

SCRUTINY REVIEW PANEL - STOCKPORT'S COMMUNAL CORRIDORS: SECURING THE SAFETY, CLEANLINESS AND BIODIVERSITY

Meeting: 5 December 2023
At: 6.00 pm

PRESENT

Councillor Matt Wynne (Chair) in the chair; Councillors Hibbert, Tom Morrison and Rachel Wise.

1. MINUTES

The Minute (copies of which had been circulated) of the meeting held on 5 October 2023 were approved as a correct record.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors and officers were invited to declare any interests which they had in any of the items on the agenda for the meeting.

No declarations of interest were made.

3. STREET CLEANSING, DRAINAGE, GULLIES AND GRIDS

The Director of Place Management submitted reports (copies of which had been circulated) which set out the council's activities related to street cleansing, drainage, gullies and grids.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:-

- It was reported that in previous years the gully emptying service had reached a point when it had been purely responsive which meant that a number of gullies were never cleared.
- A three-year programme had been developed and implemented to visit every gully in the borough. The programme was part-way through its second year and some gullies had yet to be visited. Approximately 50 to 60 gullies were visited per day and data was obtained from each on how much silt was collected. This data would enable the service to implement a prioritised approach in the future by determining which gullies would require cleaning more frequently.
- The three-year programme was designed to run two consecutive processes, those being ongoing maintenance and repair of gullies.
- The three-year programme approached gully cleansing by splitting each ward in the borough into three sections. In designing the programme, roads were packaged in areas where it was possible to get the most effective use of the gully cleansing vehicles. The first two years of the programme had focussed predominantly on main routes and had included six-monthly and annual visits to certain areas with flooding issues.
- It was reported that the effects of climate change, in particular more episodes of heavy rain, had resulted in more frequent episodes of ponding. The gullies were not faulty but

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were a Victorian system which was not designed to cope with modern levels of rain. Double gullies had been installed in particularly problematic areas.

- The gully vehicles contained trackers which recorded which gullies had been visited, the levels of silt collected, which gullies were defective and those which were inaccessible.
- In terms of risk assessment, the Council had data on particular trouble-spots where there were ongoing issues and frequent reports of flooding.
- An online form was available for residents to report flooding and there was a balance to be struck, in terms of dealing with residents' concerns and diverting resources from the three-year proactive programme.
- In terms of the data on gully cleansing, it was difficult to provide numbers in terms of visits to gullies by ward because of access issues. The service was able to report that approximately 92 per cent of gullies had been cleaned in the borough.
- Regarding the priority in terms of repairing faulty gullies, many factors were taken into account including the likelihood of flooding and the road use.
- There were 72,000 gullies in the borough and more were added whenever new housing was built.
- It would be possible to provide members with a full set of data on grids, cleansing frequency and repairs at the conclusion of the three-year cleansing programme. In terms of ward-based data in particular, the provision of more granular data at this stage, part way through the programme might give a skewed reflection on the activity of the service.
- It was reported that ad hoc work related to gullies was carried out by a specialist provider, particularly during flood events. Members would be provided with statistics on the use of specialist operators.
- During lockdown, the drivers of the gully cleansing vehicles had been redeployed to bin collection services which had caused a delay to the programme.
- It was predicted that, having visited most gullies within the borough, next year (2024) should represent a second visit for most gullies. It would be easier to clean those gullies, as they would have less build up of silt which would, therefore, be quicker to clean and the numbers cleansed would be increase.
- It was anticipated that the three-year cycle for the gully cleansing programme would be completed in April 2025 and at that point the operational plan would be reviewed and risks modelled.
- Members commented that residents' perception of gully cleansing was that the work was not being done. It was felt that Council communications on gully cleansing could be improved. It was suggested that the Council's website included details of which gullies had been cleaned, as well as those which were planned to be cleaned.
- In terms of the resources for gully cleansing, the borough had two vehicles operated by the Totally Local Company. Additional specialist resources could be brought in from external contractors as and when required. The two vehicles operated by TLC were supported by a team of seven inspectors whose role was to check highway damage, one specialist inspector, a team leader and a head of section.
- The seven inspectors had responsibility for inspecting highway safety and arranging reactive repairs. Their role was conducted using a risk-based approach.
- In terms of flooding or ponding which might affect residents there were a number of ways in which these issues were identified, including Council inspectors, residents directly raising concerns or ward members bring issues to the attention of council officers.

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- Street cleansing inspections took place on a weekly basis and random streets were chosen for inspection. The aim was to ensure that streets were maintained at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) grade of 'B' (predominantly free of litter or refuse) or above.
- The service operated a leaf clearance programme. Most areas were cleared once but areas with heavy leaf fall were attended again. The leaf clearance programme did not correlate with gully cleansing,
- Members requested information on how the service prioritised online reports of ponding and flooding, particularly where there were health and safety concerns.
- In terms of technological advances, it was reported that each individual asset within the borough had been mapped, with maintenance records linked to each asset. Furthermore, the online reporting forms ensure that the issue raised was directed to the relevant officer.
- The issue of cars being parked over grids which were scheduled to be cleaned was dealt with by leafletting. Officers offered to conduct ward briefings to inform councillors when gully cleansing was scheduled to take place in their area.
- The reorganisation of TLC services was expected to have some impact on the delivery of street cleaning services, although it was not expected to be significant.
- In the long term, there was likely to be changes to the frequency of flooding along with changes to the weather in general which affected the way in which water moved around. The gully network was more than 100 years old and was not built for current weather conditions. The borough's sewage and drainage systems were also outdated. Consideration was being given to sustainable urban drainage. In addition, the Council was urging developers to consider how water would drain from driveways and gardens.

In summary, this was a complex area of service delivery and one which was a priority for residents. It was important that the information shared at this meeting was disseminated to all members of the Council, in particular information related to the three-year gully cleansing programme.

Members requested that improvements be made to the Council's website to better communicate the progress of the gully-cleansing programme to Stockport's residents. Further clarity on data provision and requirements for additional information on this area of service delivery would be considered and agreed at a future meeting of this Scrutiny Review Panel.

RESOLVED – (1) That the reports be noted.

(2) That the Scrutiny Review Panel be provided with the following information:-

- The capital drainage programme.
- The number of reactive gully reports via the Council's on-line form and the percentage of roads in each gully cleaning category (six- monthly, annual, biennially and triennially) by percentage road length and percentage of gullies.
- The amount spent on routine gully cleaning, ad-hoc work and capital planned work.

(3) That it be requested that more information be added to the council's website to advise residents on the cyclical gully cleansing programme to include what gullies had been cleansed and the rationale behind the operational approach.

The meeting closed at 8.26 pm