

Hampshire County Council Future Services Consultation

Proposals relating to the planned maintenance budget for Highways

Proposals relating to the planned maintenance budget for Highways

What is the current situation?

Hampshire County Council is the highway authority for Hampshire and our Highways Service function is responsible for fulfilling the County Council's legal duties as outlined in the Highways Act 1980^[1]. This includes taking reasonable steps to maintain the 5,500-mile network of publicly maintainable roads, footways and cycleways that are widely used by Hampshire residents and visitors.

The County Council is not responsible for maintaining motorways and some major A-roads (historically known as trunk roads), which are maintained by National Highways^[2]. We are also not responsible for maintaining 'unadopted' private roads, as this responsibility is held by the owners of properties which front onto such roads. As such, these parts of the road network are not included in this consultation.

A core element of how we maintain 5,500 miles of roads, footways and cycleways is through our planned maintenance programme. This programme delivers large-scale structural repairs, surface treatments on roads, and drainage improvements. Most of the planned maintenance we carry out is funded directly by the Department for Transport (DfT) through ring-fenced grants^[3]. For the past decade, we have topped this up by over £10 million from our own funds each year. Given the current financial pressures we are now proposing to reduce this additional funding by £7.5 million.

In addition to planned maintenance, we also carry out routine/reactive maintenance and environmental maintenance. Routine/reactive maintenance includes day-to-day repairs (e.g. repairing potholes, replacing road markings, repairs to signs, cleaning drainage systems) and responding to emergencies (e.g. urgent road repairs). Environmental maintenance includes services such as grass cutting, weed control and managing trees, hedgerows and shrubs. The budgets for these types of maintenance are not in scope of this proposal as they collectively ensure that we are able to meet the minimum requirements of our legal duty to maintain the public highway.

Furthermore, the additional £22.5 million of County Council funding for the three-year 'Stronger Roads Today' campaign approved by Cabinet in July 2023 for increased reactive maintenance, is also out of scope. The final year of funding for this campaign is 2025/26.

[1] legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1980/66/contents

[2] You can read more about which roads National Highways maintain at: [nationalhighways.co.uk/our roads/roads we manage](https://nationalhighways.co.uk/our-roads/roads-we-manage)

[3] This means that when the money is given, there are conditions attached stating how it can be spent. We can only use it for that specific (often one-off) purpose, and we usually need to provide evidence of this.

In November 2023 the Government announced that more funding would be allocated to local highway authorities for highway maintenance. For Hampshire a 'minimum uplift' of £132.3 million of funding has been confirmed up to 2033/34 (i.e. over an 11-year period from 2023 to 2034). Included within this funding is an extra £4.2 million for both 2023/24 and 2024/25, which has already been confirmed, and we await confirmation from the Department for Transport (DfT) on how the rest of the uplift funding for Hampshire will be allocated over the remainder of the funding period. Having such long-term uplift funding confirmed will enable us to plan ahead with greater certainty. If the base funding from the DfT remains as it currently is, this uplift could lessen the impact of the proposals outlined here.

Further information about planned maintenance of the highway can be found at: hants.gov.uk/transport/roadmaintenance/plannedmaintenance

What is being proposed?

We are proposing to reduce planned highways maintenance activities, saving the County Council £7.5 million each year.

Why is this being proposed?

Until a sustainable long-term national funding solution can be found to address the intense financial pressures facing not only the County Council, but also wider local government, we have no choice but to consider changing or reducing services in some areas and propose options for savings.

Reducing the amount of money we spend on planned highways maintenance would contribute towards addressing the County Council's overall anticipated £132 million budget deficit from April 2025.

This proposal would save £7.5 million per year from our budget, while allowing us to continue to meet our legal duty to maintain the road network in Hampshire.

How would the proposal be implemented?

If approved, £7.5 million would be withdrawn from the planned maintenance budget from April 2025. The planned maintenance programme for the remainder of 2023/24 and 2024/25 would not be impacted. The planned programme for 2025/26 would be scaled down to reflect the reduction in funding available. There would be no impact on current arrangements with suppliers.

What are the potential impacts?

The potential service changes could have the following impacts:

- Activities such as larger-scale structural repairs, road surface treatment programmes, and drainage improvements would generally only be carried out when major or widespread defects are identified, and a more comprehensive solution is justified.
- Hampshire's highway network would become less resilient to the impacts of winter weather and traffic. Over time, and unless sustained long-term central Government funding is confirmed at levels sufficient to enable the full reintroduction of the planned maintenance programme, there would likely be an accelerated deterioration in the condition of our roads.
- There may be fewer staff needed to deliver the planned maintenance service. Wherever possible, affected staff would be tasked with delivering other highway related activities, e.g., routine/reactive maintenance. Effort would always be made to reduce staffing levels in a planned and sensitive way by managing vacancies as they arise, delivering savings through natural turnover and redeployment of staff; and exploring voluntary redundancy. We would undertake consultation with staff and trade unions about workforce implications at the appropriate time and in accordance with our policies and procedures.

What alternatives have been considered?

There are other approaches that we could take that are not proposed at this time. In developing this proposal, we have also considered the following:

Maintain current level of spend: This option is not being proposed because of the scale of the budget pressures faced by the County Council, and the legal requirement to operate within budget. If we maintained current levels of spending, it would put additional pressure on other statutory^[4] or critical services to deliver increased savings. This may impact levels of service in these areas and our ability to operate within our budget.

Reduce the environmental and/or routine/reactive maintenance budgets: This option is not proposed because these budgets enable the County Council to meet its legal duty to maintain the highway.

[4] Services we are legally required to provide.