

COUNCIL
18 FEBRUARY 2021**REPORTS OF CABINET MEMBERS WITH RESPONSIBILITY –
CABINET MEMBER WITH RESPONSIBILITY FOR HIGHWAYS**

Introduction

1. This time last year, we started with some of the worst flooding in decades and barely had we cleared that up than we went into a lockdown, something the country had never seen before. Now, at the same time this year, we started with some of the worst flooding in decades – exceptionally with snow and ice at the same time – and we're in another lockdown. Whilst it seems everything and everybody are determined to throw everything possible at us, we have shown that our services can more than rise to and meet these challenges. I want to start by expressing my sincere thanks to all our staff and Ringway for the truly excellent commitment, dedication, and hard work they have all given unstintingly to the people of Worcestershire, both last year and I have no doubt for the year ahead too. These are people always under great pressure, mostly on the front line, out literally in all weather, keeping our network open despite what every day throws at them. In spite of everything, in the last year, services kept going and the default position then and now is that we carry on working, subject only of course to all the Covid regulations. Whilst it would be too time-consuming to name all those staff I would like to, I cannot let this moment pass without putting on record my sincere thanks in particular to Paul Smith and Rachael Benson for their tireless commitment and extraordinary ability to put up with me.

2. My job is to keep the highways network safe and open for the movement of people and goods, for all forms of travel. An efficient network is an absolutely central prerequisite to maintaining economic growth, providing jobs and prosperity, and enabling our residents to enjoy active and fulfilling lives. We need both to maintain our roads and footways in tip top condition and continue to invest in more infrastructure for the future. In other words, looking after what we've got and building more capacity as the economy and population expand with ever-higher demands and expectations. That means more roads as well as using existing space more efficiently, including measures such as higher-tech traffic lights and congestion-busting schemes to get more traffic through the system more efficiently whilst at the same time reducing the pollution caused by stationary or static vehicles. This is why our pledge to maintain the condition of our roads and pavements in the top quartile (25%) by 2022 is so important. I'm pleased to say that we are currently on the verge of meeting that tough target.

3. We are a listening Council and we act on what people say to us. Our annual Viewpoint Surveys and all other feedback continue to make it abundantly clear that highways issues are what concern our residents far and away more than anything else and, in particular, it is congestion and the state of our roads and footways. We have put tackling congestion at the top of our list of priorities along with maintaining and improving the infrastructure.

4. In a normal year, we spend about £1.8m on footways, but this year it has been over three times that at £5.6m, due to rise to four times that next year at £7.2m. Normally, we have 4 gangs doing pavements, but this year it is now 12. In short, on pavements, we're spending an extra £4m. this year, and an extra £4m. next year.

5. In a normal year, we spend about £12m on roads but this year it will be upwards of £20m and next year nearly another £20m. Normally, we have three pavers – the massive machines that build new road surfaces - but this year it is four. In short, on roads, we're spending an extra £6m this year, and an extra £6m next year.

6. But the associated infrastructure is just as important. On Street Lighting, we have a very ambitious programme of replacing the concrete columns (categories 4 and 5) and converting to the more efficient LED bulbs which saves us a lot of money on our energy bills. This year, we spent an extra £1m on this programme but in the coming year we're spending an extra £2.5m on it. Similarly, with highway drainage, which includes looking after our 104,000 gullies, we spent an extra £1m this year, which will rise to an extra £2.5m in the coming year, reflecting the identified need.

7. On congestion, as detailed later in the report, and all very much welcomed by local residents and businesses, we have a very ambitious scheme of works across the County to tackle traffic pinch points and hotspots. We monitor traffic flows on a daily basis and it is worth pointing out that just before the latest round of Covid lockdowns, traffic levels in the County quickly and amazingly got back to some 98% of pre-Covid levels, so the demand is there and will return to even higher pre-Covid levels which, being a prudent authority, we must plan for.

8. And, of course, we cannot and should not forget Bus Travel, being the main and clear alternative to the car, as discussed later in the Report. I never forget how vital bus services are to so many people for so many reasons. The fact that bus passenger numbers reached an impressive 48% of pre-Covid levels just before the latest lockdown, confirms how important these services are. We have worked relentlessly to support our local bus companies so they can get back to normal as soon as this evil virus is defeated.

9. As we look after our assets and draw up asset-based improvement and repair programmes, with highways there are always thousands of little schemes that matter a great deal to groups of residents but which may never get into any programme of works, so I am delighted that we will be continuing for a third year with the Members Capital Highways Fund. This has so far provided each Member with £43,000 to spend on schemes of their choosing in their Divisions, and we are making some £22,000 available for a further year giving Members the discretion as to how to spend this money.

10. We continue to provide more funding and expand our provision for walking and cycling, as detailed later in the Report. I would like to highlight one of our many initiatives, an especially exciting one that will put us in the vanguard, and this is our current work and plans for walking and Public Rights of Way in particular. Walking is all too often a form of travel that is taken for granted, but it is the most popular and most used form of travel. Therefore, in addition to our record levels of investment in pavements and footways, we are doubling our spending on PROWs, which is referred to later in the Report.

11. Instead of making idle or unrealistic promises, we have kept our commitments to maintaining our roads and pavements in tiptop condition, which are certainly the best in the region and beyond, as well as investing in more infrastructure and expanding capacity for the future with an additional £30m of capital going into the network. We are addressing both current and future needs, reflecting the priorities of residents and businesses, and in their ambitiousness our strategy and operational plans are backed up by a clearly focussed political commitment and the resources to realise them. We never rest, even in the good times, and as the Report shows, we continue to review our policies and practices, for example, most recently, on Grit Bins, VAS, and explore the increasing use of technology both to send and receive information and report faults, such as gullies. Given the daily vicissitudes of running a Highways Department, it would be foolish ever to be complacent or contented, so I will limit myself to pointing out that since I don't recall receiving a single complaint about pot-holes in the last six months, I think we must be going in the right direction.

