

## **Scrutiny Committee**

**4 July 2024**

### **The State of Suffolk's Roads**

#### **Summary**

1. The County Council, as highway authority for Suffolk, has a responsibility to ensure that the local highway infrastructure maintained by Suffolk Highways is safe, accessible and well maintained. The Council uses both capital and revenue funding for highway maintenance activities.
2. The information provided to the Committee sets out the level of investment made into maintaining Suffolk's highway infrastructure and then focuses on road investment, the overall condition of Suffolk's Roads and how roads are selected for resurfacing treatments.

#### **Objective of Scrutiny**

3. To enable the Committee to understand what funding is available for highway maintenance activities, what proportion of this is available for investment into Suffolk's roads, and the resultant overall condition of Suffolk's roads. Members will also have the opportunity to consider how sections of road are prioritised for a resurfacing treatment.

#### **Scrutiny Focus**

4. The scope of this scrutiny has been developed to provide the Committee with information to come to a view on the following key questions:
  - a) What funding is available to the Council to maintain the highway network and where does it come from?
  - b) What is capital and revenue expenditure and how is it spent?
  - c) What highway assets do Suffolk Highways Maintain?
  - d) How much on average does Suffolk Highway spend, and what is it spent on?
  - e) What level of investment is required to keep Suffolk's Road in optimal condition?
  - f) What is the condition of Suffolk's roads?
  - g) How does Suffolk Highways prioritise and select roads for a resurfacing treatment.

## How does this relate to County Council objectives?

5. This scrutiny is linked to the County Council's corporate objectives as indicated below.

Suffolk County Council's Corporate Objectives	Link to this Scrutiny
Promoting and supporting the health and wellbeing of all people in Suffolk	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Strengthening our local economy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Protecting and enhancing our environment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Providing value for money for the Suffolk taxpayer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

## How will this impact on the Council's objectives?

6. Suffolk has a population of around 761,000 people who rely on the highway network on a daily basis to travel to and from work, for social or leisure purposes or to access essential services such as hospitals and schools.
7. The highway network also serves as a vital link for commercial vehicles travelling within the county, as well as to ports for other national and international destinations. A well maintained, functional highway network is fundamental to ensuring all sectors of Suffolk thrive.
8. This scrutiny will enable the Committee to consider actual investment levels into road maintenance activities and the extent to which the approach of Suffolk Highways, in using available data, supports sound decision making that has a positive impact on Suffolk's overall road condition.

## Outcomes of scrutiny

9. Having considered the information, the Committee may wish to:
- make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Ipswich, Operational Highways and Flooding;
  - identify opportunities for further scrutiny; or
  - agree how highways scrutiny will be taken forward in future years.

## Contact details

Katherine Bailey, Senior Democratic Services Officer;  
Email: Katherine.bailey@suffolk.gov.uk; Tel: 01473 260132

---

## Background

10. The County Council is responsible for ensuring that public highways in Suffolk (except for trunk roads) are safe and accessible. The Council uses both capital and revenue funding for maintenance activities. However, investments levels are less than required to maintain local highway infrastructure in a steady state in the long-term.
11. On 7 November 2023 Cabinet heard that wetter winters and prolonged and more frequent severe weather events were exposing the fragility of the road network and highlighting the need for increased investment to support the long-term sustainability of the road network in Suffolk.

12. Cabinet also heard that the focus of available road maintenance funding tended to be prioritised towards routes carrying higher volumes of traffic across the network and those roads located in rural areas, linking villages and towns together. This meant that roads located in residential areas and culs-de-sac saw lower levels of investment. It agreed that additional investment of £10m (initially to be provided by the Council but now funded from additional funding from the Department for Transport) would:
  - a) increase the amount of resurfacing undertaken to roads that required maintenance, which would ensure safe passage for all modes of transport across the network; and
  - b) improve the overall condition of treated sections of road, focusing on residential road where lower levels of investment are typically made.
13. This scrutiny will enable the Committee to consider actual investment levels into road maintenance activities and the extent to which the approach of Suffolk Highways, in using available data, supports sound decision making that has a positive impact on Suffolk's overall road condition.

## **Main body of evidence**

**Evidence Set 1**, which provides responses to the questions in paragraph 4, has been provided by John Clements, Assistant Director for Highways Services on behalf of the Executive Director of Growth, Highways and Infrastructure.

## **Supporting information**

Details on how the Council manages highway infrastructure asset management can be found in the [Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Policy](#), and further details on the management of each element of the highway can be found in the [Planned Capital Maintenance Programmes](#) document. Both these documents are available on the Council's website

The Department for Transport [Interactive Road Condition Map](#) can be found here: <https://dft.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=99f7407c62db4b3eb618f728c84b20b0>

Road condition statistics 2023: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/road-conditions-in-england-to-march-2023/road-conditions-in-england-to-march-2023>

Information on additional maintenance funding: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/asset-library/network-north-funding.pdf>

Information on the maintenance hierarchy <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/highway-maintenance/categories-of-roads>

Cabinet; Additional Investment – £10m Roads Investment; 7 November 2023: [https://committeeminutes.suffolk.gov.uk/DocSetPage.aspx?MeetingTitle=\(07-11-2023\),%20The%20Cabinet](https://committeeminutes.suffolk.gov.uk/DocSetPage.aspx?MeetingTitle=(07-11-2023),%20The%20Cabinet)

This page is deliberately blank