

## Highways Performance Dashboard – Summer 2022

Report of the Director of Climate Change, Environment and Transport

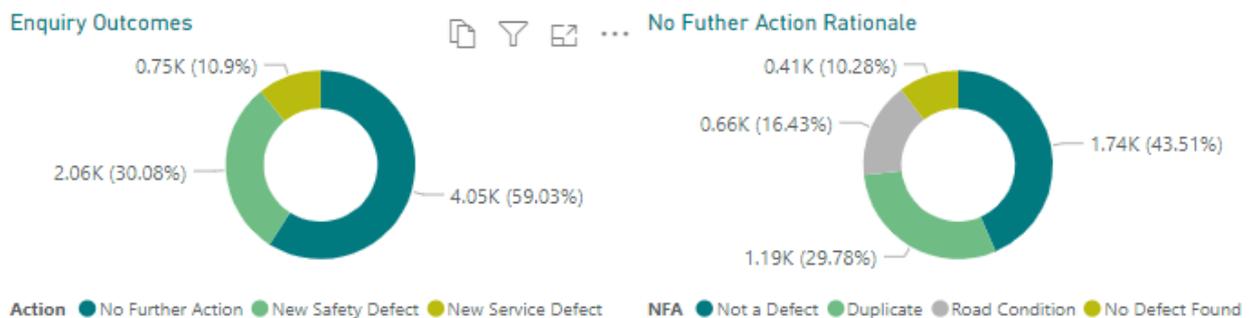
### 1. Introduction

In response to the recommendations of the Planned & Reactive Maintenance: Potholes & Drainage Task Group presented to the Corporate, Infrastructure and Regulatory Services (CIRS) Scrutiny Committee in March 2019 an updated Performance Dashboard Report has been produced. The intention of this report is to provide Members with an overview of the performance of the Highways and Traffic Management Team over the summer period.

### 2. Reactive Works

#### 2.1 Public Reports

Since the triage process began circa 90,000 reports have been assessed – 53.5% have resulted in no further action, with the main reasons being duplicate or non-actionable (non-safety defect) reports. So far, this financial year just under 7,000 reports have been assessed with almost 60% being closed as no further action. Historically all of these reports would have automatically been passed to our contractor for repair, with many resulting in unnecessary visits and the associated impacts on cost, disruption and carbon associated with this.



More recently our contractor's inspection workforce have all been upskilled so that they're able to assess public reports as well as undertake formal, routine safety inspections interchangeably – adding extra resilience and driving efficiency, especially important during the busy, colder periods.

Further work is now being undertaken looking at the other types of public reports received e.g. overgrown vegetation, ensuring that these are being managed as efficiently and collaboratively as possible, aligning to approaches that have already been successfully adopted elsewhere.

## **2.2 Safety Defects**

The close of 2021/22 financial year saw a decrease in total pothole defects recorded for the year when compared to 2020/21. This trend has continued this year when compared to the same months last year. The number of recorded pothole defects can be seen in Appendix 1. These reductions are being attributed to ongoing focus on serviceability works, including the triage patching and dragon patching initiatives. Our four dragon patchers have completed 54 sites this financial year and have a further 175 sites committed for the remainder of the year.

We have also seen significant increases in the amount of 'first time fixes' by defect gangs thanks to the work undertaken in the 'Doing What Matters' process, whereby inspectors are able to provide more detailed information at point of assessment, prior to works being passed and scheduled for repair. This has been coupled with increased quality audits that is helping to improve the workmanship across the gangs.

## **2.3 Extreme Weather in July**

The Network Operations team proactively managed the July severe weather event for excessive heat. Prior to the Met Office declaring an amber weather warning, the team provided an early warning to Devon's communities and visitors on social media, local radio and our variable message signs. We also took part in the Local Resilience Forum pre-event conferences and assisted the Emergency Planning teams in the Stranded Motorists Framework. Working closely with Milestone we re-tasked some of our gritting fleet to carry out dusting operations to avoid melting roads and liaised with our surface dressing contractors to carry out a proactive dusting programme on our newly resurfaced roads and most vulnerable parts of the network. Although road surface temperatures reached over 50 degrees across the county (hottest recorded temp was 57.1 degrees) the network fared extremely well and our road users were kept moving throughout.