Communications with Members and the General Public

12. Good communication has never been so essential and we have all quickly adjusted to new ways of working and embraced new technology. Teams and Zoom meetings are now a regular occurrence. Members are being encouraged to meet with their Liaison Engineers via Teams on a weekly basis, although we are about to review current arrangements, to ensure that we maintain this vital contact and that there is clear focus and progress on all issues.

13. We have just completed another round of our Highways & Transport Briefing Sessions/ Seminars with Members and officers. The sessions were useful and informative and Members raised a number of local issues, both of a strategic and operational nature. Where Members wanted to learn more about a particular service area, a further dedicated session was arranged, for example Streetworks. It is my aim to ensure that Members are fully briefed.

14. Our usual Winter Newsletter was sent to Parish Councils back in August and to our schools in September. This offered advice and guidance. Newsletters are sent throughout the year to help Members respond to enquiries. Officers are currently working on the revised Councillor Handbook. This was first produced in 2017 and officers are looking at their data to capture questions that Members have raised previously so that we can produce a comprehensive 'Frequently Asked Questions' document to help Members address constituents' enquiries.

15. Over the Christmas/New period, we saw flooding, high winds and then snow/icy conditions. Members were kept fully informed through regular updates and, as usual, there was an effective joined-up response to these events.

16. We have seen a slight shift in customers telephoning the Highways & Transport Control Centre, rather than raising an online enquiry. We are confident this is only a temporary situation whilst more people are at home. Work continues on re-engineering the customer interface to ensure that it is the best it can be. However, we will ensure that our customers can choose how they wish to contact us. The Control Centre staff are on hand to help with all enquiries and to direct them to the appropriate place. We continue to strive for business improvement in this area and are about to embark on another audit of our Public Enquiry system (PEMs).

17. The cohort of Liaison Engineers remains at six officers, one for each District. We have seen some temporary changes in the Liaison Engineer area, but the team have responded extremely well to ensure that service continues in this key role.

Pavement Maintenance

18. Worcestershire County Council is investing an additional £8m in footways maintenance over this and next year.

19. With this investment, including the annual Core budget and contributions from the Members Highways Capital Fund, 215 footway schemes will have been completed this year alone equating to more than 70 kilometres of new/improved pavements. Next year, the planned figure is even greater with more than 250 footway schemes being completed equating to 85 kilometres new/improved pavement.

20. The table below shows the additional footways spend information for the four year period.

2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
£1.490m	£2.724m	£1.7m	£4.086m	£4m
Total £14m				

Highway Maintenance

21. We have continued to invest more funds in our highways network with another £12m going into improving roads across the County, which is on top of the previous £12m 'Driving Home' programme and alongside the additional funds from the Department for Transport of some £10m per annum.

22. Yet again this winter, we have already had a wide variety of severe weather with flooding, storms and snow, all occurring over the period of December and into the Christmas break and I would like to pass my thanks onto all our highways staff and our contractor Ringway for their relentless drive to meet these challenges in the difficult times we are currently managing.

23. Our residents continue to tell us that roads are a very high priority and so we are continuing to invest in our highways network to ensure we have some of the best roads in the country.

24. In 2020/21 we will be spending over £20m on carriageway works. This again includes the full amount of DfT Incentive Fund following our demonstration of compliance at the highest level (Level 3) in that process.

25. We will have completed 350 road schemes this year, equating to over 200 kilometres of road; and next year, we are planning to do another 350 road schemes adding another 200 kilometres in length.

26. The table below shows the additional spend information on roads over the last 5 years).

2017/18	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
£9.089m	£3.551m	£1.912m	£7.088	£6m	£6m
Total £33.64m					

Potholes

27. This year, we have repaired:

Potholes	9848 (70% as Type 1)
Footway potholes/defects	5883 (70% as Type 1)
Defective manhole covers & gulley lids	374
Kerbing defects	835

N.B. Type 1 are permanent repairs and Type 2 temporary repairs.

28. Each defect is given a defect rating and a probability rating, which together provide a risk factor and corresponding response time. This ensures that defects with the greatest likelihood of an event occurring and with the greatest consequence are treated as a priority.

Response time categories for defects identified are:

- Make safe or repair within one hour;
- make safe or repair within 24 hours;
- repair within 7 working days;
- repair within 4 weeks (28 working days).

Where defects with potentially serious consequences for network safety are made safe by means of temporary signing or repair, a special inspection regime is in place until a permanent repair can be made.

Verges, Hedges, Grass Cutting

29. As the Highway Authority for Worcestershire, we are responsible for the highway network within the county except for the A46 Trunk Road and any Motorways which are the responsibility of Highways England. The remaining network makes up over 4000km, of which most rural sections will have verge on each side. There are three distinct cutting requirements: Rural, Dual Carriageway and Urban.

30. Rural: The rural grass cutting is managed by the County Council and delivered by our service contractor Ringway. There are normally two safety cuts during the growing season, the first being in May and the second September, though these dates are fluid and will change with the seasonal growth rates.

31. Dual Carriageway: Managed by the County Council and delivered by Ringway, there are two cuts to the dual carriageway network, generally following the same dates as the Rural cuts. Each cut will take between 4 to 6 weeks and will require traffic management to close lanes. The District Councils are invited onto our closures to safely carry out litter picking, thus reducing interruption to the highway network and maximising value for money.

32. Urban: The six District Councils carry out urban grass cutting, usually a minimum of five cuts per season for amenity and landscaping purposes, for which the County Council provides a budget. Many parishes manage the seasonal growth of highways within a 30mph (or less) zone.

33. Hedges are the responsibility of the adjoining land owner and therefore, in the majority of cases, hedges are not the responsibility of the County Council Highways Department. However, there are approximately 41 km of hedges that the County Council do cut. This will take place during the winter months.

34. Within the highway verge network there are 38 protected Roadside Verge Nature Reserves (RVNR) located around the County, which are maintained by the County Council's Countryside Service. These sites have been set up to protect the bio-diversity (wild flowers and animals) that live and grow within the highway verges.

