



<u>Committee and Date</u>
Place Overview Committee
11/11/2021

<u>Item</u>
7
<u>Public</u>

FOOTWAY AND CYCLEWAY MAINTENANCE

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1. Summary

- 1.1. Shropshire Council has 1,414 kilometres of footway and 5 kilometres of cycleway. The cycleways that form part of a footway are counted as part of footways; likewise cycle lanes on carriageways are included in carriageway lengths.
- 1.2. Unfortunately, in recent years funding levels have been such that the council has been managing a highway network in decline and this includes the footway and cycleway network. This is not unique to Shropshire with most highway authorities in England reporting a similar position. Indeed, the condition of the Shropshire network is considered above average compared to other highway authorities.
- 1.3. The service recognises the need to promote and encourage sustainable transport and encourage walking and cycling in Shropshire. However, our ability to maintain the surfaces under cyclical maintenance has been challenging, due to the pressure associated with reduced revenue and capital budgets over recent years.
- 1.4. The purpose of this report is to outline the current position and also highlight the issues currently facing the service, in relation to the maintenance of footway and cycleway assets.

2. Decisions

The Committee is asked to;

- 2.1. Note the contents of this report;
- 2.2. Identify areas of concern, not already considered within the report for consideration as part of the ongoing service improvements.

REPORT

3. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 3.1. Existing funding is primarily targeted at safety. The council has a duty to maintain the highway (including footways and cycleways) to a safe and serviceable standard. The council has a comprehensive regime of safety inspections and any defects identified the council repairs (wherever these be on the carriageway, footway or cycleway). The defects are risk categorised as an immediate or potential risk to personal injury within 1, 5 or 28 days, depending on the assessed seriousness of the defect.
- 3.2. Routine maintenance activities such as small defect repairs, vegetation cut back, cleansing/ leaf clearance etc. are funded from revenue budgets which are under the greatest levels of pressure. Surveys show that Shropshire's revenue budget is approximately £2,000 per mile less than the average budget for highway authorities in the Midlands and as such means that the highways team is unable to afford to undertake as much of the basic maintenance required to ensure that footways and cycleways remain accessible as it may like.
- 3.3. The current limited funding environment means the service often has to financially prioritise higher 'risk' defects that present the public with the greatest risk to safety.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1. There are no direct financial implications as a result of this report.
- 4.2. Any alternative improvements proposed by Committee could have the potential to require additional resources to implement which may be unaffordable within existing revenue and capital budgets.

5. Climate Change Appraisal

- 5.1. There are no direct climate change implications as a result of this report.
- 5.2. The service recognises the need to ensure that footway and cycleway assets are safe and serviceable in order to promote sustainable transport modes.

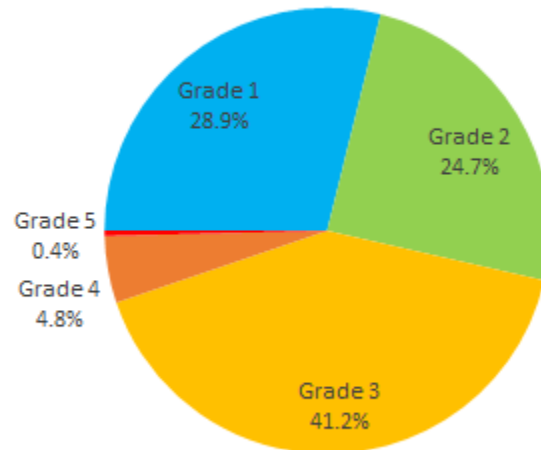
6. Background

Footway and Cycleway Maintenance

- 6.1. Shropshire Council is responsible for 1,414 kilometres of footway and 5 kilometres of cycleway across the county.
- 6.2. The highways service undertakes routine safety inspection of the entire network at varying frequencies depending on the usage of footways. This

involves a detailed inspection by a trained highway inspector which identifies and records and issues observed on the date of inspection. The service has a comprehensive regime of safety inspection covering all carriageways, footways and cycleways across the county. We also respond to customer service requests raised directly with the service and any issues also added to the maintenance record.

- 6.3. Surveys show that the current structural condition the footways network is as shown below.



- 6.4. A grading of 1 to 3 (almost 95%) are deemed to be serviceable footways with no structural deterioration, albeit inspections may identify localised defects. A Grade 4 footway is typically showing some functional impairment such as minor surface cracking which without repair could lead to further deterioration. A Grade 5 footway is typically structurally impaired with either substantial cracking (crazing) or subsidence. Capital maintenance schemes are therefore targeted at grade 4 and 5 sites.
- 6.5. Our duty under the Highways Act 1980 s41(1) is “to maintain the highway as an absolute duty to keep the fabric of the highway in such good repair as to render its physical condition safe for ordinary traffic to pass at all seasons of the year..”
- 6.6. Therefore, from an Asset Management perspective, the network is in good physical structural condition as a whole and has been maintained to a good standard, particularly when compared to carriageways. Allocation of funding from capital schemes between carriageway and footways therefore reflects this situation.
- 6.7. Data from all sources is used to help inform the capital programme for investment on footway improvements within the annual programme.

