

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Decision Report

Decision Maker:	Executive Lead Member for Universal Services
Date:	27 November 2023
Title:	Highways – Stronger Roads Today Service Update
Report From:	Director of Universal Services

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Purpose of this Report

1. The purpose of this report is to outline the challenges facing the highways maintenance service and the proposed strategy for the *Stronger Roads Today* campaign, which has been developed to address the increased deterioration in the condition of the highway network due to the severe weather experienced during the 2022/23 winter season.

Recommendations

2. That the Executive Lead Member for Universal Services notes the work that the Highways service has already undertaken in response to the severe weather experienced over the 2022/23 winter season and approves the continuing work and additional measures proposed under the delivery strategy for the *Stronger Roads Today* campaign, announced in June 2023, and as detailed within the report, which utilises the additional £22.5million allocated for reactive highway maintenance over the next three years.
3. That the Executive Lead Member for Universal Services approves a deferral of the full implementation of the Highway Network Recovery Strategy until 2025/26 at the earliest, subject to a further review in Autumn 2024.

Executive Summary

4. This report seeks to provide an overview of the challenges facing the highways maintenance service in Hampshire, and in particular the impacts of Winter 2022/23 and the detrimental effect this has had, and is continuing to have, on the condition of the highway network.
5. The devastating impact of the winter weather has generated unprecedented levels of enquiries, pothole reports, other defects and damage claims, as well as dramatically accelerating the deterioration of the highway network.
6. In recognition of the long-term underfunding for highway maintenance at a national level and the negative impact this has had on Hampshire's network condition, the County Council has substantially increased the funding for

highway maintenance over recent years and the most recent contribution to this has been the commitment of an additional £22.5m over the next three years, targeted specifically at reactive repairs, i.e. potholes and other carriageway defects.

7. The report outlines the strategy for how this additional funding, in conjunction with normal funding allocations will be used to, as a minimum, slow down, and at best, arrest the deterioration in the condition of the highway network. The new *Stronger Roads Today* campaign, launched alongside the most recent funding allocation, will initially target potholes and other road defects and this report includes details of what has been done already in the immediate aftermath of the winter season, what is planned in the medium term ahead of the coming winter and what is planned for the future years of the additional funding allocation. The measures include additional frontline resources and new innovative ways of working to increase productivity and improve public perception.
8. Hampshire's Highways service has proactively responded to the challenges and already implemented new ways of working that not only provide greater productivity but improve delivery of the highway maintenance service for future years. The short- and medium-term plans outline how additional resources will be utilised to undertake large programmes of reactive carriageway repairs, which in the longer-term will be protected by increased programmes of surface treatments, i.e. surface dressing and micro asphalts, to improve the longevity and resilience of the repairs, prolonging the life of the road network. This is in-keeping with the County Council's longstanding asset management approach to delivering highway maintenance to ensure the right treatments are targeted at the right time to provide maximum benefit and value.
9. Despite the significant work to be delivered as part of the *Stronger Roads Today* campaign, it should be noted that the road network is likely to remain in a fragile state and if another harsh winter is experienced in the coming years Hampshire could encounter very similar levels of impacts in terms of defects, public enquires, correspondence and claims.

Contextual information

10. The decline in the condition of the local road network has been a challenge that has been affecting most highway authorities across the country, including Hampshire. The 2023 Annual Local Authority Road Maintenance (ALARM) report stated that the backlog in carriageway maintenance for England and Wales was £14.2bn, which is an 11% increase over the past year and does not take into account the impact of the past winter. In Hampshire the maintenance backlog is now estimated at around £500million.
11. Several reports have been previously approved by the Executive Lead Members for Economy, Transport and Environment, and Universal Services over recent years, outlining the pressures and challenges facing the County Council's highways service. The underlying cause of this is due to longstanding under-investment at a national level, compounded by financial impacts from global events such as Brexit, Covid, and the war in Ukraine.
12. In March 2022 the Highway Network Recovery Strategy was approved. This set out a 10-year plan to arrest the deterioration of the highway network condition

and was approved just as the war in Ukraine started. Since then, the highways service, and the wider construction sector, has been significantly impacted by market volatility and spiralling inflation. In response to these pressures the Executive Lead Member for Universal Services approved a postponement to the full implementation of the Network Recovery Strategy to at least 2024/25. Given the additional and significant challenges posed by the recent weather events, the priority for the highway maintenance service has needed to focus on restoring roads and, particularly, repairing potholes. This is the primary driver for proposing that the implementation of the Network Recovery Strategy is further postponed, until the 2025/26 financial year at the earliest, subject to a further review in the Autumn of 2024.

