

**Report to Councillor Joy Dennis, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport**

**March 2023**

**Proposal for Exceptional 'One-Off' Highway Revenue Expenditure**

**Report by Matt Davey, Assistant Director (Highways, Transport and Planning)**

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**Summary**

- The County Council has approved a one-off allocation of £4.5m revenue in 2023/24 for highways maintenance and repairs, including flooding and drainage. The exceptional funding will enable several proactive activities to be undertaken which will help redress the maintenance deficit.
- The funding will help to mitigate some of the pressures on the service caused by the impact of climate change - now experiencing more extreme weather events, and this has resulted in melting roads, wide-scale flooding, storm damage from high winds, and large numbers of potholes.
- The additional funding will be focused on drainage maintenance and investigations, proactive pothole repairs, signs and line maintenance, trees, ditches, and vegetation maintenance.
- The funding is one-off and whilst it will have a positive impact, the expectations on what the additional funding will achieve are likely to be far higher than what can reasonably be achieved.
- Estimates are indicative and early engagement with contractors is needed to understand practical timescales for delivery and the costs.
- Delivery is to be through current highway Contracts. Contractual compliance – feedback sought from legal/procurement.
- Performance reporting will be undertaken via the quarterly Performance and Resources Report.

**Recommendation**

- (1) That the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport approves the use and allocation of the exceptional one-off revenue fund of £4.5m for highway maintenance and other works.
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## **Proposal**

### **1 Background and context**

- 1.1 Highway revenue expenditure focuses on meeting the County Council's obligations to keep the highway safe. This has led to a service that is more reactive in some areas where proactive maintenance is limited or cannot be afforded.
- 1.2 In the last few years, there has been experienced an increase in more extreme weather events resulting in melting roads, wide-scale flooding, wind damage and an increase in the number of potholes.
- 1.3 Following one of the driest and warmest summers on record in November and December 2022, the county experienced twice the normal monthly rainfall. This led to widespread flooding on the network resulting in some prolonged road closures and many high priority sites needing remedial work.
- 1.4 Freezing temperatures in December 2022 and January 2023 resulted in a significant spike in the number of potholes and safety defects on the network.
- 1.5 The number of safety jobs raised each financial year is increasing.
- 1.6 Previous 9 years average 33,257 jobs raised -  
2021/22 total number 37,904 (729 per week)  
2022/23 (to 13/02/23) 35,402 (769 per week)
- 1.7 In January 2023, 7,174 safety jobs were raised, the most ever on record and a 250% increase on January 2022.
- 1.8 Prioritising safety defects has impacted the scope for sign and line maintenance with no proactive sign cleaning for several years.
- 1.9 Similarly, vegetation maintenance has been primarily focussed on safety critical issues. For example, this has meant that some rural footways have narrowed which has impacted user accessibility and there is a 1,200 job backlog in routine maintenance activities such as preventative, general tree maintenance.

### **2 Proposal details**

- 2.1 To partly redress the maintenance backlogs, an exceptional, one-off investment of £4.5 million has been included in the 2023/24 revenue budget. The proposal is to focus this expenditure in four key areas: drainage; potholes and carriageway condition; signs and road markings; and vegetation maintenance. A summary and details along with cost estimates is included in Appendix A.

#### **Drainage proposals**

- 2.2 Additional revenue funding for drainage operations in 2022/23 has been used for increased jetting capacity and a moderate ditch clearance programme. Further investment would support a proactive approach to routine cleansing and help tackle priority work and drainage investigations. It could also be

used to help map the County Council's drainage assets in hotspot areas which in turn would drive efficiencies in future work programmes.

- 2.3 Initial data analysis shows the largest volume of reactive work this year has been on the gullies currently maintained on an annual basis. The gullies and drainage systems on the annual cleanse programme are generally those on the higher speed network. It is therefore proposed that an additional six-monthly cleanse is introduced for one year on an experimental basis. This will test whether it reduces the draw on reactive resources in this area, which can then be used to support other drainage activities.
- 2.4 It is proposed to deploy additional gangs to support a wide range of proactive drainage activities such as digging out grips and replacing and freeing gully tops. There are a number of 'hot spot' areas across the county where proactive measures will assist with getting water off the network.
- 2.5 Funding for a CCTV unit and for resources to map drainage assets in hotspots will help to identify fixes and schemes that will provide long term relief of flooding issues.

### **Potholes, Carriageway and Footway Maintenance proposals**

- 2.6 This year the County Council employed two Velocity Jet Patchers for approximately six months. Whilst the Jet Patchers are deployed to focus on safety related defects, they also repair non-safety defects that are likely to become an issue at a point in the future, providing a longer-term benefit to the road network. The exceptional funding will pay for a third Jet Patcher in 2023/24.
- 2.7 Additional 'find and fix' gangs are proposed to focus on pothole hot-spot areas, alongside an additional patching resource to undertake larger patching that provides a longer-term repair.
- 2.8 This proactive and preventative approach will help manage the spikes in safety defect volumes experienced during the busiest parts of the year.

