



# Title of report: Gully Cleansing

**Meeting: Connected Communities Scrutiny Committee**

**Meeting date: Tuesday 8 July 2025**

**Report by: Head of Highways and Traffic**

## **Classification**

Open

## **Decision type**

This is not an executive decision

## **Wards affected**

(All Wards);

## **Purpose**

To provide an overview of the management and operation of gully cleansing, endorsing or otherwise the current arrangements and providing recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Roads and Regulatory Services.

## **Recommendation(s)**

**That:**

- a) **Scrutiny committee notes the current gully cleansing arrangements in place for the county and provides its views on the proposed operational changes planned as a result of the introduction of the new Public Realm Contract on 1 June 2026.**

## **Alternative options**

1. That gully cleansing continues to be managed and operated as per the current arrangements.

## Key considerations

### Current Gully Cleansing Arrangements

#### Background

2. As the Local Highway Authority, the Council has a duty to maintain the highway drainage network to the point where water is discharged to either a public sewer, or an inland water body.
3. Gullies play an important part in keeping the highway clear of water, particularly in urban areas or on the strategic road network. Assets are currently cleansed and managed on our road network as part of the Council's Public Realm Contract with Balfour Beatty Living Places.
4. In periods of intense rainfall, gullies can sometimes become overwhelmed by the volume of water. The volume of water in a system can mean that a gully is unable to discharge into a sewer or pipe, giving the appearance that the drain is blocked. If a gully is overwhelmed, the water will quickly dissipate once heavy rain has passed. However, if water does not drain away quickly after a spell of heavy rain, the gully may have become blocked due to mud, silt, leaves etc, which prevents the water from being able to drain away through the outlet.

#### Asset and Data Collection

5. There are over 27,860 gullies across the county. Whilst it is acknowledged that not every gully will have been captured on the network to date, known assets and key attributes are captured and recorded in Balfour Beatty's asset management system, Confirm, either through handheld devices used by operatives in the field, or through back office staff. In 2024/25, Parish/Town Councils added to the Council's knowledge and understanding of drainage assets through a survey of the network as part of the drainage grant funding scheme.
6. A basic map of known gullies for which Herefordshire Council are responsible is available for public viewing at <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/flooding-2/flood-management/3#gulliesmap>. Gullies are individually marked on the map with latitudes and longitudes being displayed along with a site code, which is used to identify the length of road where the asset is located.

#### Reporting of Issues

7. Customers are able to report issues with the highway drainage network through the Council's online reporting system at <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/roads-1/report-problems-road>. Issues that are reported are investigated by the relevant Locality Steward, who assesses the report against the Highway Maintenance Plan in order to determine the level of intervention required. Where necessary a job for a reactive cleanse is then raised and passed to a crew to attend.

#### Cleansing and Risk Management

8. Gullies are cleansed on both a reactive and programmed basis across the county using Balfour Beatty employed staff and additional sub-contracted resources.
9. Reactive cleanses are typically as a result of a report of a gully becoming blocked due to mud, silt, leaves etc. Where this happens, crews will undertake clearance works of the gully pot itself and jet the connecting pipes using high pressure water jetting so that the drainage system can adequately function again. In an average year, it is estimated that 340 tonnes of silt and other detritus will be cleared from highways drainage assets.

10. Programmed cleanses are undertaken according to a cleansing schedule. Over recent years, the programme has only operated on the A and B road network, but for 2025/26 the C road network will be included. Details of the gully cleansing schedule can be found at <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/roads-1/gully-drain-cleaning>

## **Future Gully Cleansing Arrangements**

### **Asset and Data Collection**

11. As set out previously in this report, it is acknowledged that not every gully will have been captured on the network to date. This will have been for a variety of reasons, ranging from previous and current cleansing programmes to the rural nature of the county, which means that assets can become lost over time, due to factors such as vegetation growth.
12. As part of the new Public Realm Contract that will commence on 1 June 2026, a number of roles relating to the inspection and management of the highway drainage asset will transfer to the Council. Whilst responsibility for the frontline cleansing of assets will remain with the new contractor, the Council will become responsible for asset management, including of gullies. Building on work undertaken by Parish/Town Councils in 2024/25 to assist with a survey of the drainage network, drainage engineers and technicians, assisted by Locality Stewards undertaking highway inspections, will be tasked with comprehensively adding to the asset database.
13. To assist with this task and through the procurement process associated with the new Public Realm Contract, the Council has requested that a dedicated gully management system be introduced to enable better data capture and management of the highway drainage asset. Experience gained by other authorities points to this increasing productivity and efficiency, and resolving issues swiftly.
14. Through the dedicated gully management system, gullies and associated pipework, along with other drainage assets, can be accurately mapped and supporting attributes recorded. Operatives in the field can view information via handheld technology, adding new and updating existing assets where necessary, which can be viewed immediately by office based staff on upload. Such systems also allow for the importing of wider drainage network data, such as Severn Trent Water or Welsh Water sewer networks, that then allow for a truly comprehensive understanding of the entire drainage system at the touch of a button.