Surface Dressing

35. Our surface dressing programme starts in April. Over 180 sites will be treated at a programme cost of around £3.6m.

36. In the surface dressing process, hot bitumen is sprayed onto the road surface using a calibrated tanker. In many cases, structural patching of the road will have taken place months beforehand. Chippings are then applied onto the bitumen from a metered spreader. The new surface is rolled and then swept to remove loose chippings after 24 hours, again after 48 hours, and again after seven days.

37. Surface dressing improves the skid resistance of the road surface. It seals the road surface against water ingress, preventing potholes forming. It is an extremely effective method of extending the life of the road.

38. Liaison Engineers will share the surface dressing programme with Members prior to the start of works. Of course, the process is weather dependent so the programme will be amended as the year progresses.

Winter Service

39. We have invested in a modern Winter Service fleet, vital to ensuring Worcestershire's key roads are treated to keep residents and businesses moving. There are 34 gritters in the fleet, including three brand new ones, which are strategically allocated to depots around the County. Colleagues will know that I am a leading advocate for embracing new technology, and Gritters are no exception. The Gritters we have today have the capability to provide GPS tracking (location details) and to send information on road surface temperatures allowing the Service to collate data. For

example, we can adjust the discharge rate for salt to ensure we operate efficiently in small areas that may otherwise be problematic.

40. The formal 'Winter Service' period is from mid-October through to mid-April. Last year, we did not see the snow events like we did in 2018-19 and they returned to a more typical position. The table below shows the headline information for the 2019/2020 period.

41. At the start of the Winter Service Period we had just over 16,000 tonnes of salt in stock, to include our strategic reserve which was renewed and re-sheeted during the autumn. Current levels equate to just over 11 days of continuous treatment at 20g/m², well above the required level.

Winter period	183 days
No of standbys (where marginal or sub-zero temperatures were forecast:)	85
No of primary treatments	38
No of secondary treatments (precautionary)	9
No of snow events	0
Tonnes of salt spread across network	3800
Salt delivered to Parishes (tonnes)	11
Salt delivered to schools (tonnes)	11

42. We actively monitor our road network using a forecast specific to Worcestershire, in conjunction with seven weather stations and sensors we have deployed around the County throughout the entire season. This ensures we have the best weather information available to enable effective decision-making in terms of when to treat and also prepare, communicate and effectively deal with more severe weather when it arises.

Grit Bins

43. Members will be aware that this year the County Council undertook a targeted approach to refills of the highway (yellow) grit bins. Of the 1300 plus bins on the network, data analysis revealed that only 520 of those bins are actively used and therefore only those were refilled during the summer. New bin requests follow the existing process and assessment. Where assessments are successful, they are placed, filled and added to our electronic inventory. Subsequent refill requests through our online "report it" system are collated and passed to our Contractors for resolution. Where bins are reported as damaged and shown to be not in use, the Liaison Engineers will discuss the continued validity of the bin at its current location with the appropriate Member, with a view to either redeploying to an alternate location where it will be actively used or removing the bin from the network.

Severe Weather Events

44. Years ago, severe weather events were a rare occurrence but now we're seeing at least two every year, whether that's flooding or snow/icy conditions. During these times, key officers often have to partly suspend their non-urgent daily tasks to pick up additional duties, which can also include attendance at regular multi-agency, Gold-Silver-Bronze meetings. This is a huge commitment in terms of time and resource, but we are proficient in quickly moving towards the recovery phase. It does, however, mean that during these periods, responses to Members' enquiries are not quite as quick as we would all like.

45. The revised green grit bins process implemented last year has worked well. A number of parishes have received new bins either on the Highway or on private land, as have Local Members from their Locally Determined budgets.

46. The policy document, assessment forms and other information are available on the Worcestershire County Council website:
http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/info/20007/travel_and_roads/381/gritting_ice_and_snow/2

Street Lighting

47. Since 2018 and the part allocation of the Highways Infrastructure Investment, the Council's Street Lighting Team has been working with our Contractor, Prysmian, to deliver a capital programme of concrete column replacement and LED roll-out. The programme has been successfully completed, with over 700 concrete columns replaced and 16,500 LED lanterns fitted throughout the County, in predominantly residential areas.

48. Surveys of the concrete columns identified those in the poorest condition and these were then targeted in this project; old columns were replaced with new galvanised steel columns which should provide at least 35 years of service.

49. The roll-out of LED lanterns has been generally well received by the residents of Worcestershire and we're already seeing a positive impact from these energy efficient lanterns on the County's energy costs.

50. During the roll-out, significant numbers of the obsolete, low pressure sodium lighting (orange) have been cleared, another positive outcome. Additional funding for 2020/21 and 2021/22 will allow us to continue the roll-out of the energy and maintenance saving LED lanterns.

51. To date, we have converted approximately 24,000 of our street lights to LEDs, equating to 43% of the assets and this will continue to increase with the recent funding commitment.

52. We have a number of non-LED street lights along remote footpaths and our contractor cannot access these with the hiab vehicles, which means they have to rely on ladders to repair or convert these lights to LED. A large proportion of the current capital funding will be invested to convert as many of these as possible to LED. We are reliant on the validation of a positive column test result before being able to access with ladders

to carry out repairs or LED conversions. As we convert more footway lights to LED, we will see improved reliability and reduced maintenance visits and costs.

53. Although we have replaced the poorest condition concrete columns, the County Council still has over 9,000 concrete columns that continue to deteriorate as they are well past their design life. Next year, we will be prioritising the columns that are on divorced footways within a cohesive programme.

54. We worked together with Jacobs, our consultants, to install one of the first 'red light' street lighting installations in Trotshill Way, Worcester. This new technology will help protect the existing colonies of light averse bats. Bats are particularly deterred by light intensity and high "blue" light content. The option of specifying red or amber LED light sources at locations where ecology is an important consideration will be a good alternative solution in the future. This scheme generated much positive interest and feedback.

55. The Highways and Transport Control Centre will start to deal with residents' enquiries regarding streetlighting, in much the same way as they deal with general highways issues. Officers are currently completing training in this area, which will then mean that Street Lighting Engineers will be able to focus on the more complex issues.