Insurance Risk

- 6.8. The table below shows the insurance claims received by Shropshire Council from the period April 2016 to March 2019, split between carriageway and footway.

	Carriageway	Footway	Cycleway	% Footway & Cycleway
2016/2017	200	29	0	12.7
2017/2018	422	29	2	6.9
2018/2019	585	31	0	5.0
2019/2020	980	30	7	3.7
2020/2021	705	13	0	1.8
2021/2022	326	5	2	2.1
Grand Total	3,218	137	11	

- 6.9. Over this period, there has been a rise in carriageway defects due to the deterioration of the highway asset. However, the service has slowly been able to reduce this risk in the last couple of years via a range of interventions and service improvements. Throughout the period of increases in carriageway claims, the number of claims on footways and cycleways has remained consistently low in comparison and represent a falling percentage compared to the total number of claims that the council receives.

Financial Position

- 6.10. Shropshire Council, as is the case with a vast majority of highway authorities, is seeing a highways network in deterioration. This presents the council with significant challenges, especially with regards to 'risk' and trying to ensure that the network remains safe and serviceable for all users.
- 6.11. The carriageway presents the authority with the greatest insurance / claim risk; and as a result it has seen the majority of the investment. Put simply, money spent on paying claims is money that cannot be spent on the highway and so it is important that those areas where claims are highest are prioritised when considering budget allocation across various asset categories.
- 6.12. As a result the priority for the service has been to improve the underlying asset condition of the highway and reduce the maintenance backlog as quickly as possible. Since the start of the financial year, the service has repaired over 10,000 potholes and reduce the backlog by over 30%. The vast majority are fixed first time, permanently without need for a subsequent visit.
- 6.13. Whilst, the structural condition of the footway and cycleway network is generally sound, most requests for service tend to relate to overgrown vegetation (shrubs, tree's etc.) or narrowing of width of footway/ cycleways from grass/weed creep. As revenue budgets have reduced significantly over

the past decade and as the deterioration of the carriageway and drainage network has diverted ever increasing percentages of budget to pothole repair and gulley/ditch cleansing, it is becoming ever more difficult to prioritise such works within current budgets and so new approaches are having to be considered.

- 6.14. The service has been implementing a significant improvement programme initiated by a consultant who was brought into the council to ensure better value for money could be derived from budgets and this improvement programme has evolved still further with the new management team in Shropshire Highways.
- 6.15. These improvements have been delivered by a combination of better enablement of Kier to deliver value for money within the terms of the contract but also the development of the in-house workforce to supplement the work being carried out by Kier.
- 6.16. This team primarily undertakes more simple repairs on the network, to allow Kier to focus their resources on the more complex larger scale maintenance programme. The in-house team are focused on 'find and fix' operations, which not only involve carriageway defect repairs, but also cleaning of signs and cutting back vegetation. Over time this will give improvements on the existing footway and cycleway network. As pro-active approach develops it will see an increase in these types of pro-active routine maintenance taking place across Shropshire.
- 6.17. As part of the ongoing future service development, there is an ambition to see some local service delivery being carried out by town and parish councils. This could see more routine maintenance activities such as vegetation maintenance near footways and cycleways being carried out at a parish level, as part of the future operating model and parish grant schedule. This could enable local communities to focus on and prioritise work of local value and supplement activity areas which revenue pressures have led to a reduction in service.

7. Conclusions

- 7.1. The service has necessarily had to respond to the pressure of a deteriorating asset and reducing budgets by diverting funding to the most urgent areas of need. The introduction of an improvement plan and the additional staffing capacity of a consultant for 6 months, has enabled the service to look at a more proactive way in deriving value from its budgets through a range of improvements which has seen a significant transformation in service delivery over a short period. The service continues to be in a transitional phase and working towards a future operating model, which will see further improvements in highways over the coming years. There is a limit on what can be achieved without additional funding however.
- 7.2. The report demonstrates that we are meeting our duties under the highways Act and managing risks associated with the footway and carriageway asset

which we are responsible for and managing those effectively within the current funding constraints.

- 7.3. It is recognised that from a serviceability perspective, there are areas where public expectations around the standard of maintenance and improvement do not align with the budget position. The on-going maintenance of lining refreshment, sign cleaning, remove vegetation encroachment are revenue activities and it is these budgets have seen the greatest pressure.
- 7.4. The service recognises the importance of encouraging and facilitating walking and cycling. Further development of our lower-cost self-delivery model will enable a more pro-active service that will see routine maintenance and pro-active services improve. However, the current pressure on revenue budgets also means that prioritising investment on footway and cycleway maintenance may mean a reduction in maintenance in areas of greater risk and almost certainly an increase in claims which would negatively impact on the Councils budgets and reputation.
- 7.5. The service however recognises these challenges and have been actively transforming service delivery to derive the greatest value from budgets possible which has already seen significant improvements in service effectiveness.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)
None
Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder) - Cllr Dean Carroll
Local Member - All
Appendices - None