

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Executive Decision Record

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

Contact name: Peter Rooney

Tel: **Email:** peter.rooney@hants.gov.uk

1. The decision:

- 1.1. 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 proposed delivery strategy for the *Stronger Roads Today* campaign, which utilises the additional £22.5m that has been allocated for reactive highway maintenance over the next three years.
- 1.2. 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.

2. Reasons for the decision:

- 2.1. To provide the Executive Lead Member for Universal Services with details of the work that has already been undertaken by the County Council's Highways service in response to the severe weather experienced over the past winter season and seek approval for the proposed short/medium/longer term delivery strategy for arresting the accelerated deterioration of the highway network, utilising the additional funding allocated as part of the *Stronger Roads Today* campaign.
- 2.2. The Highway Network Recovery Strategy was first approved in March 2022 by the Lead Executive Member but due to external events the full implementation of this strategy was deferred. The focus and priorities for the highways service has been forced to change to respond to the events of the past winter and therefore full implementation of the Highway Network Recovery Strategy needs to be deferred until 2025/26 at the earliest, subject to review in Autumn 2024, and confirmation of future Department for Transport block funding arrangements beyond 2024/25.

3. Other options considered and rejected:

- 3.1. To continue to deliver highway maintenance in a similar manner to previous years, albeit with additional funding. This option was rejected as it would not

provide the immediate targeted response and repairs required following the winter damage. Continuing with the normal strategies for highway maintenance would not provide the necessary focus on carriageway maintenance that is required and would arguably expose the road network to further deterioration and insufficient resilience for the coming winter season.

3.2. The option to proceed with full implementation of the Highway Network Recovery Strategy from 2024/25 was rejected as it would not focus service delivery in the right areas of need given the current priorities and could expose the County Council to additional risks and reputational damage.

4. Conflicts of interest:

4.1. Conflicts of interest declared by the decision-maker:

4.2. Conflicts of interest declared by other Executive Members consulted:

5. Dispensation granted by the Conduct Advisory Panel: none.

6. Reason(s) for the matter being dealt with if urgent: not applicable.

7. Statement from the Decision Maker:

Approved by:

Date:

27 November 2023

**Executive Lead Member for Universal Services
Councillor Nick Adams-King**

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Decision Report

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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 proposed delivery strategy for the Stronger Roads Today campaign, which utilises the additional £22.5m of funding that has been 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 over recent years, 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 in the condition 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 at reactive repairs, i.e. potholes and other carriageway defects.

7. The report outlines the strategy for how the 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 delivery of highway maintenance to ensure the right treatments are targeted at the right time to provide maximum benefit and value.
9. Despite the significant work that will be delivered as part of the *Stronger Roads Today* campaign, it should be noted that the road network is still in a fragile state and if another harsh winter is experienced in the coming season 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 backlog is estimated at £400million.
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 highways service. The underlying cause of this is due to under-investment at a national level over many years and the financial shortfall has been compounded by a series of 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 has been significantly impacted by market volatility and spiralling inflation, which has particularly impacted the construction industry. 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 challenges posed by the recent weather events, the priority for the highway maintenance service needs to focus on restoring the roads and, particularly, repairing potholes. Therefore, it is recommended that implementation of the Network Recovery Strategy is further postponed, until the 2025/26 financial year at the earliest, but this can be reviewed again in the Autumn of 2024.

13. 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 already deteriorating highway network, which generated unprecedented numbers of carriageway defects such as potholes, cracking and structural failure.
14. Reflecting the numbers of carriageway defects, the County Council also received exceptional numbers of public enquiries, 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

15. 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 £377m, however this figure was produced before the recent increases in inflation and the current value is now likely to be around £500m.
16. 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 £200m for highway maintenance, with the County Council's share being £5.9m. Whilst additional Government investment in highway maintenance is always welcomed and much needed, the levels are significantly lower than required to make a substantial difference.
17. 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.

18. 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.
19. 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.

Stronger Roads Today - Strategy

20. 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 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.
21. 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 8000 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. 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.
 - d. Mobilising additional spray injection patching machines, such as Dragon Patchers, with up to six on the network.
 - e. 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.
 - f. 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.

- g. 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.
- h. The re-programming of less-urgent work to allow the resources to concentrate on filling potholes and responding to safety defects.
- i. 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.

22. 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.

23. 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. Development in the materials and products produced at the County Council's materials recycling facility in Micheldever. An ambition is to produce a fully recycled surface course that can be used on carriageways.
 - 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.
24. The strategy will help to demonstrate that the County Council's Highways team has acted swiftly to respond to the events of the previous winter and is effectively planning ahead to ensure the right treatments are delivered to provide maximum benefit and value.
25. 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 fragile 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 network, leading to similar problems as those experienced this year.
26. 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.

Consultation and Equalities

27. 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.
28. 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

29. 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

30. 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

31. 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

32. The past winter season has had a devastating effect on the condition of the UK highway network, which has led to unprecedented numbers of defects, public enquiries, correspondence, and third-party claims. The County Council has recognised the impact of this and acted swiftly to provide additional financial support to address the situation.
33. The strategy that has been developed to deliver the new *Stronger Roads Today* campaign has already provided an immediate response to the effects of the previous winter season. The collaborative response and development of this strategy has produced new innovate ways of working that will not only deliver this programme of work but will benefit the future delivery of the highways service.

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