

# SCRUTINY REPORT

**MEETING:** SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**DATE:** 22 November 2017

**SUBJECT:** Highway Maintenance

**REPORT FROM:** Peter Stokes/Neil S Long

**REPORT STATUS:** FOR PUBLICATION

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## 1.0 BACKGROUND

**1.1** Highway Operations is Bury Council's in-house team responsible for reactive highway maintenance, highway weed control, road markings, highway drainage, highway safety inspections, highway related customer inquiries, street works inspections and highway enforcement.

Section 41 of the Highways Act 1980 requires that the Highway Authority (Bury Council) maintains the highway. Highway Operations discharges this statutory duty and provides evidence of a defence to highway claims under Section 58 of the Highways Act 1980. This is provided by virtue of the inspection, maintenance and repair regimes employed by the service.

### **Key Highway Assets Maintained By Highway Operations**

- Roads – 660km
- Footways – 1200km
- Road Gullies – 42,500 no.
- Road signs – 15,000 no.
- Guardrail – 15km

### **Highway Operations Key Stats.**

- Completed over 13,00m2 of carriageway and footway repairs in 16/17
- Complete 5,516km of walked Highway Safety Inspections per annum
- Resolved 7,235 customer enquiries in 2016/17

All Road markings, highway drainage repairs and highway weed control works are all carried out by external contractors, this equates to approximately 40% of the highway maintenance revenue budget for works. Procurement and supervision of these contracts is carried by Highway Operations Officers.

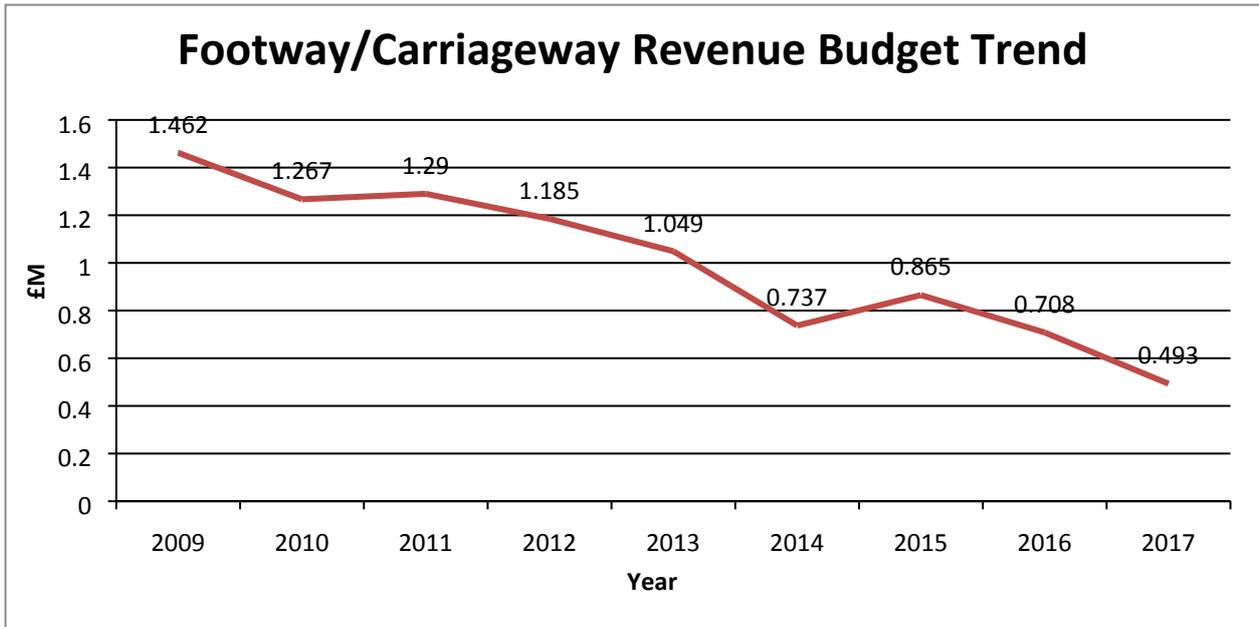
## 2.0 ISSUES

### **Highway Operations Budget, Performance & Financial Needs**

**The Highway Maintenance and Pothole Strategy Action Plan** is attached to this scrutiny report which provides details of investment, performance improvement measures, IT and technology investment, communications and actions in connection with the Council Motion 13<sup>th</sup> September 2017

Highway Operations revenue budgets for carriageway and footway maintenance have reduced by circa 66% since 2009. This cut has, in part, been offset through increases in capital

funding. Whilst capital funding is welcome, these monies are generally not able to be used for reactive maintenance works.