At the time of writing (early August), a second amber warning for extreme heat is in place and we are once again well prepared.

## **3. Cyclical Operations**

### **3.1 Gully Cleaning**

Waste bays in South Molton have received full approval and are now licenced and being used to minimise waste costs and manage tipping volumes within the gully cleaning operations. Savings in the region of £50k had been achieved by the end of July. The bays will also have a significant impact on the carbon impact of the service by significantly reducing the mileage undertaken to tip waste.

The drainage referral process is working well, operatives and officers are able to log assets that are defective. Gangs then follow up to address the issues. This helps maintain the gully cleaning programme and improves efficiency. Since April the following work has been carried out.

3249 Jetting requests have been resolved

214 seized covers released  
305 covers replaced  
28 CCTV drainage surveys identifying various defects.

The progress of the gully cleaning service can be seen in Appendix 2.

### **3.2 Grips, Easements and Buddleholes**

Asset location data is now being added to the public viewing portal.

Levels of plant are being regularly reviewed on the cyclic cleaning operation to ensure efficiency of the operation is maximised to achieve the policy of cleaning each asset annually, whilst minimising costs to deliver the programme.

The progress of the grips, easements and buddlehole cleaning service can be seen in Appendix 2.

## **4. Tree Safety Management (including vegetation)**

The programme of expert tree inspections on our principal road network is on track with six districts completed. Torridge and North Devon are due to be completed by end of September.

At this point 224 tree defects have been recorded, 49 fewer than at the same point in 2021. The number of individual trees with ADB (ash die back) is almost identical at this point to last year at 221.

Potentially hazardous trees are also reported via highway safety inspections (HSIs). In the first 4 months of the 2021/22 financial year 114 tree defects were identified during HSIs. For the same 4 months of 2022/23, that figure is 242, a little more than double. Almost exactly 50% of those defects identified last year related to Ash Dieback. Although exact figures aren't available for this year yet, it is roughly estimated that about 65% of this year's records relate to ADB.

Although we are not seeing any noticeable reduction in the number of reported ADB infected trees compared to this time last year the comprehensive and extensive surgery work on our main road network, including the North Devon Link Road (NDL) and A380, over the past 2 years has given us some confidence that those routes are at less risk of incursion from falling ash. It is far too early to be certain where we are with the rate of spread of the disease in Devon, however, mainland Europe has been living with ADB long before it arrived on to British shores and expert opinion suggests that based upon historical progression Devon is likely to be living with the disease at its current level for the next 5-10 years. Even beyond this date the disease will remain a potential threat to our ash tree stock in the same way as Dutch Elm disease is to our elm stock to this day.

Noting the significant carbon sequestration and storage, ecological and social wellbeing benefits achieved by our tree assets we are moving forward in better understanding the real number of highway trees we manage across Devon's road network. Previously overall highway tree stock numbers in Devon have been based upon an estimate of the number of trees within a sample area, however, we have

secured recent access to new satellite-based data which provides us with both the number of trees within the boundaries of the highway and any other trees on private land which have the potential of falling on to the highway. The data has the benefit of being refreshed over a 3 year cycle, whilst also having the potential to identify tree location, height and canopy size which will greatly enhance our understanding on the asset we are maintaining.

This is a significant step forward in improving the efficiency in managing our tree stock and will enhance the authority's ability to develop a longer-term strategy in managing this essential and most precious asset. Knowing more precisely what we have will improve our resilience should the service need to respond to any pathogen infections which may threaten the asset in the future.

The team have been trialling alternative methods of working to deal with overgrown vegetation issues on a test and learn basis for approximately 12 months, including utilising qualified arboricultural contractors to inspect reported sites and provide advice to residents and the use of a 'find, inform, fix' approach to pragmatically deal with overgrowth issues. What has been learnt will now be reviewed and where good outcomes are noted, will be taken forward into a redesigned process.

## **5. Preparations for Winter Service**

As one winter ended the preparations for next winter began. This started with a review of lessons learnt from both Milestone and DCC staff. Although last winter was generally mild, we did experience some very challenging weather including back to back named storms bringing extreme winds and low road surface temperatures on the same day.

During winter we also started a trial in Exeter to pre-salt key cycleways and footways. This trial is in the early stages but proved a positive step towards carbon reduction and active travel which was well supported by stakeholders. It is hoped the trial can continue this winter.