Gully Cleansing

56. Gully cleansing and drainage repairs remain a top priority. During the past 18 months there has been a significant drive to attend and cleanse the A, B and C classified routes. During the winter months the focus has now moved to urban areas and housing estates.

57. By comparing the recent cleansing data with historical data, a new optimised cleansing programme can be produced ensuring gullies are attended and emptied before they become full. Furthermore, new work streams will be brought online to deal with any issues that the recent cleansing drive has identified such as broken pipework or tree root damage.

58. Since October 2019, we have visited over 70,000 gullies of the 104,000 gullies in the County. This is on an optimised programme which ensures gullies are looked at as frequently as required, which might be monthly, yearly or as much as every three years. We identified problems with 9000 gullies and we have a good understanding of the work required so that we're ready to hit the ground running in April.

59. We also have 10,000 other drainage assets, including culverts, grips, slip ways, etc.

60. We have 16 Highways Inspectors on the ground and all drainage enquiries are triaged and prioritised accordingly.

61. The £2.5m additional funding will enable us to have more varied gangs working. We will be able to deliver larger schemes, the two/three days schemes, as well as being reactive to all gully defects, which I know is important to Members. We will also be undertaking more CCTV investigations to find solutions quickly.

Review of Vehicular Activated Signs (VAS) Policy

62. Due to the length of time since a vehicle activated signs (VAS) review has been completed, and the increasing popularity of VAS among Members, it has been decided to review and update County Council policy on the matter.

63. The policy will establish Worcestershire County Council's position regarding the usage of VAS on the highway network, in particular speed-activated VAS that are requested and funded by the County Divisional Member then gifted to a Parish or responsible body/organisation to maintain and service.

64. VAS are used to reduce speeds by driver education rather than enforcement. The influence of these signs on vehicular speeds has been found nationally to have an excellent initial effect, with overall speeds down, but then slowly rising over a period of time to a level usually lower than that before installation. An historic study in Worcestershire produced results which followed this prediction very accurately across all the sites monitored.

65. Although feedback from both Members and residents is largely positive, there is a concern that, as noticed by other initiatives, a proliferation of these signs would actually result in driver complacency, thus the positive effect of these signs would diminish.

66. The updated policy will contain key principles: general criteria, location criteria and general considerations, focusing on the technical and engineering considerations. It will ensure that signs in Worcestershire are positioned at the right locations where they will be able to demonstrate measurable potential benefits in relation to speed reduction.

Parish Lengthsman Scheme

67. The 2020/21 Lengthsman scheme has been challenging. The original lockdown commenced as we were writing the yearly agreement, and the pandemic has affected many aspects of the scheme.

68. We have managed to adapt to the ever-changing circumstances. This has included a move away from an existing Lengthsman training provider to an outside body who has provided Covid - safe online courses.

69. The County Council has provided regular updates to all involved Parishes to ensure that the Lengthsman scheme can continue to run whenever possible, in line with local and national advice.

70. The Parishes have adapted well to both the changes to working practices dictated by National Government advice, and also the new County Council Lengthsman agreement.

71. The County Council has engaged with our colleagues in the Worcestershire County Association of Local Councils (CALC), who have been instrumental with our new risk assessment process and collaborating with Parishes to help them through difficult times.

72. The Parish Lengthsman Scheme is still as popular as ever, empowering local communities with the ability to carry out the work important to them, while maintaining a

dialogue with the highways department, reporting problems that benefit both local residents and Worcestershire as a whole.

73. We believe that this difficult year has enabled a closer relationship to be forged between the County Council and Parishes, if not just due to the sheer amount of communication, but also the requirement to work towards a common goal for the benefit of Worcestershire's residents.

Street Works

74. In 2019/20, 26,459 permits were granted for works on our highway network. In 2020 we saw an increase in works on the highway due to Covid restrictions which meant that less traffic on the highway enabled normally more sensitive works to go ahead. Similarly, there was a push to complete works by contractors coming to the end of their contracts on Cadent Gas and Severn Trent Water. We have also seen an increase in immediate/urgent works due to extra pressures on the networks by more people being at home.

75. 'Failures' can occur at various stages and for a number of reasons including incorrect traffic management, unsafe working, wrong materials used and incorrect reinstatement method employed. Currently, across most utility works, failure rates are worse for live sites. Severn Trent Water and Cadent Gas are the poorest performers during the period with failures at an unacceptable level. As Severn Trent Water is performing poorly across the whole region, we are insisting on improvement through regular regional meetings and weekly meeting with their Streetworks Representative. Cadent Gas' performance is being dealt with locally through improvement meetings and weekly planning meetings.

76. During the past year, our inspection regime has been different due to the impact of Covid. For the first six months of the year, no joint site meetings were possible with the utilities and live site inspections were done by a drive-through and a follow up call. Pictures of defects were shared via Street Manager. This did ease towards the end of 2020 but, from January 2021, our inspection regime will continue with the Covid restrictions.

77. We currently have 4 New Roads and Streetworks Act (NRSWA) inspectors who are checking 10% of reinstatements in Category B and 10% in Category C. We also have 4 Site Negotiators, soon to be 6, inspecting live sites (10% sample). In addition, we carry out routine inspections, with a particular focus on works affecting strategic routes.

	Cat A - Works in Progress	Cat B - After Works Completion	Cat C Within Guarantee Period 2/3 years
	% Fail	% Fail	% Fail
Apr 2019- Mar 2020			
BT Openreach	5.5	10.5	4.3
Cadent Gas	11.4	14.9	6.2
Severn Trent Water	14.4	13.9	12.2
South Staffs Water	0.0	8.3	16.7
Virgin Media	3.2	7.4	6.6
Wales & West Utilities	12.5	7.7	0.0
Western Power	14.3	12.7	6.0
Private Undertakers	13.8	25.9	7.4
	Cat A - Works in Progress	Cat B - After Works Completion	Cat C Within Guarantee Period 2/3 years*
	% Fail	% Fail	% Fail
Apr 2020-Dec 2020			
BT Openreach	3.9	7.7	7.7
Cadent Gas	8.5	13.1	8.8
Severn Trent Water	10.3	10.8	10.1
South Staffs Water	12.5	12.5	14.3
Virgin Media	7.7	11.3	2.0
Wales & West Utilities	8.2	4.5	0.0
Western Power	11.7	19.6	7.8
Private Undertakers	24.7	35.9	15.9

Inspection Category Timing of Inspection

A Undertaken during the progress of the works

B Undertaken within the six months following interim or permanent reinstatement

C Undertaken within the three months preceding the end of the guarantee period.