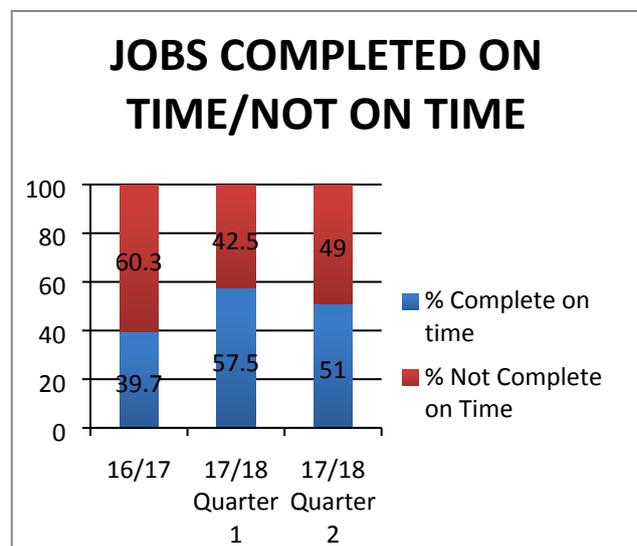
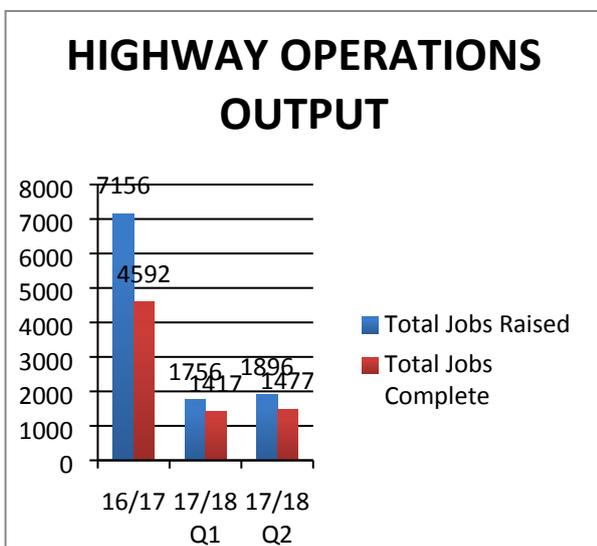
N.B. The total carriageway and footway revenue budget for 2017/18 is **£493,000** or £747/km of highway (based on a network length of 660km). The 2016/17 GM average carriageway and footway revenue budget was circa £1,100/km or **£726,000** for a 660km network length.

### 2.1 Highway Operations Performance

Highway Operations employs a number of innovative systems and techniques in order to provide an efficient, modern service. These innovations include:

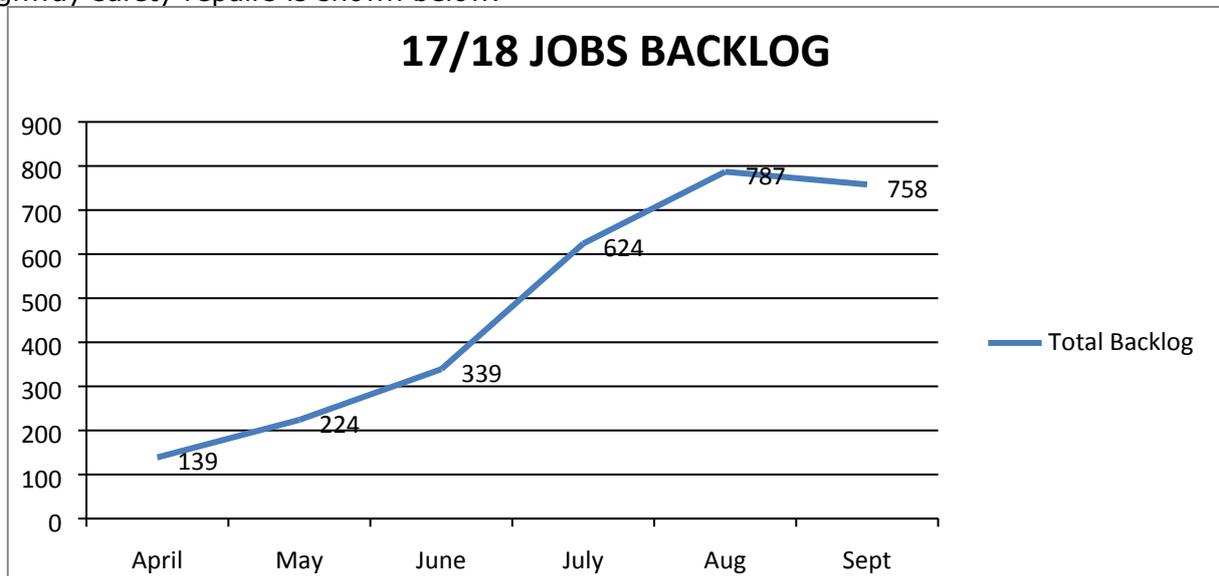
- Handheld GPS technology to record inspections, instruct works and record/photograph defects/completed works;
- CAT planing machines which reduce exposure to hand arm vibration and increase output;
- Spray injection patching machine which reduces exposure to hand arm vibration and significantly increase output; &
- Highway Inspector repairs.