The round of summer maintenance on the gritters is nearing completion and to assist with reliability, our contractor will now be running each vehicle fortnightly throughout the year.

Devon County Council continues to maintain representatives on the National Winter Service Research Group (NWSRG), enabling us to benchmark and influence on a national stage.

## **6. Customer Engagement Project**

The Highways Service have been working with the Digital Transformation Team and have identified a number of opportunities, in both our 'Report a Problem' and licences and applications, to improve the customer journey and experience and replace our old database systems with modern, robust, and supported workflow management systems.

Work has started to design and implement a scalable solution incorporating dynamic forms, digital workflows, DCC management of customer data and integration with

third party systems. The new toolset will also be used by members of the public to apply for licences and could then be designed to also meet the needs for report a problem. This will provide a consistent customer experience, across the service, and also provide a workload management tool, for staff, to support the management of several processes. This will enable more efficient working practices and help the service understand and manage demand.

The scope of the project includes:

- Improved website navigation
- Implement website guided assistance
- Submit an application / report a problem
- Manage customers
- Manage workflows
- Manage inspections
- Manage data & business intelligence.

To support the project a member of the team has been seconded from their substantive post for a period of 12 months.

## **7. Development of @DevonAlert**

@DevonAlert continues to lead the way in the south west with regards to travel updates, event notifications and emergency incident informing and proactive warning. The Twitter account continues to go from strength to strength and now has over 12,000 followers, with our numbers increasing week on week. On average our tweets are viewed/retweeted 150,000 times per month (590,000K during Feb – Storm Eunice). Our content is now supported by a library of branded images and GIF's and we have recently furthered our social media presence by joining Facebook. Please help us to help Devon by following us on both platforms. Equally, when appropriate we aim to use our Variable Message Signs (VMS) in parallel to ensure consistent messaging.

## **8. Road Wardens and Highway Management Community Enhancement Fund**

There are currently 89 Road Warden agreements with Parish and Town Councils.

Since April 2021:

- 14 volunteers have undertaken Signing, Lighting and Guarding training (Chapter 8)
- 9 volunteers have signed up to the online Highway Safety Awareness module
- 12 Parish and Town Councils have been supplied with pothole repair material for use on their local roads.

There are currently 160 volunteers who have undertaken Signing, Lighting and Guarding training, but their accreditation to work on the highway has expired or will in the near future. We are contacting the local councils to confirm if they are still active and to offer refresher training.

During 2021/22 financial year 25 bids for grant from the Highway Community Enhancement Fund were approved totalling over £20,000, facilitating over £60,000 of work and projects.

Additional 2021/22 funding was available for public realm projects. 17 bids for grant were approved totalling over £40,000, facilitating over £78,000 of work and projects.

## **9. Delivery of the Capital Programme**

Design and delivery for planned maintenance works continues to go very well, especially as Devon Highways teams continue to work through changes and opportunities afforded through an amendment to Term Maintenance Contract payment mechanism.

The majority of schemes have been designed and programmed; however, it should be noted that disruption out of the authority's control such as winter, co-ordination and budgetary issues may put the delivery of some of these schemes at risk. Planning will however continue to ensure we manage these potential risks as effectively as possible.

Schemes continue to be delivered through our Term Maintenance Contractor and External Framework Contractors to ensure sustainability of delivery and value for money.

Over the financial year approximately £9M is anticipated to be delivered on our strategic A Roads, typically including resurfacing and associated drainage. While two smaller schemes were delivered in April, the main programme of resurfacing commenced in June, with an anticipated £3.4M to be delivered by the end of August. Additional design work is being carried out on schemes to be delivered from September, to ensure the most economical solution against a background of continuing cost increases.

Approximately £13.5M of planned works are scheduled to be delivered through a variety of treatments such as resurfacing, patching, drainage and footways outside of the A roads which has been identified and prioritised through a mix of local intelligence and holistic asset data. Delivery has progressed well, with a large proportion of the works already delivered ensuring that the weather window before winter is fully optimised. A few schemes remain in design with the remainder of the schemes in program, with a high confidence of delivery this financial year.