13. In October 2023 the Government indicated that additional funding would be made available for highway maintenance and further details were announced in November 2023. In light of significant new funding it may be necessary to review the content of the Network Recovery Strategy. The need to appraise and amend the content of the strategy will be undertaken as part of the review in Autumn 2024.
14. Over the past winter Hampshire experienced a very mild but wet start to the season but from early December an onset of prolonged, heavy freezing conditions prevailed, mixed with further wet periods. This weather had a catastrophic effect on the highway network, which generated unprecedented numbers of carriageway defects such as potholes, cracking and localised structural failure.
15. Reflecting the numbers of carriageway defects, the County Council also received exceptional numbers of public reports, correspondence, and third-party damage claims. Included within Appendix A is a graph that illustrates the number of pothole related enquiries received in 2023 in comparison with the previous 5 years. The data for 2023 shows that by the end of July 2023 the County Council had already received 45% more enquires than for the whole of 2018, which was the worst year previously recorded. Similarly for third-party claims made against the County Council, the total number received by April 2023 had already exceeded the total number received for the whole of 2022.

Finance

16. In a previous report approved by the Executive Lead Member for Universal Services (*Highway Network Recovery Strategy – Update for 2023/24*) the highway maintenance backlog in Hampshire for all highway assets was estimated to be £377 million, however this figure was produced before the recent increases in inflation and the current value is now around £500 million.
17. The Government recognised the impact of the winter weather on the condition of the local road network and in the Spring 2023 Budget announced an additional £200 million for highway maintenance, with the County Council's share being £5.9 million. Whilst additional Government investment in highway maintenance is always welcomed, and much needed, the levels are significantly lower than that required to make a substantial difference.
18. Hampshire County Council has recognised the challenges posed by the deteriorating network over the years and has made several financial interventions to mitigate the impact of the under-investment at a national level.

Since 2010 the County Council has provided an additional £10 million of revenue funding per year, which is capitalised for structural planned maintenance activities such as carriageway resurfacing and other surface treatments. In 2021 the County Council committed an additional £7 million per year for routine highway maintenance activities.

19. It is important to highlight that an element of the additional £10 million of funding (added in 2010) is subject to further public consultation as part of the County Council's savings proposals for 2025.
20. In July 2023 the County Council approved a further £22.5 million over the next three years as part of the *Stronger Roads Today* campaign to provide a direct response to the deterioration of the highway network following the severe weather experienced over the past winter.
21. On 4 October 2023 the Government announced additional funding would be available for highway maintenance. A total allocation of £8.3 billion was announced for English regions with £2.8 billion of that outlined for the South East, South West, East of England and London. On 17 November the Government confirmed funding levels for Hampshire for 2023/24 and 2024/25, and the indicative minimum 'additional' funding allocations between 2023/24 and 2033/34 inclusive. This new money is in addition to the existing Highways Maintenance Block and Pothole Fund allocations. The year-by-year profiles beyond 2024/25 have not yet been finalised, but the funding is expected to increase over time. Whilst the prospect of a significant funding boost is most welcome expectations still need to be tempered in so far as more funding will not yield a quick fix to an already weakened network.

Stronger Roads Today - Strategy

22. In response to the problems caused by the past winter's weather and the additional financial support as part of the *Stronger Roads Today* campaign, a strategy has been collaboratively developed with Milestone (the County Council's term highway maintenance contractor) to arrest the deterioration in the condition of the highway network. Due to the significant deterioration across the Hampshire network some elements of the strategy have already been implemented, at pace, to address the most urgent areas and to take advantage of the drier summer weather and longer daylight hours. The strategy includes:
 - a. Details of the immediate response to the winter of 2022/23.
 - b. Medium term steps – preparing for 2023/24 winter season, and.
 - c. Developing innovative and proactive approaches to maintaining the network in future years.
23. Following the exceptional high demand experienced by the highways service caused by the winter conditions of 2022/23, frontline operational resources have been significantly increased and changes to working practices implemented to provide a swift response to reported defects and maintain safety for highway users. This has included:
 - a. The mobilisation of 23 Rapid Repair Teams, essentially focussed on safety defects but empowered to proactively repair all defects in an area to speed up the repair process. This has delivered the repair of over 8,000 defects in

8 weeks, a considerable increase in productivity levels in comparison with the traditional approach to reactive repairs.