These innovations together with improvements in logistics and a focus on targeting insurance have helped to achieve significant gains in performance shown below:



NB. Projecting current performance the number of jobs completed will increase by circa 1200 this financial year than were completed in 16/17, this equates to an increase in output of circa 26%. Circa 55% of jobs are projected to be completed on time in 17/18, which is an increase of 15% on 16/17. Further improvements are projected for quarter 3 performance as new systems of work become embedded.

Despite the significant improvements made within Highway Operations there remains a disparity between capacity and the demands placed on the service. The current backlog of highway safety repairs is shown below.



It is projected that circa 1500 highway safety repair jobs will not be completed in 2017/18, which is 1000 jobs less than in 16/17.

## 2.2 APSE State of the Market Survey – Highways – Nov 17

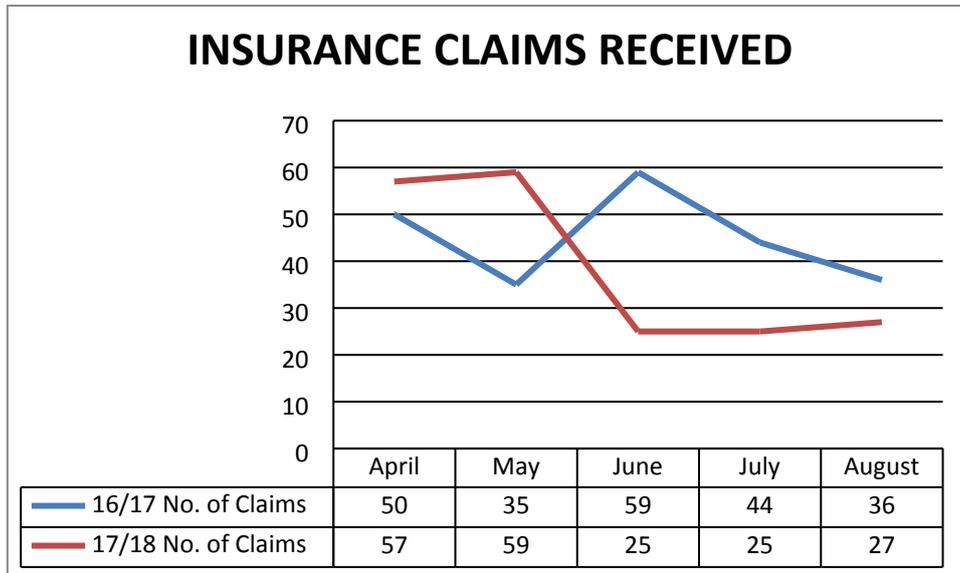
- 52% of respondents reported decreased budgets, whilst for 21% had increased (covered increase in funding to assist in flood recovery). 64% anticipated a decreased budget for 18/19 (again for increased people cited flood recovery funds but also Northern Powerhouse investment).
- 73% responded that they hadn't taken a more aggressive approach to defending claims.
- 43% of respondents estimated that existing damage to roads in the council area will be never repaired to an acceptable standard.

## 2.3 Financial Needs

It is impossible to accurately determine future demands on Highway Operations as works are reactive in nature and the rate of formation of highway defects cannot be modelled, unlike general condition indices. However, in order to meet the current level of demand on the service it is estimated that circa £250,000 additional highway maintenance revenue works budget per annum is required. This would bring existing highway revenue budgets into line with our GM neighbours.

It is anticipated that any investment in highway maintenance revenue budgets will potentially be offset by a reduction in insurance claims payouts. The vast majority of highway insurance claims payouts are a made as a result of repairs not being completed on time, which impacts on our ability to provide a robust defence in court. Additional highways revenue budgets will be targeted on improving repair response times, thereby increasing the number of repairs completed on time.

The graph below shows how recent improvements in performance have translated into a reduction in the number of highway claims received.



### 3.0 CONCLUSION

Highway Operations has a proven track record of efficiency and regularly completes pothole repairs at significantly lower cost than the national average of **£72** per pothole <sup>(a.)</sup>. In 2017/18 the typical costs for Highway Operations to repair a pothole are **£48**, 33% below the national average.

The recently announced Highway Maintenance Investment of £10million, whilst welcome, will not be sufficient to achieve significant improvements in the condition of the highway network. The rate of formation of defects will therefore continue to accelerate and with that the demands on Highway Operations will increase. Despite the proven efficiency of Highway Operations an increase in the current level of highway maintenance revenue budget is required to meet the current and future level of demand. Without this investment Bury Council will be increasingly exposed to insurance claim payouts and potential reputational damage.

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a. Average cost to repair a pothole according to Asphalt Industry Alliance 2017 Annual Local Authority Road Maintenance Survey (ALARM).

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