

**Brierley Hill Area Committee – 3rd February, 2011**

**Report Of The Director Of The Urban Environment**

**Management of Potholes and Highway Deterioration**

**Purpose of Report**

1. To update Area Committee in relation to the Council's progress in managing potholes and highway deterioration.
2. To outline the Council's resource capacity in the delivery of the service.

**Background**

3. The Council's Corporate Board received a report on 20<sup>th</sup> April 2010 highlighting concerns associated with an increasing number of recorded potholes and highway defects as a result of severe winter weather conditions experienced over the last two years.
4. Whilst the report was specific to Dudley, it recognised that highway deterioration and damage had been experienced across the Country as a result of the coldest winter for 30 years, with prolonged periods of freezing temperatures and high quantities of salt required to keep our roads accessible, both having a detrimental impact on the condition of our highway.
5. The report highlighted that the Council had identified an additional £200k for pothole patching works for 2010/11 in addition to receiving a one off Department for Transport Section 31 Grant of £252,200 to spend this financial year on repairing highway damage.
6. Furthermore, the report proposed the potential realignment of this year's highways budget, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Transport, to consider reduced footway repair works in order that additional works may be undertaken on the Borough's highway.
7. The following information has been prepared to inform Brierley Hill Area Committee of progress to date.

### Outstanding Potholes / Highway Defects

8. On the 25<sup>th</sup> February 2010, there was approximately 14,200 sqm of pothole work outstanding. This was an approximate figure as it is quite common for a 1sqm pothole to require a 1.5-2.0 sqm repair.
9. In order to target this works and as a result of Dudley Council's DfT allocated grant of £252,200 for highway repairs, a number of technical options were considered as to how best to spend the grant funding, with the option of conventional repairs being chosen as securing an early start and delivering optimum value for money.
10. During April to October, additional resources were subsequently sourced from the Councils highway term contractor, to support in house highways teams having been gradually ramped up to five repair gangs since mid April. Rather than have a patchwork quilt of small repairs, the policy has been to extend to larger patch repairs. This has ensured that the repairs last longer, as small repairs can more easily fail, if the surrounding carriageway surface is in a poor condition.
11. During this period each township had a dedicated pothole gang, under the daily control of the local highways inspector. An added benefit was that any dangerous potholes found by the highways inspector could be repaired quicker as resources were readily available.
12. Whilst the funding has provided for an intense targeting of repairs, it is not sustainable due to its one-off allocation. However, a further £200k revenue funding identified for highway repairs will continue to support potholes work now that the grant funding has been fully utilised. As a clear picture emerges, this will need to be considered against numbers of outstanding repairs and opportunities for proactive resurfacing.
13. As a result of the £252,200 grant funding, it is estimated that approximately 12,000 m<sup>2</sup> of repairs have been completed at a unit cost of circa £21 m<sup>2</sup>.
14. It has not yet been necessary to realign other highway budgets in support of greater numbers of pothole repairs. However, this will continued to be reviewed and remain an option subject to available budgetary provision and future outstanding numbers of repairs.

### Pothole / Highway Defects - Enquiries Received

15. Information detailed below shows a comparison of the number of pothole reports received since the start of the year compared to the same period in 2009.

<b>Month</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>Diff +/-</b>
January	137	296	+159
February	228	394	+166
March	208	458	+250
April	191	351	+160
May	144	192	+ 48
June	102	189	+ 87
July	128	124	- 4
August	104	65	- 39
September	72	88	+ 16
October	65	113	+ 48

16. During the early months of the reporting period, the information does show increased numbers of potholes recorded for each month compared to 2009 which is not surprising considering the severity of the winter. However, trends for 2010 generally show a reducing number of reported potholes from March onwards, with targeted repairs and increased levels of resource suggesting a positive impact.

### Insurance Claims

17. Claims Received by Highways -

<b>Month</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>Diff +/-</b>
January	20	35	+15
February	47	65	+18
March	45	84	+39
April	26	64	+38
May	29	79	+50
June	35	38	+ 3
July	27	29	+ 2
August	29	21	- 8
September	29	23	- 6
October	18	30	+12

18. Insurance claims received by the Council remained relatively high for the first five months of the period compared to previous years, with levels continuing to reflect the many hazards experienced during the winter of 2009/10. However, the number of claims levelled out during the latter part of the period, being comparable in number to those received in 2009.

19. It is important to note that numbers of claims are associated with the highway in general and reflect a range of different accidents including slips, trips and falls etc and are not solely associated with potholes or outstanding highway repairs. It is equally important to note that a claim can be submitted several months and indeed years after an alleged accident, so claims cannot always be associated with the month of notification. In any event, whilst the Council continues to have a high repudiation rate, numbers have expectedly increased over the recorded period.

### The Continuing Way Forward

20. The Council's Highways team continue to target outstanding repairs by a combination of in house and external contract support teams, providing a dedicated resource across the Borough.
21. Although Government funding has been utilised to support this works, a cautious approach is being taken in recognition of the current economic climate and government pressure to seek further savings.
22. A continuation of the existing arrangements will take place with revenue funding now that the DfT grant has been fully committed.
23. It is important to note that increased operational provision has been in place since the start of the financial year and further trends will need to be reviewed and analysed prior to consideration of realignment of budgets to further target pothole works.
24. In any event, the measures taken have had a positive impact for not only road users but pedestrians alike.

### Finance

25. The revenue budget for potholes for 2010/11 is £540,700. This is consistent with spend committed for pothole works for 2009/10.
26. In addition, a further £1,126,300 is committed for patching works, albeit this constitutes larger areas of patching but nonetheless can impact on potholes where a number are adjacent.
27. At the end of October 2010, the Council had spent £1.036m of its budget for pothole and patching works.
28. The full £252,200 DfT highways grant, was committed by October 2010 in accordance with DfT requirements.

### Law

29. The Council's budgetary process is governed by Local Government Finance Acts 1988 and 1992, the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and the Local Government Act 2003

30. Section III of the Local Government Act 1972 enables the Council to do anything that is calculated to facilitate or is conducive or incidental to the discharge of its functions.
31. The Council carries out its functions to provide, improve and maintain highways under Section 24, 41, and 62 of the Highways Act 1980 and exercises traffic regulatory powers under Section 1 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984.

The requirement for a Local Transport Plan is a requirement of The Transport Act 2000.

## Equality Impact

32. This report takes into account and acknowledges the Council's Policy in respect of Equality and Diversity in the delivery of the service and the ongoing maintenance of the Councils Highways and Footways.
33. The Councils Capital Programme includes specific provision to benefit pedestrians and other vulnerable users of the highway; assist social inclusion and mobility of the less able together with measures to improve access for persons in the borough.

## Recommendation

34. That Area Committee note the contents of this report and the work being undertaken by the Council's Highways Team in respect of progressing the repair of outstanding potholes and highway defects.

John Miller

**Director of the Urban Environment - John B. Millar**

Contact Officers: Matt Williams ext. 4500  
Garry Dean ext. 4506

Background documents used in the preparation of this report:-

Report to Corporate Board 28<sup>th</sup> April 2010.

Report to Corporate Board 29<sup>th</sup> June 2010

Budget Growth Proposals Document 2010/11.

Annual Highway Maintenance Programme.

Street Maintenance Budget Profile 2009/10 and 2010/11.

Street and Green Care Service Plan.

Transport Settlement, Proposed Transport Capital Programme for 2007/8 and Road Safety Grant (Meeting of the Council 26<sup>th</sup> February 2007).

Letter from the Department for Transport dated 25<sup>th</sup> March 2010 detailing additional grant funding.