- b. Introduction of a “Find & Fix” App to allow Milestone’s frontline teams to complete repairs without the need for a separate task order.
 - c. Recognising that there is significantly increased customer demand because of the deteriorating network condition, the Highways team are actively taking steps to seek improvements to the online reporting system to improve the quality of the information provided in response to enquiries.
 - d. Allocating customer enquiries directly to Milestone gangs who attend and repair or make safe whatever they find. This provides a quicker response to reports received and creates additional capacity for HCC staff.
 - e. Mobilising additional spray injection patching machines, such as Dragon Patchers, with up to six on the network.
 - f. An on-going programme of drainage work including CCTV surveys to identify blocked or damaged surface water drainage assets in need of repair or replacement.
 - g. Trialling different carriageway repair systems such as thermal patching, which not only provides additional resources but provides a reduction in carbon emissions through the re-use of existing carriageway materials and significant reductions in waste.
 - h. The introduction of geographic scheduling trials to improve customer perception and productivity in repairs of safety defects. This approach focuses a resource to a single location that repairs as much as possible whilst there. This new way of working in conjunction with the Find & Fix App reduces repeat visits to repair individual defects and improves customer perception as most defects within a location are addressed at the same time.
 - i. The re-programming of less-urgent work to allow the resources to concentrate on filling potholes and responding to safety defects.
 - j. Staff from non-highway maintenance teams within the Universal Services Directorate have been repurposed to assist with highways operations including frontline activities and support services such as damage claims management.
24. For the medium-term, the campaign funding will be used to ensure the Highways service is better prepared for the 2023/24 winter season. Collaborative working groups have already been established that are assessing what needs to be done to deliver the next phase of the *Stronger Roads Today* campaign. As part of this work, asset management condition data is being used in conjunction with other data collected from various sources such as the Find & Fix App, task orders and public enquiries to develop programmes of structural patching repairs using a variety of resources and treatment options, including:
- a. An increase in the number of traditional two-person small hand patch repair teams, working daily from the local highway depots to repair potholes and other defects.

- b. Investing in additional proactive larger hand patching gangs, increasing to six gangs across the network.
 - c. Increasing the fleet of spray injection patching machines, i.e. Dragon Patchers and Jet Patchers, to specifically target rural roads for potholes, cracks and other defects.
 - d. Mobilising a larger machine patching gang to deliver a programme that will resurface larger areas of the carriageway, where smaller individual patches are not suitable, or uneconomic.
 - e. Continuing with geographic scheduling and repairing everything in an area in one visit, where practicable, with a higher percentage of structural patching repairs.
 - f. Trailing new equipment to increase productivity for the proactive patching gangs and quality of repairs.
 - g. Deployment of additional drainage jetting machines to provide more resilience to current resources, enabling timely responses to flooding areas.
25. Longer-term the Highways team will learn and build on the trials and innovations developed and will look at:
- a. Increased targeted carriageway patching programmes.
 - b. Increased programmes of surface treatments and preservation techniques such as surface dressings and micro asphalts. These treatments are essential following the extensive patching programmes that are being undertaken in order to prevent further accelerated deterioration.
 - c. Further development of the cold recycled bituminous materials (CRBM) produced at the County Council's materials recycling facility at Micheldever. An ambition is to produce a fully recycled surface course that can be used on carriageways. CRBM is already routinely used as a sub-surface binder course.
 - d. Continue to work with Milestone and supply chain partners to identify new innovations that will improve the quality and delivery of the service such as exploring the use of vehicle-based AI technology to monitor the condition of the network and more efficiently target interventions and predict future maintenance requirements.
 - e. Implementing further trials of innovative solutions such as new repair systems, specialist equipment or new materials that will provide valuable data and feedback. This will be essential to help identify future investment opportunities and ensure that, despite the financial constraints on the service, the County Council is adopting the most efficient, productive, and value-for-money approach to deliver its highways service.
26. The strategy will help to demonstrate that the County Council has learned from the impacts of the previous winter and is effectively planning ahead to ensure that the right solutions and treatments are delivered to yield maximum benefit and value.
27. The optimal long-term solution is for Government to recognise the significant long-term investment that is needed to restore the local road network to a more serviceable and resilient state.

