

From: Matthew Balfour, Cabinet Member – Environment and Transport
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To: **Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee – 21 July 2015**

Subject: Highway Drainage

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Past Pathway of Paper: N/A

Future Pathway of Paper: N/A

Electoral Division: Countywide

Summary:

To update Members on the response provided to reports of flooding and drainage issues on the highway.

Recommendation(s):

The Cabinet Committee is asked to note the report.

1. Introduction

1.1 The County Council is responsible for the maintenance of 5,400 miles of public highway including 250,000 road drains and associated drainage systems.

1.2 The primary objectives of the highway drainage system are:

- Removal of highway surface water (from the carriageway) to maintain road safety and minimise nuisance,
- Effective sub-surface drainage to prevent damage to the structural integrity of the highway and maximise its lifespan, and,
- Minimise the impact of highway surface water on the adjacent environment including properties

1.3 Highway flooding and drainage issues generate around 8,000 customer enquiries every year. The majority of drainage enquiries related to blocked drains, carriageway flooding and flooding to private property.

1.4 All drainage and flooding enquiries are prioritised on the basis of the following risks:

- Highway Safety
- Internal flooding of property
- Network disruption

1.5 Due to the varied nature of drainage issues dealt with by the County Council, the time taken to resolve a drainage enquiry varies from a few hours to several months. Over the last 12 months the average time to resolve a drainage enquiry was 47 days.

2. Financial Implications

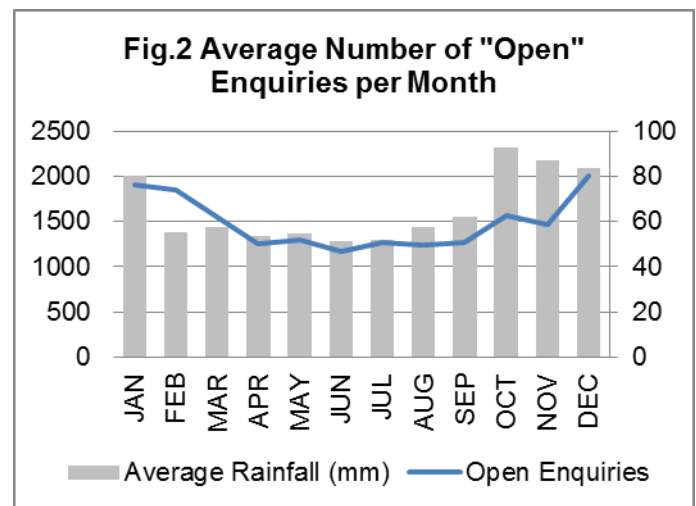
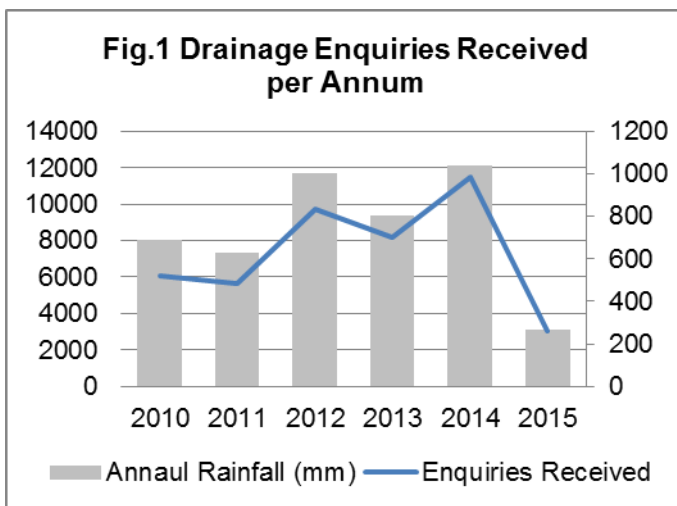
2.1 The allocated budget for highway drainage cleansing is £2,408,300 and is revenue funded. The allocated budget for repairs, renewals and improvements is £1,870,000 and is largely capital funded. The approach outlined in this report has been developed on the basis of the current budget allocation and feedback from stakeholders to ensure a balance between the needs of the asset and the demands of the County Council's customers.