*Guarantee period is three years for reinstatement of an excavation greater than 1.5m, otherwise it is two years.

	Permits				Fixed Penalty Notices	
	Granted	Refused	Total	% Refused	Issued	Withdrawn
Apr 2019-Mar 2020						
BT Openreach	4652	1824	6476	28.2	84	5
Cadent Gas	2155	555	2710	20.5	354	1
Severn Trent Water	9662	2494	12156	20.5	463	27
South Staffs Water	44	21	65	32.3	2	0
Virgin Media	823	135	958	14.1	4	1
Wales & West Utilities	399	99	498	19.9	16	0
Western Power	1523	466	1989	23.4	213	11
Worcestershire Highways	7201	569	7770	7.3	522	n/a
Total	26459	6163	32622	18.9	1658	45
Apr-Dec 2020						
BT Openreach	5878	1626	7504	21.7	122	12
Cadent Gas	2086	595	2681	22.2	220	1
Severn Trent Water	6928	1410	8338	16.9	503	27
South Staffs Water	57	10	67	14.9	4	0
Virgin Media	1021	241	1262	19.1	17	5
Wales & West Utilities	422	39	461	8.5	13	2
Western Power	1526	287	1813	15.8	112	6
Worcestershire Highways	7036	507	7543	6.7	1157	0
Total	24954	4715	29669	15.9	2148	53

Development of Street Works

78. In March 2016, Worcestershire County Council adopted a Permit Scheme for roadworks. The original scheme charged a fee along traffic sensitive routes and in May 2018, the Permit Scheme Order was amended to charge a fee for works on all roads. The next stage is to establish parity and incorporate an inspection regime on permit conditions for our own works. Staff resources have been increased and restructured to monitor and manage this change, increasing the eyes on the highway network both on the ground and digitally. This enables greater co-ordination and compliance control covering all road works. We will be reporting on the progress of our Permit Scheme in February 2021 to include a plan to achieve a 'well-run' scheme in relation to co-ordination, compliance control, parity and transparency which will, in turn, provide the supporting evidence required for an application to operate a Lane Rental Scheme.

Lane Rental Scheme

79. A lane rental scheme allows a local highway authority to charge works promoters for the time that street and road works occupy the highway. Charges are focused on the very busiest streets (top 5% most congested sections of highway) at the busiest times (am/pm peak times). Charges apply to works promoted by both utility companies and local highway authorities on the local road network.

80. The power for local highway authorities to implement and operate a lane rental scheme in England is subject to approval by the Secretary of State for Transport.

81. Transport for London (TfL) and Kent County Council have successfully trialled the DfT's lane rental scheme providing the evidence for the decision to make the scheme available to all local highway authorities in England. The trial schemes reported that:

- majority of utility works avoided a charge, and therefore were undertaken outside of traffic-sensitive times (84% across TfL scheme);
- the average number of collaborative works sites where more than one organisation utilises the site at the same time have increased significantly;
- there has been an increase in planned utility works that take place overnight (28% across TfL scheme); and
- customer satisfaction related to roadworks have experienced significant improvements, including reports of "un-manned sites"
- the surplus revenue funded a wide range of improvements to Street Works including the DfT's new Street Manager noticing system

82. Surrey County Council has also made an application for a Lane Rental Scheme which was approved by the Secretary of State in December 2020, with charges of £2,500 per day for a full road closure and £1,500 per day for a lane closure.

83. We are currently developing a proposal for a Worcestershire Lane Rental Scheme and following an extensive consultation process, we are aiming for Summer 2022 to have a full scheme proposal for Cabinet approval to make the application to the Secretary of State.

84. 2020 brought major change to how Local Authorities manage and respond to permit applications by the introduction of the "Street Manager System". This software system and legislative change brought in by the Department for Transport paves the way for live permit scheme applications and 'connected' road works' sites, to provide an up to

date, real time look at what is happening on the network. The system is being continually developed with phased upgrades planned into the future. In its current early phase, it ensures all works now have their site starts and work stops sent within two hours (within the NRSWA working day 08.00 till 16.30). The system also drives a consistent approach to works by all Authorities. We have responded to the introduction of Street Manager by procuring a new and advanced software system for permit management that integrates seamlessly with Street Manager, which includes our site negotiators and inspectors utilising mobile technology to provide live updates whilst on site.

85. The new systems are designed to provide an automated real time update to the public online road works GIS 'One Network'. In addition, the Street Works team update on live incidents such as flooding, road traffic accidents, Covid Test sites and now vaccinations sites, to provide a comprehensive and live state of the network online. In 2020/21 the Street Works team will roll out a One Network account set up service to Local Members to enable them to set up a personalised automated email update on works in their area and beyond.

86. The online application process for on highway licences for skips and scaffolding was completed during 2020, improving the ease and efficiency of this direct public service.

Traffic Signal Control

87. A number of traffic signals have been upgraded to incorporate both the latest adaptive control systems and a full asset replacement of equipment elements that were both older than the industry recommended replacement lifespan and were 'old' technology. This included:

- sockets for poles,
- reusable controller bases
- a network of ducting
- an extra low voltage LED system

Resulting in the reduction in:

- Civils work (breaking of ground and traffic management for future repairs and maintenance). The old traffic signals system had a mixture of installation methods. The traffic signals controllers were directly buried in the ground and the cables were sealed in using an epoxy base seal. A large majority of the cable connecting the equipment was either buried in the ground or not in a fully ducted system and the traffic signal poles were concreted in with either very little or no access to the cable entry point. With the new system, the traffic signal controllers are on a reusable base with rubber grommets instead of epoxy seal. The system is fully ducted and the poles are in sockets. This enables us to change any of the parts whether this is as a result of an RTC or for future maintenance without having to dig any holes.
- energy consumption by the sites to 20% of previous levels,
- carbon footprint of the signals asset
- rate of lamp failure and lamp change
- electrical injury risk to maintenance engineers and installation operatives as all of the site equipment is 48 volts rather than 240 volts.

