting a simplified grading of good (25% or less), average (50%) and poor (75% or more).
- Flood risk areas (identified by the County Council's Flood Risk Management team using a 1 in 30 year flood event) and historic flood records.

- Customer enquiries.
- Existing asset information.

7.2.2 From 1 October 2018 the frequency of gully emptying and cleaning will start to be changed based on the following principles:

- 6 month cycle to remain for Vulnerable gullies (6,828).
- 12 month cycle to remain for Gullies on high speed roads (7,123).
- 18 month cycle to remain for Gullies where silt levels are recorded as average or poor; but to be monitored during the next cleaning cycle before committing to change the frequency of cleaning.
- Move gullies from an 18 month to a 24 month cycle where silt levels are recorded as good. Gully cleaning frequencies will be applied to whole sections of road.

7.2.3 Operationally it is important to optimise the output in order to maintain the proposed cleaning regime at a whole section of road level. For example, where there are 20 gullies on a street and 5 gullies are on an 18 month cleaning cycle and 15 gullies are on a 24 month cleaning cycle, then this road would be assigned a 24 month cleaning cycle.

7.2.4 There is also a need to obtain more information that will be collected during the current 18 month cycle (1 April 2017 to 30 September 2018) to support the above approach.

7.3 Blocked gullies

7.3.1 Given the scale and nature of the gully emptying and cleaning service, there will always be blocked gullies. The proposed strategy is to move from maintaining the number of gully dig outs at a level (i.e. less than 2% of the total number of gullies in all Member divisions) to clearing blocked gullies within 12 months of being reported / identified from 1 April 2018.

7.3.2 To help drive improvements in the effectiveness and efficiency of the service, a new suite of performance indicators are being developed.

7.4 Examples of where resources could be redeployed

7.4.1 The proposed changes in 7.2 and 7.3 above could enable resources to be redeployed to the following activities: targeted action at known flooding sites; increased frequency of gully emptying in problematic areas; increased gully dig out activity and; channel sweeping.

7.5 Reporting Blocked gullies

7.5.1 A change to the fault reporting system is in development that will more fully automate the reporting of a blocked gully and improve the customer journey. The fault will automatically be transferred into the Cat 5 defect pool and then is 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 5 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 and be operational by 1 April 2018. This planned change will not affect a customer's ability to report flooding. This change will also be reflected in the Council's Defect Management Approach (DMA). Guidance will be given to customers explaining the intervention level (e.g. definition of a blocked gully).

7.5.2 The above will be subject to the Highways Member Advisory Group (MAG) meeting(s) to be initiated in late 2017 covering the fault reporting system, setting out how the process currently works, planned improvements including more appropriate, succinct and meaningful customer responses and seeking MAG views on future developments.

7.6 Electronic mapping of gullies (including status)

7.6.1 Moving forward, Ringway are developing their electronic system utilising GIS data, to enable efficient collection of data at a gully drain asset level, allow localised flooding and gully dig outs to be easily identified; improve scheduling, coordination of activity, better and more accurate reporting 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. This change is planned to be operational by 1 October 2018. This aligns with the next gully cleaning cycle and allows time for the change to the fault reporting system to become established.

8. **Financial Implications**

8.1 It is anticipated that this proposal will have a positive impact on the direct cost of gully cleaning. It is also suggested that risk will be reduced with subsequent impact on insurance claims. Financial impact is minimal.

9. **Equalities Implications**

9.1 When considering proposals placed before Members it is important that they are fully aware of, and have themselves rigorously considered the equality implications of the decision that they are making.

9.2 Rigorous consideration will ensure that proper appreciation of any potential impact of that decision on the County Council's statutory obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty. As a minimum this requires decision makers to read and carefully consider the content of any Equalities Impact Assessment (EQiA) produced by officers.

9.3 The Equality Act 2010 requires the County Council when exercising its functions to have due regard to the need to (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act; (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant

protected characteristic and persons who do not share it and (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. The protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation.

- 9.4 An equalities impact assessment (EqIA) has been conducted and is attached at Appendix 2 to this report. The EqIA identifies potential equalities impacts of the proposed strategy are positive as it will improve accessibility for vulnerable (disabled, blind and wheelchair) users at existing pedestrian crossing points, where ponding has resulted from a lack of gully maintenance.

Background Information

Report to the Highways Cabinet Panel, November 2017

<http://cmis.hertfordshire.gov.uk/hertfordshire/Calendarofcouncilmeetings/tabid/70/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/397/Meeting/758/Committee/49/Default.aspx>

Motion to County Council, March 2017

<http://cmis.hertfordshire.gov.uk/hertfordshire/Calendarofcouncilmeetings/tabid/70/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/397/Meeting/513/Committee/4/Default.aspx>