28. Whilst this report outlines the response and plan to mitigate the effects on the condition of the highway network, it should be recognised that the local road network is still in an extremely weakened state. The implementation of the *Stronger Roads Today* campaign will help to repair much of the damage following the last winter season but if further challenging winter periods are encountered it is likely to have a further detrimental impact across the network, leading to similar problems to those experienced this year. However, with the additional financial support from the County Council, the additional resources it has provided, and the new innovative working methods and technology introduced to improve the response to fixing defects such as potholes, the highways service is better placed with increased resilience to deal with the effects of the weather.
29. The weather encountered during this winter period has seen significant levels of rainfall. During October between 190-300% of the average rainfall fell across Hampshire, and in the first week of November all areas of the county had already recorded more than half of the average rainfall for the month. In early November the Met Office issued an amber weather warning for Storm Ciarán, exposing Hampshire and the rest of the South-East to high levels of rainfall and very strong winds. Fortunately, the impact of the wind was not as severe as expected but significant coastal and fluvial flooding was nevertheless encountered in many coastal and southern areas of Hampshire.

Consultation and Equalities

30. Due to the nature of the approval sought for this report, limited consultation has been undertaken. However, the Highways team, Milestone and the wider supply chain are closely involved in actively and dynamically managing the situation and the associated risks and impacts.
31. The decision sought in this report will not reduce the scope of the service provided or have any impact on service users or individuals working on the service, so has been assessed as having a neutral impact on groups with protected characteristics. Approval is sought for service adjustments to accommodate and address pressures and it is not anticipated that these proposals will have a direct impact on people with protected characteristics. Rather, they are intended to maintain service delivery for all highway users and help maintain and/or improve safety.

Climate Change Impact Assessments

32. Hampshire County Council utilises two decision-making tools to assess the carbon emissions and resilience of its projects and decisions. These tools provide a clear, robust, and transparent way of assessing how projects, policies and initiatives contribute towards the County Council's climate change targets of being carbon neutral and resilient to the impacts of a 2°C temperature rise by 2050. This process ensures that climate change considerations are built into everything the Authority does.

Climate Change Adaption

33. Adaptions will continue to be made, as part of routine service delivery, to reduce the highway network's vulnerability to climate change by reducing flooding on the highway caused by heavy rainfall.

Carbon Mitigation

34. In light of the additional work that will be undertaken on the highway network as part of the *Stronger Roads Today* campaign, new innovative ways of delivering the work have been developed to increase productivity, reduce travel time and reduce repeat visits to the same road. The longer-term strategy will involve targeted surface treatments which will prolong the life of the road structure and reduce the level of reactive maintenance that is required. The County Council's materials recycling facility at Micheldever will be an ongoing and sustainable source of materials that have lower carbon emissions over traditional materials and further development will be undertaken to identify new carbon saving products and materials.

Conclusions

35. The past winter season has had a devastating effect on the condition of the UK highway network. The County Council has recognised the impact of this and has acted swiftly to provide additional financial support to address the situation.
36. The strategy that has been developed to deliver the new *Stronger Roads Today* campaign has already successfully provided an immediate response to many of the impacts arising from winter 2022/23. Further development of this strategy, working collaboratively with Milestone, will enable the delivery of an expanded programme of work and demonstrate that, despite very significant challenges, every effort is being made to maintain the local road network in Hampshire to a serviceable standard.

REQUIRED CORPORATE AND LEGAL INFORMATION:

Links to the Strategic Plan

Hampshire maintains strong and sustainable economic growth and prosperity:	yes
People in Hampshire live safe, healthy and independent lives:	yes
People in Hampshire enjoy a rich and diverse environment:	yes
People in Hampshire enjoy being part of strong, inclusive communities:	yes

Other Significant Links

Links to previous Member decisions:	
<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>
Highway Network Recovery Strategy – Update 2023/24	12/2/23
The Impact of Inflationary Pressures on the Delivery of the Highway Maintenance Service	12/5/22

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents

The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)

<u>Document</u>	<u>Location</u>
None	

EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT:

1. Equality Duty

The County Council has a duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 ('the Act') to have due regard in the exercise of its functions to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by or under the Act with regard to the protected characteristics as set out in section 4 of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation);
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation) and those who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (see above) and persons who do not share it.

Due regard in this context involves having due regard in particular to:

- The need to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons sharing a relevant characteristic connected to that characteristic;
- Take steps to meet the needs of persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
- Encourage persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

2. Equalities Impact Assessment:

The decision sought in this report will not change the scope of the service provided or have any impact on service users or individuals working on the service, so has been assessed as having a neutral impact on groups with protected characteristics. Approval is sought for service adjustments to accommodate current pressures and it is not anticipated that these proposals will have a direct impact on people with protected characteristics. Rather, they are intended to minimise disruption to all highway users arising from the current challenges and help maintain highway safety.

Appendix A – Numbers of pothole related enquiries received 2018 – July 2023