### **Reporting of Issues**

15. As part of work to introduce the new Public Realm Contract that will commence on 1 June 2026, a review of the end to end customer journey of processes within the highways team, including gully emptying, will be undertaken.
16. It is considered that significant improvement can be provided to customers through the introduction of a dedicated gully management system, which will enable a customer to:
  - Identify an individual asset using a map based approach
  - View details of the date and time of the last inspection
  - View details of the programmed cleansing frequency
  - Understand the condition of the asset upon arrival and on leaving from the last visit
  - Have the ability to report a problem, including the inclusion of free text information and the uploading of a photograph, that will then be recorded against the individual asset, forming a report log.

### Cleansing and Risk Management

17. There will always be a requirement for gullies to be cleansed on both a reactive and programmed basis across the county, but the challenge is in achieving an appropriate balance between the two categories to ensure resources are used effectively.
18. Requests for reactive cleanses under the new Public Realm Contract will be responded to in accordance with the Council's Highway Maintenance Plan, which assigns a risk factor and as a result a response time for corrective action to take place. Whilst this risk based approach will need to continue, Officers intend to revise the Highway Maintenance Plan ahead of June 2026, which will include reviewing arrangements associated with reactive gully emptying to ensure they are fit for purpose and provide value for money.
19. As gully emptying is a revenue funded activity, there has been increasing financial pressure on the service over recent years. It is therefore important that the service operates efficiently at all times, in order to maximise value for money. On a per unit basis, completing a higher volume of programmed cleanses delivers greater value for money than, and reduces the need for reactive cleanses.
20. Whilst completing higher volumes of programmed cleanses is more efficient than undertaking reactive cleanses, there has been a greater shift over recent years by Councils across the country to operating more intelligent, risk based programmes. Whilst more traditional 'one size fits all' approaches may have previously been undertaken and which would have seen programmed cleanses of all assets on a regular basis, increased knowledge and understanding of individual assets made possible through enhanced data capture via dedicated gully management systems has allowed officers to build programmes on a risk based approach.
21. Operating a risk based approach to a gully cleansing programme allows resources to be directed to areas where need is greater, such as where data has shown there to be a higher likelihood of a gully being blocked and non-operational, or where there is a higher risk from surface water flooding. Gully management systems allow this approach to be dynamically adjusted at any time so that programmes of work can be built quickly and efficiently, moving away from manual, time consuming and potentially subjective decision making processes. As part of work to introduce the new Public Realm Contract it is intended that this approach begin from 1 June 2026.

### **Community impact**

22. Over the course of the year, the gully cleansing service aims to:
  - keep road users safe through effectively managing the risk to the travelling public from the hazardous effects of water on highway surfaces.
  - keep the county moving; maintaining accessibility to services through the availability and reliability of the highway network during the winter period.
  - to coordinate our actions in regard to the highway with those that the council undertakes to, so far as reasonably practicable keep both the public and its employees safe as they move around those external spaces for which the council is directly responsible.

## Environmental Impact

23. The delivery of this service seeks to minimise any adverse environmental impact and will actively seek opportunities to improve and enhance environmental performance.

## Equality duty

24. The Public Sector Equality Duty requires the Council to consider how it can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that it is paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services.
25. A full Equality Impact Assessment is not required as a direct result of this report.

## Resource implications

26. Gully cleansing is undertaken through the Public Realm Contract and funded from the revenue base budget.
27. Total revenue costs including labour, vehicles and waste disposal, relating to reactive and programmed gully cleansing between 2022/23 and 2025/26 are set out in Table 1 below.

Revenue	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	Total
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Gully Cart (Reactive)	185	178	209	361	933
Gully Cart (Programmed)	266	229	198	298	991
TOTAL	451	407	407	659	1,924

Table 1: Gully Cleansing Revenue Costs 2022/23 – 2025/26

## Legal implications

28. The Council as the Local Highway Authority are responsible for the management and maintenance of highway drainage, under the Highways Act 1980. The Council has a duty, under the Highways Act 1980, to install and maintain drainage systems to keep the highways clear of water.
29. Under the Highways Act 1980 and the Flood and Water Management Act 2010, the Local Highway Authority must maintain and repair the highway drains that run beneath the road surface and where possible, keep the highway free from flooding.
30. Highway drainage is usually the responsibility of the Local Highway Authority but drainage may be adopted by another relevant authority such as a private developer or a 'sewerage undertaker' such as Severn Trent Water or Welsh Water.

## Risk management

31. There are no direct risk implications as a result of this report, the purpose of which is to seek the views of the Connected Communities Scrutiny Committee regarding gully cleansing.

32. Any recommendations made by Scrutiny Committee will be subject to a Cabinet Member decision that will set out the full risks and opportunities to the council.

### **Consultees**

33. There are no direct risk implications as a result of this report, the purpose of which is to seek the views of the Connected Communities Scrutiny Committee regarding gully cleansing.
34. Any recommendations made by Scrutiny Committee will be subject to a Cabinet Member decision that will set out the full risks and opportunities to the Council.

### **Appendices**

None.

### **Background papers**

None.

**Report Reviewers Used for appraising this report:**

Governance	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date Click or tap to enter a date.
Finance	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date Click or tap to enter a date.
Legal	Sean O'Connor	Date 30/06/2025
Communications	luenne featherstone	Date 30/06/2025
Equality Duty	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date Click or tap to enter a date.
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**Please include a glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.**