Devon has continued to invest in preventative carriageway maintenance techniques that not only offer whole life savings, but also significant carbon reductions when compared to resurfacing. A little over £5M was invested in surface dressing and delivered via the summer months to ensure effective embedment. This programme has seen 161 sites successfully delivered which equates to approximately 1.1million m<sup>2</sup>. This included 22 'lock chip' sites which is an enhanced dressing process to better cater for the urban environment.

Approximately £6.75M is scheduled to be delivered through short notice planned works including minor hand and dragon patching. All of which are identified through

centrally managed inspections and delivered via a rolling program throughout the year.

Finally, £1.7M is programmed to be spent maintaining the Public Right of Way and cycle network, with works allocated and planned for delivery this financial year.

Meg Booth  
Director of Climate Change, Environment and Transport

Electoral Divisions: All

Cabinet Member for Highway Management: Councillor Stuart Hughes

### **Local Government Act 1972: List of Background Papers**

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Background Paper	Date	File Reference
Nil		

Highways Performance Dashboard - Final

## Appendix 1 to CET/22/47

### Number of potholes recorded across the Devon network per month/year

	<b>17/18</b>	<b>18/19</b>	<b>19/20</b>	<b>20/21</b>	<b>21/22</b>	<b>22/23</b>	<b>Avg</b>
April	3,489	9,782	3,741	6,505	3,904	2,980	<b>5,484</b>
May	4,329	6,339	3,344	4,764	4,248	3,493	<b>4,605</b>
June	3,293	5,120	3,713	5,179	5,743	2,948	<b>4,610</b>
July	3,148	5,225	2,719	4,040	4,301	2,758	<b>3,887</b>
August	3,352	4,423	2,041	3,071	3,845		<b>3,346</b>
September	2,831	3,378	2,745	3,297	2,874		<b>3,025</b>
October	3,750	3,137	3,013	2,465	2,545		<b>2,982</b>
November	4,316	3,434	3,931	3,349	2,697		<b>3,545</b>
December	3,766	3,533	3,393	2,465	2,723		<b>3,176</b>
January	7,408	5,770	6,694	5,181	3,494		<b>5,709</b>
February	7,687	5,121	5,269	5,619	2,972		<b>5,334</b>
March	8,523	6,706	7,884	6,190	4,915		<b>6,844</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>55,892</b>	<b>61,968</b>	<b>48,487</b>	<b>52,125</b>	<b>44,261</b>	<b>13,116</b>	

## Appendix 2 to CET/22/47

### Gully Cleaning Programme

As of 7<sup>th</sup> August (35% through the financial year)

	<b>Total Programmed</b>	<b>Gullies Attended</b>	<b>Gullies Cleaned</b>	<b>Gullies Left to clean</b>	<b>% Complete</b>
<b>Honiton</b>	24,456	8,060	7,036	17,420	29%
<b>Exeter</b>	30,460	10,578	10,170	20,290	33%
<b>Rydon</b>	22,402	10,442	8,942	13,460	40%
<b>South Hams</b>	16,434	7,718	6,358	10,076	39%
<b>Okehampton</b>	18,571	8,644	8,409	10,162	45%
<b>Merton</b>	12,716	5,282	4,708	8,008	37%
<b>South Molton</b>	20,283	7,514	6,592	13,691	33%
<b>Tiverton</b>	7,380	5,180	6,516	864	88%
	<b>152,702</b>	<b>63,418</b>	<b>58,731</b>	<b>93,971</b>	<b>38%</b>

### Grips, Easements and Buddlehole Cleaning Programme

As of 7<sup>th</sup> August (35% through the financial year)

	<b>To be Cleaned</b>	<b>Cleaned</b>	<b>Left to Attend</b>	<b>Programmed (m)</b>	<b>Cleaned (m)</b>	<b>% Complete</b>
<b>South</b>	12,018	4,340	7,678	47,814	22,643	<b>36%</b>
<b>North</b>	14,132	5,667	8,465	38,728	15,211	<b>40%</b>
<b>West</b>	15,480	7,996	7,484	62,910	25,826	<b>52%</b>
<b>Torridge</b>	25,541	6,793	18,748	82,502	38,189	<b>27%</b>
<b>East</b>	40,733	15,164	25,569	72,715	33,438	<b>37%</b>
	<b>107,904</b>	<b>39,960</b>	<b>67,944</b>	<b>304,669</b>	<b>135,308</b>	<b>38%</b>