

**TITLE OF REPORT:** OSC Review - roads and highways – highways  
maintenance progress update

**REPORT OF:** Acting Strategic Director, Communities and Environment

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## **SUMMARY**

The final report of the Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee review of roads and highways was presented in June 2018. One outcome from the review was that the position on highway maintenance continued to be monitored, and this report provides an update on progress in that particular area.

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## **Background**

1. The final report of the Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee review of roads and highways was presented in June 2018. A specific recommendation from the review was:
  - that the position on highway maintenance continues to be monitored, with further sessions for members arranged as appropriate;
2. This report provides an update on trends with regard to highway maintenance, in line with the previous recommendation.

## **Progress**

### *Defects detected*

3. More than 18,000 defects were detected in total in 2018. Excluding categories such as observations and obstructions some 16,400 actionable defects were identified. The two highest categories of defect were footway trips (7,463) and potholes (about 4,746). Together these make up about three quarters of all actionable defects.
4. Numbers of actionable defects in 2018 saw a 10% increase over levels in 2017. However the increase in the number of potholes, at 30%, was much greater than that in footway trips (5.4%).
5. The increase in number of potholes was concentrated early in the year, and is most likely to reflect the severe weather at that time. Prolonged periods of cold or wet weather typically see a major increase in such defects. Towards the end of the year numbers dropped off significantly and, for the final quarter, were at a similar level to 2017.
6. Understanding the trends in footway trips is proving much more difficult. Numbers decreased over several years, in spite of there having been no upturn in levels of

renewal. The most likely explanation for this is an increasingly strict application of the criteria for identifying footway defects. Numbers increased significantly in the early part of 2018, but have since fallen back again.

#### *Backlog of defects*

7. Over 15,000 highway defects were repaired in 2018, an increase of some 4,000 over 2017. However, given the increase in the number of defects detected, the backlog of repairs has continued to increase.

#### *Review of policy*

8. The policy on the inspection and repair of highways was revised in November 2018 in order to bring it in line with the new national Code of Practice. This establishes a 'risk based' approach towards identifying and setting priorities for repair. This changes the target times for repair of lower risk defects – previously these were identified for repair within either 10 or 40 working days. The new policy retains the 10 working day category, but seeks to include lower priority defects as part of annual works programmes. This aims to provide more flexibility in planning repairs to minor defects, in order to allow better use of resources at a time of financial constraint.
9. It is too early to judge the effectiveness or otherwise of the new policy. This will be assessed in future reports.
10. Current practice in the undertaking of repairs has also been reviewed. The main outcome from this is a proposal to trial a new approach known as 'Micro Asphalt' with the aim of extending the life of surfaces on minor roads. It is anticipated trials will be undertaken early in the next financial year.

#### *Future risks*

11. The main future risk relating to highway maintenance remains the pressure on budgets. The Council's Highway Asset Management Plan identifies a significant shortfall in this area, and pressures continue to mount. While a relatively resilient asset in many ways the cumulative effects of under-funding are likely to become increasingly evident, and work continues to establish how existing funding gaps might be bridged in the longer term.

### **Recommendations**

13. That the update report on highway maintenance is noted, and that further updates are provided in due course.