



REPORT TITLE: Highways Routine Maintenance

Dates between which decision will be taken	Earliest date: 1 st September 2021 Latest date: 3 rd September 2021
Cabinet Member	Cllr Vernon Smith, Cabinet Member for Highways and Flooding
Key Decision	Yes/No
Purpose of Report	To seek formal approval to invest up to £1.3m of additional funds in highways routine maintenance.
Recommendations	To delegate authority to the Head of Highway Authority to invest up to £1.3m of additional funds in highways routine maintenance to be provided through the Term Maintenance Contract
Reasons for recommendations	The decision will enable the Council to continue to invest in repairing safety defects in line with GCC policy and comply with its statutory duty under the Highways Act 1980.
Resource Implications	Up to £1.3m funds have been identified corporately from un-ringfenced reserves to be invested in highways routine maintenance as one-off funding
Background Documents	Safety Inspection Policy - https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/media/2155/highway_safety_inspection_policy-60408.pdf
Statutory Authority	Highways Act 1980
Divisional Councillor(s)	n/a
Officer	Any representations should be sent to: Name: Kathryn Haworth Tel. no: 01452 328792 Email: Kathryn.haworth@gloucestershire.gov.uk By 5pm on Tuesday 31st August
Timeline	n/a

Background

1. Following the winter of 2020/21 Gloucestershire has experienced high volumes of safety defects and in order to comply with statutory duties and maintain repairs in line with the Safety Inspection Policy the resources on the network have been increased to respond to the situation. This additional spend has increased pressure on the routine maintenance budget.
2. The table below provides a summary of the defects

Month	Defect numbers
March 2021	5033
April 2021	4139
May 2021	4509
June 2021	5264
July 2021	4710

3. Historically the average number of defects per month has been approximately 2,500, so it is clear to see that there is a significant increase in defect numbers and consequently the requirement to deploy additional resources on the network. Average gang numbers have normally been in the region of 26 gangs but this can fluctuate depending on training, leave and defect levels. During this period 40-45 gangs have been deployed to respond.
4. Safety defect volumes and the necessary resources to respond (and to comply with Policy and statutory duty) are reviewed on a weekly basis.
5. In order to respond to the situation and apply a proactive approach, additional types of resource have been brought in, including spray injection patching machines. This enables there to be a proactive approach to forthcoming annual inspection routes with the aim of reducing the gang resource needed over the coming months. This will enable more efficient programming of defect repairs and better productivity of gangs. Unfortunately some time delays were experienced as a result of drivers having to self isolate due to COVID notifications.
6. An additional hand lay patching gang has also been on the network to tackle the larger defects and areas of continued deterioration to reduce return visits. This gang has been splitting it's time across the county depending on the location of defects identified.
7. Existing crews continue to work hard to repair defects identified and keep the network safe, however the provision of the additional gangs, spray injection and patching resource means continued pressure on the routine maintenance budget and in advance of the winter season when there is normally an increase in defect figures, an additional investment of resources is required. This will enable the teams to have the best opportunity to maintain the road network over the coming winter season.

Options

The options are as follows:

Option A – to delegate approval to the Head of Highway Authority to invest up to £1.3m of additional funds in highways routine maintenance through the Term Maintenance Contract; or

Option B: To decline to authorise such recommendation. Insufficient funds will result in the Council being unable to comply with its statutory duty or a significant overspend at year end.

Risks

8. GCC's Safety Inspection Policy requires that inspections and repairs are carried out in order to comply with the statutory duty under the Highways Act 1980. Therefore where safety defects are identified they need to be repaired within appropriate timescales in order for GCC to comply with its duty. If insufficient resource is provided to the Contractor to enable repairs then the liability associated with those is transferred to GCC in the event of third party claims on the network.
9. There is a continuing risk and impact of COVID19 on available staffing resources – we continue to experience an impact on staff numbers and gang availability within the inspection and repair teams as a result of self isolation and illness.
10. Extreme adverse weather conditions over the forthcoming winter, combined with an already fragile network, would have a detrimental effect and lead to increases in safety defects above the normal seasonal levels.

Financial implications

11. The increase in resources on the network creates an overspend pressure in routine maintenance. Approval for additional gangs (up to 40) was given at the start of the financial year during April and May to respond to the situation but defect volumes have continued at those high levels which has sustained the pressure. When the forthcoming winter is taken into consideration, when an increase in defects would normally be experienced, it is expected that this pressure will continue. Up to £1.3m additional funding has been identified corporately from un-ringfenced reserves comprising the insurance reserve and Covid grant, which is proposed to offset this position. This has been agreed by the Council's chief finance officer.

Climate change implications

12. Our changing climate is impacting on our operations as the increased defect numbers are a reflection of our wetter and extended cold winter, again this was highlighted with snow in April this year. Our aging network is fragile in the face of the extreme weather conditions from flooding, snow and ice – during the last winter we experienced flooding incidents on several occasions, along with an extended period of freeze/thaw cycle from January to March. This summer we have already seen road temperatures in the region of 50 deg C.

Equality implications

Has an Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) been completed? No

Compliance with the GCC Safety Inspection Policy and GCC's statutory duty under the Highways Act 1980 ensure that the highway network remains safe for all users.

Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) implications

13. No implications identified

Social value implications

14. No implications identified

Consultation feedback

15. No consultation undertaken outside GCC and Contractor.

Officer recommendations

16. To approve Option A – to authorise the Head of Highway Authority to invest up to £1.3m additional funds in highways routine maintenance.

Performance management/follow-up

17. Performance will continue to be monitored on a monthly basis including defect numbers, required resources and operations undertaken to tackle the on-going impact on the network.