

S29. Roads Maintenance – Gully Cleaning

The committee considered a report by the Acting Director of Development Services providing an update on the performance of Roads and Grounds Services in relation to the servicing of road drainage (gullies) as discussed at Scrutiny Committee on 9 September 2021. The report brought details of existing service provision and performance and details of financial information relative to the service provided.

Following a question on whether the software being adopted, for the data-led approach to managing routine and reactive maintenance, had the ability to alert services when cleaning was needed, the Roads & Grounds Manager explained that it can. When an area had been recently cleaned, it would appear as a green tick on the devices and when cleaning was overdue, it would appear as red.

Additional staff had been trained to undertake specialist operation to provide further resilience as the service had been impacted by high staff absence rates in 2019/20 and 2020/21, members asked why absence had been prominent and where additional staff had been accrued from. Mr Neill explained that 'additional staff' were existing staff members within the Roads Service who had received additional training and co-ordinators were responsible for managing team resources according to where the greatest need was. There was an understanding the Roads, Grounds and Streets services were becoming one service hence why the relocation of staff could be beneficial as they were expanding their skill sets and could be reactive to acute pressures. The Acting Director of Development Services explained that more flexibility was encouraged – absence issues had arisen from an aging workforce, however, this was furthered due to the incapability to be flexible when attending the variety of jobs the service required.

Following a question on how 'problem gullies' were tackled, Mr Neill explained they were prioritised on Friday's although noted this was not the case every Friday due to limited resource in terms of staffing numbers. These particular areas were involved in a separate programme in order to keep on top of the problems, however, at a slower pace as desired. He stated that the purpose of the smarter routes was to increase capacity and use available resources in a more efficient way.

In terms of increasing the budget for gully maintenance with the purpose to address local flooding, the Roads & Grounds Manager stated that gully cleaning was primarily a revenue function and the money being utilised for road resurfacing was ringfenced and therefore cannot be used for cleaning. The Acting Director of Development Services recognised there could be the necessity to review the balance of capital investment and revenue support for maintenance. He explained that more should be done to anticipate the capital required to upgrade drainage network and look towards moving this programme. The Surface Water Management Plan was the foundation of this and would be presented to Executive in the coming months to highlight the pressure the Council budget faces – it was important that the issue would be targeted in the most efficient way. Mr Duff stated that it would be

likely that the effort to tackle climate change would have an impact across the whole Council's budget in terms of prioritising the demands.

Members referred to a historical problem of missing drain covers and asked if this was still problem. Mr Neill clarified the issue was stemming from theft as the iron covers were sold for scrap but hadn't been an issue since despite some iron covers remaining.

The committee noted the decline in number of gullies cleaned per year as highlighted in 2020/21 with 7,573 gullies cleaned in comparison to 12,430 out of 35,763 gullies in 2019-20. It asked if the new data-led approach to gully cleaning would still allow staff members to visit sights to assess and inspect areas which had been reported by members of the public. The Roads & Grounds Manager clarified that the reduction in gully cleaning was also seen in comparable councils due to the pandemic – only emergency cleaning which would impact on infrastructure was undertaken. Furthermore, he assured inspections were still carried out depending on the state of the area, monthly inspections for the most critical routes and increased to annually for local access routes.

Following a question on whether the cleansing routes would be shared with the public, Mr Neill clarified that it already was public information through request of the individual. In terms of making routes more easily accessible, he explained the Communication Graduates could be utilised to develop the relationship with councillors and Community Councils.

Following on from this point, members raised the issue that the public may not move their vehicles for gully cleaning, and therefore unable to clean properly due to lack of awareness of the schedule. Members proposed the idea of sharing the cleaning timetable with Community Councils to then communicate with their local area. Mr Neill stated he would explore this option further.

Decision

The Scrutiny Committee:-

- (1) noted the report on the performance of the Service in relation to maintenance of roads drainage assets, and**
- (2) noted that a further report will be prepared for consideration in one year's time for progress to be monitor.**