88. Of the 299 signals installations in the County, the proportion that are over an asset date of 25 years old has reduced from 14% in 2018 to 6% in 2020. The proportion of extra low voltage LED traffic signals assets has increased from 56% in 2018 to 67% in 2020. The result is a significant improvement in the operational efficiency (traffic flow), highway network resilience, and ongoing maintenance burden.

Public Realm

89. We have continued our programme of public realm improvements in Town Centres including schemes in Worcester Street Kidderminster, the Shambles and Pump Street in Worcester and Stourport High Street. Further schemes will be starting in the next few months in Market Place in Redditch and Port Street in Evesham. Typically, these schemes include upgrading the surfacing materials on carriageway and footways, tree provision, upgrading street lighting, removal of unnecessary clutter, replacement or refurbishment of street furniture, improved drainage and updated signage. The schemes are designed to make some of our busiest town centres easier to maintain, more accessible and more attractive places for people to live, shop, do business and visit for recreational purposes.

Pedestrian Crossings

90. The table below shows the pedestrian crossing installations for 2020/21

Crossing Type	Location	Date installed
Toucan Crossing (upgrade of existing Puffin crossing)	Market St, Bromsgrove	May 20
Pelican Crossing (upgrade of existing)	Crown Close, Bromsgrove	May 20
Zebra Crossing	Brickfields Rd, Worcester	August 20
Zebra Crossing	Hewell Rd, Redditch	August 20
Zebra Crossing	Tolladine Rd, Worcester	September 20
Zebra Crossing	Willow Way, Redditch	September 20
Zebra Crossing	Station Rd, Pershore	September 20
Puffin Crossing	Pheasant St (Asda), Worcester	October 20
Zebra Crossing	Station Rd, Honeybourne	March 21
Zebra Crossing	Leamington Rd, Broadway	April 21

Traffic Regulation Orders (TRO)

91. In 2020, lockdown restrictions due to Covid had a direct effect on the Council's ability to advertise or make TROs. These difficulties were overcome by way of adaptations to procedures whilst in accordance with legislation. However, the number of permanent TROs implemented was unavoidably lower than the previous year at 93 against 122.

92. However, 2020 saw;

- The introduction of the largest residents' parking scheme ever implemented by WCC in the Arboretum area of Worcester.
- A number of experimental/temporary TROs to address safety issues related to Covid (Hagley Park Wood, Clent and Rigby Hall School, Bromsgrove), to support Redditch Borough Council's successful bid for an e-scooter trial and also to support the Network Efficiency Programme.
- The development of a new, in house county-wide GIS system to support Civil Parking Enforcement. All parking restrictions are mapped digitally onto GIS. At present, they are mapped by district and that means we currently have six sets of maps and three different GIS systems. The purpose of this current, ongoing project is to consolidate the existing per-district systems into a single one covering the County as a whole. There are clear operational benefits in having a single set of readily accessible data but there is a stronger imperative in that the GIS system for Wychavon uses software which is now obsolete.

93. Moving traffic offences fall under the responsibility of the Police for enforcement and other offences such as parking are for the District/Borough/City Councils to enforce. Nonetheless, the County Council was obliged to step in to enforce the Lowesmoor Bus Lane in Worcester, thereby ensuring more reliable bus services, particularly the no. 38 service to the hospital, and also reducing air pollution. The scheme which started in September 2020 has been a great success; contraventions have dropped from 2000 per week, when we started issuing warning notices, to less than 200 Penalty Charge Notice's being issued per week now.

Road Traffic Accident Reduction

94. The road safety engineering team works in close partnership with West Mercia Police to keep the highway network safe and traffic moving by minimising the potential for road traffic accidents. Accident data analysis provides the basis for road safety engineering measures and feeds into all new and improved highway schemes and maintenance programmes. All highway schemes with the potential to change driver, rider and/or pedestrian behaviour are road safety audited by the team at both design and construction stages. I have arranged to meet the police to discuss the possibility of reducing the length of time of police road closures following road accidents.

Traffic Monitoring

95. 2018/19 saw the results from the first phase of the upgrade of our existing permanent traffic flow monitors to minute by minute live traffic flow detection at 28 sites on key routes in and around Worcester City:

- An upgrade to existing traffic monitoring infrastructure to provide high quantity and quality data for traffic volume, speed, classification and emissions (Nitrogen Oxides, Carbon Dioxide and Particulates)
- A powerful analytics platform giving data trends by the minute, hour, day, week, month or year. This data inputs to Transport Planning, Development Control, Street Works permitting conditions, TRO timed restrictions and speed

limits, the Asset Management Programme and the monitoring and evaluation programme for highway improvement schemes.

- A live traffic flow alerts map, including a Highways England stream, providing immediate and automated alerts of deviation from normal.

96. This was achieved using fully solar powered highway equipment which, after two full years of operation, have proved to be very efficient and resilient in terms of data provision and maintenance burden.

97. Throughout 2020/21 these data sites, supplemented with our bluetooth journey time monitoring equipment and our casualty accident database, have provided a week-on-week trend analysis of the impact of lockdown on travel in Worcestershire

98. All of these were achieved using fully solar powered highway equipment which, after two full years of operation, have proved to be efficient and reliable.

