

## **Place Overview Committee**

**08 April 2021**

### **Member Questions and Responses**

#### **From: Councillor Roger Evans**

At a recent meeting of this committee, and I note the minutes of this meeting have not yet been published, I understand that an announcement was made that the cabinet plans to spend an extra £40M on road maintenance during the next 4 years. This is of course just days after members of the cabinet proposed that council agree a budget for 2021/22 with no mention of this increase in it.

Many members have complained about the state of our highways and the continued deterioration in them. This, together with the failure to repair the increasing number of potholes have caused many members of the public to quite rightly criticise the policy that cabinet have agreed and supported concerning highways maintenance.

I welcome, as do many others, the proposal. However, after the last meeting I made enquires with the finance department, asking for confirmation of where this £40M was coming from. Was it in fact new money or money that had already been allocated and was now being listed under a different name. For example, was it in fact just the recent cuts being restored. I was informed that they had no knowledge of this and had made no provision for any extra spend in any future forecasts.

I would therefore wish to ask the following please.

- A. Can it be confirmed because of decisions made how much in each of the preceding 5 years was spent on highway maintenance and how much was removed from this budget during this same period?

#### **Response:**

[Please refer to attached spreadsheet.](#)

- B. Can I and members of the Scrutiny Panel be informed as to where this extra money is shown in the recently adopted Financial Strategy adopted at the last council meeting.

#### **Response:**

[The current administration has pledged to spend an additional £40m on Highways over the next four years should they be re-elected. This investment would be \*additional\* funding. There are many ways in which this funding could be provided including grants, lobbying for additional government funding, borrowing, use of reserves, efficiencies, capitalisation or reallocation of existing funds or compensatory cuts. Any investment proposals would be developed with the Executive Director of Resources and a fully costed](#)

proposal brought back to full Council for approval at an appropriate point in the future.

- C. Who is it proposed will be carrying out this extra work; will it be our existing highways contractors, Kier and WSP, or will, as I and many others hope, be put out to tender with the aim of using others, including local firms. Firms who have up until recently been excluded from doing this type of work.

**Response:**

As the Council is now in the pre-election period, officers are busy planning for the next administration and will of course be looking at how they can deliver any election pledges. It would however be presumptuous to have detailed plans for delivery before the elections have been concluded and therefore a delivery mechanism has not yet been identified. The highway service however always anticipates unplanned windfalls of investment, such as in-year DfT funding, and therefore has confidence that any additional investment can be implemented in a cost effective way that makes the most difference to the condition of the highway network.

**From: Councillor David Turner**

After the Beast from the East winter I addressed this committee on the absence of guidance and support for town and parish councils and volunteer groups in safely clearing snow and ice. Footways in particular are a problem in cold weather, when we often find pedestrians walking in the highway which often affords a better walking surface – but which also presents the inherent danger of vehicles.

As is acknowledged in the report at agenda item 7, the development of a promised snow warden scheme has not materialised. I am pleased to see the recommendation is for the scheme to be instituted for this coming winter.

The snow we experienced over the Christmas and New Year period highlighted that carers, especially those who have to visit a resident two or three times a day, encounter difficulty in hilly areas reaching their clients in a timely manner. In fairness, my intervention did resolve one particularly tricky challenge in Much Wenlock in the bad weather – for which I thank the highways team.

I am pleased that run-off from fields carrying with it straw, mud, etc. has been identified in this report and the gully cleansing is being suggested as a priority. I am also pleased that the woeful lack of resource upon which the Flood & Water Manager can draw has been highlighted.

- Q1. Has the Committee received any commitment from the highways team that a snow warden scheme can be developed and the appropriate materials made available in time for winter 2021-22?

**Response:**

At the previous meeting the Head of Highways presented a report on Winter Maintenance which advised that a review of Winter Maintenance was being undertaken and specifically referenced that Snow Wardens were being considered as part of that review. A councillor panel has subsequently met to inform the development of this review. Whilst this is a significant piece of work, it is anticipated that improvements arising from the review will be in place by the start of Winter 2021.

Q2. Has the Committee given consideration to a register of properties that are difficult for carers to access in snow and ice, whereby targeted treatment will afford access?

**Response:**

The highways service only has finite resources to draw upon during severe weather events. We have statutory responsibilities as the highway authority to treat our priority routes within a designated time. We anticipate the winter review will identify how local priorities can be managed more effectively as we try to support the community during demanding conditions.

Q3. Has the Committee considered a date by which the development (or reinstatement) of the gully cleansing programme should be in place?

**Response:**

A gully cleaning programme has always been in place, albeit the frequency of maintenance reduced for a few years to match budget requirements. The importance of gully cleansing is however recognised in maintaining roads in a better condition and preventing flooding, and as such the frequency of maintenance was increased again last year. The Council maintains 92,000 gullies and catch pits on our highway network and Kier have 4 Gully emptying units undertaking the routine operations. Last financial year the service cleansed all of these assets. In addition to this last year the service set up two in-house teams which attending flooding issues and more complex drainage jobs to address some of the historic problems that have arisen on the network.