3. Policy Framework

3.1 The approaches outlined in this report fulfil the principle of achieving value for money.

4. Report

4.1 Around 7.5% of the enquiries received by Highways Transportation and Waste each year relate to highway drainage and flooding. The volume of enquiries received is influenced by the weather with peaks in demand during the winter months. During the very wet weather experienced between 23 December 2013 and 1 March 2014, the County Council received over 3,500 highway drainage and flooding enquiries:



4.2 All enquiries are prioritised on the basis of the impact on highway safety, residents homes and the movement of traffic on the road network. If the enquiry provides insufficient detail to make a judgement, it is assigned to a Highway Steward to inspect and collect the necessary information.

4.3 Any event or defect on the highway which presents an immediate high risk and potential for harm to pedestrians/ road users or an immediate high risk of internal property flooding from highway surface water is responded to within 2 hours. Approximately 4% of drainage enquiries received each year are deemed to require a response within 2 hours.

- 4.4 5% of drainage enquiries received are about issues that are the responsibility of a third party; for example water leaks and sewerage problems. These enquiries are reported to the relevant authority, updated and closed.
- 4.5 45% of enquiries are resolved by routine maintenance such as cover repairs and cleansing. On main roads cleansing is done on a cyclic basis to maximise efficiency although some flexibility is retained to ensure that cleansing at higher risk sites can be brought forward. On minor roads cleansing is carried out on a targeted basis and is usually completed within 28 days.
- 4.6 40% of enquiries received are complex issues and require a more involved response by a Drainage Engineer. This response may include surveys, CCTV investigations and the delivery of renewals or improvements.
- 4.7 Much of the County's drainage infrastructure was installed when the roads were originally constructed, some of which date back to late 1800s/early1900s. Over the years, settlement of the soil, ingress of tree roots and road works by third parties (largely utilities) have caused widespread damage and years of underinvestment have exacerbated this problem.
- 4.8 In recent years prolonged and heavy rainfall events appear to have become a more frequent occurrence. Development and changes in land use have resulted in increased volumes of surface water being discharged into the drainage system which is designed to cope with moderate to heavy rainfall. In many places the sewers are now running at capacity.
- 4.9 The 2015/16 capital allocation for highway drainage renewals and improvements is £1.65m. All works are prioritised on the basis of safety, internal property flooding and network disruption during moderate to heavy rainfall.
- 4.10 Water being discharged from adjacent land onto the road is also becoming an increasingly common cause of highway flooding. A more stringent enforcement process utilising our Highways Act powers has been developed however to date, the vast majority of cases have been resolved via constructive discussion with the land owner.
- 4.11 Customer satisfaction is monitored in a number of ways on a weekly, monthly and annual basis.
- Enquiry volumes, complaints and compliments are monitored on a weekly basis by the Drainage & Flooding Manager. So far in 2015, there has been an average of 139 enquiries per week. Less than 1% of these enquiries were complaints about the service.
 - Performance metrics including a customer satisfaction survey are reported to the Interim Director of Highways, Transportation and Waste on a monthly basis. Every month 10-15 customers are selected at random and asked whether or not they were satisfied with the service they received. In 2015, 94% of customers surveyed about the Drainage & Flooding service said that they were satisfied with the service they received.

- Finally, an annual Tracker Survey is undertaken to measure Member, Parish Council and resident satisfaction. In 2014, 71% of residents said that they were either satisfied or very satisfied that the road drains are kept clean and working in their local area.

4.12 Customer feedback is regularly reviewed and used to inform the way we deliver our services. The 2014 Tracker Survey indicated that blocked drains were continuing to be a hot topic for Members and Parish Councils, particularly in rural areas. In response changes were made to the way we deliver drainage cleansing and we now publish information about the regime on a monthly basis. Similarly, at the 2014 Parish Seminars, Parish Councils raised a number of questions about highway drainage. In response a short guide to highway drainage was collated and distributed to Members and Parish Councils. A copy of the guide can be found at Appendix A.

5. Conclusion

5.1 The County Council receives a diverse range of enquiries about drainage and flooding every year. Each enquiry is prioritised on the basis of the risk to highway users, residents and businesses in Kent to ensure that the available resources are utilised in the most efficient and effective way. Performance is regularly monitored and customer satisfaction is good however feedback is taken on board and used to shape the service we deliver.

6. Recommendations

Recommendation(s):

The Cabinet Committee is asked to note the report.

7. Background Documents

None.

8. Appendices

Appendix A – Highway Drainage & Flooding; A short guide for Parish Councils

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