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Congestion - Worcestershire Network Efficiency Programme

100. Since May 2019 we have invested a further £5m - making £10m in total - to address four key locations across the County: A38 east of Upton, A449/442 Hoobrook island in Kidderminster, A448 Parkside signals in Bromsgrove and Port Street signals in Evesham. Initial findings are detailed below:

101. A38 east of Upton. Planning permission was recently secured to introduce a 4-arm roundabout to replace the current, dated staggered crossroads. We developed a detailed design requiring purchase of land owned by Croome Estates Trustees and we are currently considering a start date, recognising the ecological and archaeological matters involved.

102. A449/A442 Hoobrook roundabout, Kidderminster. We are pursuing the 3-lane widening on the three A-class approaches to this island, along with signalisation of the junction. The scheme started in January of this year and is on target to conclude in the summer of 2021. We are very grateful to the Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership (WLEP) for the £1.3m Get Building Fund (GBF) allocation which co-funds this improvement.

103. The A448 Parkside signals in Bromsgrove town have been investigated with the chosen solution being an upgrade of the signal technology, widening of footways, instruction of further and longer approach lanes and improved crossing facilities at this busy town centre junction. The detailed design is reaching completion this spring with construction planned for later this year.

104. Finally, the Port Street junction in Evesham will commence in April 2021. The aged signalised 4-arm junction has been designed with upgraded signal technology, improved 2-phase crossing facility and additional capacity for traffic on the Waterside approach.

105. Croft Road in Worcester City had an uncontrolled zebra crossing with high pedestrian and cyclist usage throughout the working day which caused significant and understandable driver frustration, together with enormous congestion. We have replaced this with a push-button controlled Toucan crossing which, with the removal of the mini-roundabout island that gave priority to the City Council car park, created massive delays along the A449 north of the City. The new layout has vastly improved journey times, reduced congestion and queues, and enhanced the surrounding area.

106. Sidbury and City Walls Road signalised junction had 40 year+ old signals which created congested movement through this very busy A44/A38 intersection in the City. The scheme concluded last year included upgraded intelligent signals creating a more free-flowing, balanced junction, as well as introducing new controlled crossing facilities across Commandery Road at the eastern end, along with improved footway links and aesthetics.

107. St John's scheme is due to be completed in March this year. This scheme improves pedestrian safety with the introduction of a new formal, controlled crossing at the bottom of The Bullring; removes narrow carriageway lanes with caused pinch-points that created congestion and squeezed on-road cyclists; improves crossing facilities on Henwick Road and Bush Walk; improves the walking environment throughout the area with significant new pavements of high quality block paving; and enhances the appearance of the whole area.

108. In respect of the £3.4m NPIF (National Productivity Investment Fund) allocation across the Bromsgrove area, this has seen the successful introduction of several junction and corridor improvements, as well as many walking and cycling enhancements across the District.

109. The A448 Kidderminster Road scheme introduced an improved push button crossing by Sanders Park with improved cycle and footway links connecting from either side.

110. The removal of a problematic zebra crossing at Hanover Street, Bromsgrove, has seen a massive improvement to traffic flow in the area. The replacement controlled pedestrian crossing has managed the large numbers of crossing pedestrians, increased by the proximity of two local schools, by creating consistent but managed periods to cross, whilst allowing traffic to continue along the route.

111. Market Street, Bromsgrove junction/area immediately west of the Town centre, has also benefitted from improved signal control at the Bus Depot junction. This has been further improved with walking and cycling links into the Town adjacent to the supermarket, a widened footbridge, and enhanced footway environments.

112. All of the above schemes have been vastly improved with several walking/cycling links across the district, which give real safe alternative routes, away from busy main road traffic, which should encourage increased sustainable mode activity and active travel corridors.

113. The A456 Worcester Road, Hagley junction has for several years been a concern for residents with long queues and delays occurring along the main road. With S106 monies and the Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) GBF £200k contribution, we have been able to design an improvement to this 4-arm signalised junction that will upgrade the signals, better integrate the crossing facility to the east and

improve journey times through the area. The scheme started on site last March and is scheduled for completion in June 2021.

114. Looking to the future, we are considering various possible solutions to schemes raised in the LTP4 consultation process with known local congestion issues. Many of these have S106 monies available to bolster the funding. Sites include A456 Bewdley By-Pass, Battens Drive in Redditch, Blackpole Road/Cotswold Way and the A44 Redhill and Swineherd Way junctions in Worcester. We will continue to hear the voices of Worcestershire's residents who tell us that congestion is amongst their top three concerns in the County.

Passenger Transport

115. For the past 12 months our transport officers have been engaging with operators and providing support to ensure the ongoing changes in guidance have been clear, and that their routes, staff and passengers have been kept safe and protected.

116. Our staff are working with Clinical Commissioning Groups and Primary Care Networks to support Worcestershire's efforts to deliver the Covid vaccination programme. Our Transport teams have been busy ensuring that transport is available for those who most need it during this difficult time and offering transport to those residents who cannot access Covid-19 vaccination centres. We are supporting residents who would normally receive hospital transport services to attend hospital appointments to make their vaccination appointments.

117. The Fleet team, who operate minibus services, have also been out and about delivering food supplies and medicines to residents who are vulnerable or clinically shielding.

118. The review of Wychavon services against the approved Worcestershire Passenger Transport Strategy which was due to take place last year, has been delayed by the pandemic. In the meantime, we are monitoring the changing situation and our resources continue to provide support to safeguard the passenger transport network. Over the course of the coming months, officers will continue to work with operators to monitor services and usage to identify what may be the new levels of 'normal'.

119. During this time, we will observe the stability of the market to plan our tendering process for when the review is able to commence.

120. We remain committed to delivering a holistic transport network throughout the County, albeit subject to outside forces which are beyond our control.

121. We also remain committed to supporting our local transport operators through this difficult time so they will be able to deliver a sustainable network for the residents of our County when the market is in a steady state to do so.

122. We have provided support for the 302 and 303 services between Worcester and Kidderminster, as well as support for the reinstated 202 service providing Rubery, Lickey End and Marlbrook links with Bromsgrove. The support through our subsidised local bus budget and the grant monies from the DfT and DfE have also allowed us to support the companies' loss of income, maintain service levels and provide duplicate services that

serve our many schools and colleges. This has all allowed many of our small operators to remain in business during this pandemic.

