

## Planning, Transport, Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee

### **Update: Winter Maintenance / Routine Gully Cleansing**

#### **Purpose of the update:**

Councillor Smith proposed an update be brought to the Committee in November regarding the resilience and readiness of grit lorries ahead of the winter, and the build-up of silt in drains in the borough, which led to flooding

This note summarises the current position of the winter maintenance and gully cleaning programmes, the current issues, the risks and the processes that are in place to ensure efficient service delivery.

### **1. Introduction & Background**

Winter maintenance in Thurrock is undertaken by the Council's Environment Team between November and March inclusive. Weather monitoring is carried out by Transportation and Highways and extends a month either side of the above period to ensure advance warning can be given should unforeseen cold periods occur.

There are approximately 26,000 highway gullies in the borough. Cleansing is carried out by the Environment Team. The gully tanker is owned by the Environment team and is operated by a gang of 2 full time members of staff dedicated solely to operating the tanker.

### **2. Winter Maintenance and Gully Cleansing Regime and Resilience**

#### **Winter Maintenance**

In 2016/17 the Environment Team were called upon 40 times to grit the borough's Primary routes, with 35 runs being recorded in the previous year.

There are 5 Primary gritting routes which require 6 staff to operate. In case of very severe weather when a second run is required, a second team of 6 operational staff are called upon to complete the task. Each run takes approximately 4 hours to complete, including loading.

The risks associated with the above procedure is that the next working day can be affected by lack of staff resources should severe weather conditions require repeat runs over several nights. Alternative arrangements are being explored to ensure business continuity and that any impact on the daily service delivery from the Environment Team is kept to a minimum.

## **Gully Cleansing**

Usual procedures for gully cleaning entail operatives working through the borough tending to each and every gully. Routine maintenance involves lifting the grate, sucking out the dirty water and flushing with clean water and ensuring the outlets are free flowing by jetting all leads. Should the leads not be free flowing, a daily report is sent to Transportation and Highways for further investigation and / or repair as necessary.

There are a large number of gullies and leads that are visibly blocked with mud. Gullies in this condition would usually fall outside of the routine cleansing programme and would be scheduled for investigation and repair at a later date.

The current Policy states that every gully is cleaned on an annual basis. However with the number of gullies that currently require further investigation, it is not achievable to tend to every gully within one year with the current dedicated resource.

The number of blocked gullies in the borough has been a cause of concern due to recent heavy rains and the risk of flood. In order to address the concerns and reduce the risk of flooding, alternative arrangements have been made to replace the usual practice of flushing the already free flowing gullies.

Working collaboratively, as of September this year, a list of blocked gullies is regularly provided to the Environment Team by the Highway Inspectors and Engineers and these are attended to and dealt with in priority order. This means that although the number of gullies attended in a day is largely reduced, the end result is that the number of problem gullies will reduce over time and the risk of flooding reduces accordingly. This also helps address customer satisfaction as remedial works are clearly evident by residents and road users.

Should, for any unforeseen reason, the tanker be out of use for a week an alternative supplier has been sourced to enable continuous working in order to reduce the number of inactive days spent on gully cleaning.

For the longer term, a thorough review of the gully cleansing operation is currently underway. This involves reviewing the frequency of which gullies are cleaned. Areas of known flooding or where there is significant leaf fall are likely to have a more frequent cleansing regime than gullies that are rarely subject to blockages and problems. It is proposed that the new regimes are finalised and in operation by January 2018.

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