### **Signs and lines proposals**

- 2.9 The proposal is to deploy additional resources to enable an increase in the volume of sign and line maintenance. There are approximately 76,000 road signs and bollards on the highway network and 4,000 linear kms of road markings in the county, 481,000m<sup>2</sup> of symbols and wording and 116,000 road studs (cats' eyes).
- 2.10 The current revenue budget for signs allows for repair/replacement of approx. 1,500 sign assets. The additional revenue budget would allow an additional 750 signs to be replaced/repaired.
- 2.11 Further funding to undertake sign/bollard cleaning will allow two gangs to be deployed. They will clean and cut back obscuring vegetation on approx. 4,000 -5,000 signs/bollards.

## **Vegetation proposals**

- 2.12 Current work on highway trees is focused on 'dead, diseased and dying' trees only. This has resulted in a back log of over 1,200 medium priority tree maintenance jobs. Additional resources are proposed to undertake this work including pollarding and other essential work to maintain the health of the tree stock and control their growth, particularly for urban street trees. A programme of preventative maintenance will reduce the need for future, more costly reactive maintenance, and is likely to maintain the trees in a healthy condition for longer.
- 2.13 Additional funding in 2022/23 enabled some ditch clearance and it is proposed to allocate further funding to this activity which would maintain approximately 3,000 linear metres of ditches. It is also proposed to allocate resources to footway siding which is anticipated could 'side' around 15-20 km of footways.
- 2.14 Funding is proposed to undertake accurate mapping of rural grass verges. This will help inform future cutting regimes and support better procurement of the service in future.

## **Communications**

- 2.15 The delivery of the proposals will be supported by a comprehensive communication plan.

## **3 Other options considered (and reasons for not proposing)**

- 3.1 Consideration was given to areas of most need, balanced with available resource to undertake the work. All work needs to be delivered within the existing contractual model and therefore delivery options are limited.

## **4 Consultation, engagement and advice**

- 4.1 The Communities, Highways and Environment Scrutiny Committee will be consulted about these proposals at the meeting on 6 March 2023.

## **5 Finance**

- 5.1 Revenue consequences

As part of the 2023-24 revenue budget approved at the February 2023 County Council meeting, an additional £4.5m was provided for highways maintenance within the non-portfolio budgets. It is proposed that the £4.5m is spent in line with the priorities outlined in Annex A. This will be in addition to the current 2023-24 highways maintenance budget of £15.855m and give a total available expenditure of £20.355m.

- 5.2 The effect of the proposal:

### **How the cost represents good value**

- 5.3 Expenditure will be through existing contractual mechanisms. The work will be programmed and optimised to ensure best value and efficiency.

- 5.4 The proposal is addressing areas of greatest need across maintenance activities. Existing condition and live asset data will be used to formulate programmes for priority focus.

**Future savings/efficiencies being delivered**

- 5.5 This exceptional one-off investment will help inform the design of future maintenance regimes.

**Human Resources, IT and Assets Impact**

- 5.6 Allocation of some of the funding will be for temporary resources to aid delivery and auditing of work.

**6 Risk implications and mitigations**

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Mitigating Action (in place or planned)</b>
Resources to deliver the work	Early recruitment of additional temporary resources
Contractor availability	Early engagement with contractors. Working closely with contractors to plan realistic delivery timeframe. May require expenditure over 2 financial years.
Availability of road space	Early engagement with Streetworks team to plan work
Contractual compliance	Working closely with Legal and Procurement teams
Delivery costs may increase to significant levels due to inflation that contractors may need to pass on to client	The appropriate contractual arrangements are in place to provide appropriate governance and oversight of any cost increases.
Unexpected or emergency works	Any unexpected or emergency works of significant scale may impact delivery programmes. Service level continuity planning and contractual landscape provide suitable options for alternative or flexible delivery and financial management.

**7 Policy alignment and compliance**

- 7.1 The Council Plan 2021-2025 sets out the priorities for the council over the next four years and the ambitious outcomes for people who live and work in West Sussex. This proposal supports the sustainable and prosperous economy priority.
- 7.2 The programmes of work are based on asset management approach set out in the West Sussex Transport Plan, and the Highway Infrastructure Asset

Management Strategy, that align with the aims and objectives within the Council Plan.

- 7.3 In particular the delivery of critical maintenance of the highway network assets underpins the ability of the Council to meet its vision and strategic aims set out in the Council Plan.
- 7.4 There are no equality, human rights, or public health implications associated with this proposal.
- 7.5 Highway contracts consider the County Council's climate change commitments. Officers will continue to work with delivery partners to consider innovative approaches and current best practice.
- 7.6 Highway contracts consider Social Value and Sustainability and social, economic, and environmental factors will be considered throughout the development and implementation phases of work programmes.
- 7.7 Crime and Disorder Reduction Assessment – none have been identified although ongoing Crime and Disorder implications would be assessed before and during implementation phases.

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### **Appendices**

Annex A - Proposal for Exceptional 'One-Off' Highway Revenue Expenditure 2023/2024

### **Background papers**

None