123. We are working with partners to discuss ownership of Bus Shelters throughout the County. This will improve maintenance and customer experience.

124. A total of 150 real-time in-shelter displays have now been installed across Worcestershire with further installations planned throughout 2021.

125. Despite a comprehensive submission of bids for the Rural Mobility Fund and Electric Bus Town, we were unfortunately unsuccessful although the DfT have advised that both submissions were close to the requirements. We remain committed to pursuing opportunities for funding in the future.

126. We are investigating the potential for a Demand Responsive Transport solution for Bromsgrove and are working closely with Local Members and Strategic Technology Partners. We are working with Bromsgrove to consider the introduction of an electric bus shuttle service between the station and town. Centre.

127. During the recent flooding events, we operated a number of shuttle buses, including from Upton to Hanley Castle High School; Bewdley Bridge and Worcester Bridge.

Community and Voluntary Sector Transport

128. The Community and Voluntary Sector transport operators throughout Worcestershire are increasingly taking passengers to Covid vaccination centres. These requests are coming from their existing passenger members and also from new clients who are being directed to Community Transport (CT) from various sources including GP surgeries, the NETPS (Non-Emergency Transport Patient Service) provider and from the contact details on appointment letters.

129. CT conventionally provides transport in volunteers' own cars, accessible MPVs and minibuses for people who cannot or who have no access to other forms of transport and, therefore, the majority of clients tend to be those with limited physical mobility, older people, and those who do not have friends or family who can assist them. They tend to be isolated or without access to the facilities they need and so can be regarded as vulnerable.

130. As the vaccination programme rolls out, there is almost always going to be a need for transport and the Sector is liaising with Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCG), surgeries, local councils and the NHS to try to ensure that all those for whom transport to a vaccination centre is an issue, can be helped.

131. It has been agreed to put CT information on appointment letters and the CT website – www.communitytravel.org – and the generic information line is being publicised widely. Most CT schemes have a good relationship with their local surgeries and their service is understood. The Sector's transport offer is now becoming more widely known and issues such as the demand for Sunday journeys is being addressed. Here2Help is notifying volunteers of the opportunity to drive for CT schemes and there is a recruitment drive underway for 'out of hours' drivers. All schemes have

undertaken relevant risk assessments and PPE and other protocols are in place on vehicles.

Public Rights of Way

132. Walking brings a wealth of benefits to our health and wellbeing and we are committed to financial investment in the Public Rights of Way service area. In recognition of this, we will be doubling our existing budget. A record of the good work we have done this year includes:

- Last summer we trimmed over 150kms of paths;
- Inspected a record number of reported problems – over 2,500, which is a huge 20% more than normal;
- Delivered around £300,000 worth of investment in the network, which includes:
 - Replacing or repairing over 90 bridges;
 - Some 500 roadside signs replaced or programmed to be replaced in the coming months.
 - Protected the network for public use by assessing over 550 planning applications this financial year, and working with developers and planners to protect and enhance potentially affected public rights of way.
 - Exploring ways of empowering local volunteers and others to be involved in maintaining and looking after our PROWs.

Walking and Cycling New Projects

133. The County Council continues to invest in walking and cycling. We have secured some additional £800k funding for walking and cycling in the County through the Emergency Active Travel Fund. The Phase 1 money has been used to provide additional cycling facilities including parking, mapping and route information plus travel planning. Improvements have also been made to selected routes including Old Road, Worcester and quiet lane between Bromsgrove and Redditch.

134. Consultation is scheduled on the proposals for spending the Phase 2 funding (£649,200). The schemes in this funding include:

- Pershore Wyre Road active travel corridor
- Redditch Arrow Valley Active Travel Network
- Worcester Diglis to Sixways canal corridor
- Stourport to Kidderminster canal corridor

135. Additional cycling infrastructure has been provided along the A4440 Southern Link Road in Worcester with the provision of new bridges for pedestrians and cyclists at Hams Way and Crookbarrow Way as part of the integrated improvements for walkers and cyclists. County Highways continues to make significant investment into cycling to cater for the 1% of commuters who cycle.

136. The planning application has been submitted to Worcestershire County Council for Kepax Bridge, Worcester, a new bridge for walkers and cyclists across the River

Severn, which will link communities on the east and west banks of the river and extend the opportunities for walking and cycling for leisure or commuting in the City.

137. Work has continued to deliver the Bromsgrove National Productivity Investment Fund (NPIF) schemes. Particular highlights for 20/21 include:

- Upgrading of paths through Sanders Park and provision of a new link to Whitford Road
- Enhancing connectivity to the town centre through upgrades to road crossings
- Widening an existing footbridge and delivering a widening and lighting scheme to Pig Alley

138. More generally across the County, seven zebra crossings and 26 dropped kerbs with tactile paving have been delivered to improve active travel connectivity and Section 106 funding has also been secured towards the provision of a new bridge at Hampton in Evesham, which is critical to the delivery of the active travel network in the town. Work has now commenced on the detailed scheme.

Budget

139. Through the use of a blend of capital, revenue and grant monies, spending on highways has increased during this financial year and is proposed to increase further in 2021/22 with the recommended addition to the capital programme of £6m for highways, £4m for footways and cycleways, £1.25m for addressing local members' highways priorities, as well as £25k revenue funding to enhance highway safety markings and signage. This is supported by £2.4 million which is planned to be spent through the Highways Infrastructure Investment Fund (HIIF) in 2021/22, as part of £37.5 million over four years 2018-22 including a focus on striving for top quartile performance in the condition of our roads and pavements. This is on top of structural maintenance grants received from Government. This investment continues to reflect the high priority that this administration attaches to these services and assets.

140. I would like to place on record my thanks to the Director of Economy and Infrastructure, Assistant Directors, service heads, managers and staff across the Council for their commitment and continued hard work and for running one of the best Highways networks in the country. The work is unremitting and relentless but we face every challenge with determination and good humour.

Alan Amos
Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways