



Environment and Transport Select Committee
12 December 2013

Gully Cleaning Update

Purpose of the report: Scrutiny of Services and Budgets

To update the Select Committee on highway gully cleaning.

Introduction:

1. Gully cleaning is the routine cleaning of the drains located on the highway. Normally located at the edge of the road by the kerb, a gully is design to take water away from the road surface. A gully consists of a concrete pot positioned under the road surface with an iron grate visible from the road. The water collects in the concrete pot before being channelled through a series of pipes connected to the main drainage system. The pot also collects any debris, leaves, litter, soil and rubbish that are washed off the road ensuring that the connecting pipe does not become blocked.
2. Without regular cleaning, gullies can become blocked and consequently will not be able to drain surface water away from the road efficiently. The resulting standing water can subsequently contribute to flooding problems and damage the integrity of the road structure leading to potholes for example.
3. Surrey County Council undertakes a variety of routine cleaning and maintenance activities on the highway drains each year. The 2013/14 budget for routine and reactive drainage maintenance activities is £2,853,640 and includes the following activities;
 - Routine cleaning of gullies
 - Clearing of blocked drains using additional jetting vehicles
 - Cleaning out soakaways
 - Drainage asset data collection
 - Drainage system minor repairs, including clearing of ditches

4. All of the routine and reactive drainage maintenance activities form part of the maintenance contracts awarded to May Gurney, now Kier, in November 2010. All of these contracts commenced in April 2011. The Gully cleaning contract was delivered by May Gurney's sub-contractor ACL until mid June this year at which point the sub-contractor arrangement changed and routine cleaning activities are now delivered by Conway.

Data and Access to Information

5. There are over 159,000 gullies and 8,000 soakaways located on the highway network across Surrey. These figures have been collated and verified whilst cleaning the assets over many years and are considered to be fairly accurate however given the size and age of the highway network in Surrey it is recognised that there will be some gaps in our data.
6. To improve our knowledge of the drainage systems a survey is currently underway to record all visible highway drainage assets. The survey will assist in filling in the gaps and provide a more comprehensive drainage inventory. This can then be used to ensure our cleaning programmes are capturing all drainage assets, are efficient and targeted based on need.
7. Data is also collected during the routine gully cleaning cycle. When the gullies are cleaned, the record of the visit is electronically stored against the individual gully using a mobile device. This provides useful information on the date when the gully was cleaned, the silt levels at the point of cleaning (how full up the gully is) and if the gully is defective or blocked. This information is then used to determine whether any further maintenance action requires programming.
8. In terms of wider access to gully data, the public on line web reporting facility will display individual gullies in a map based format, against which issues such as blockages can be reported.
9. Information on the gully cleaning schedule is also most easily accessed via the SCC website where it is possible to search for details on what month a specific road will be cleaned.

Routine Cleaning of Gullies

Gully Cleaning Programme

10. To ensure the programme of gully cleaning is efficient it is good practice to use the recorded silt levels when determining the frequency of cleaning. For example if a gully is more prone to becoming full of silt and therefore working less effectively then it will be programmed for more frequent cleaning. This may mean that some gullies are cleaned more than once a year and others will be cleaned less than once a year. The current contract requirements are that SPN 1 and 2 roads do not contain

more than 50% silt and the SPN 3 roads do not contain more than 75% silt at any time.

11. During 2013/14 the gully cleaning programme is designed to clean all known gullies at least once during the year. The intention is to optimise the programme for 2014/15 onwards which will mean the frequency of cleaning may vary to ensure the contractual silt levels are adhered to.
12. Based on an asset volume of over 159,000 gullies, the contractor is required to clean around 13500 gullies per month. On a daily basis, we have on average five vehicles cleaning gullies, one vehicle cleaning soakaways and two vehicles undertaking jetting of blocked gullies.

Programme Performance and Output

13. There are a number of key performance indicators that are used to measure the performance of the gully cleaning contract. Adherence to the annual programme has significantly improved over the last twelve months with the contractor now achieving over 95% for the KPI that measures 'the number of gullies cleaned each month against the number programmed'.
14. Where a gully cannot be cleaned at the first visit it will most likely be due to one of the following reasons; it is found to be blocked, there are parked cars preventing access, or the gully lid is jammed or broken. The year to date position indicates that on average 97% of the gullies are reported as free running after cleaning.
15. About 3% of all gullies visited are found to be blocked. Over 80% of the blocked gullies are now being cleared by additional jetting carried out within seven days of the first visit. Where necessary the vehicles also use root cutting equipment to clear blocked connections. The remainder require further investigation that will most likely involve excavation and pipe repair via the minor works programme.
16. Approximately 5% of gullies are found to be obstructed by parked vehicles at the first visit. A second follow up visit will take place however records suggest that less than 20% will actually be cleaned at the second visit. This essentially means that approximately 6,400 gullies (4% of the overall total) will remain not cleaned each year due to parked vehicles.
17. Emptying the gullies of silt obviously generates waste. On average we remove over 180 tonnes of silt from our gullies each month. The silt is transferred to a centre, currently in Dartford, where 100% of the waste is recycled. For example, Aggregates are used in concrete and asphalt production, and organic material is used for composting etc.

Other Activities

Soakaway Cleaning

18. Soakaways are also subject to a routine cleaning programme. The annual soakaway programme is designed to prioritise cleaning against reported wetspots.

Drainage System Minor Repairs

19. Where minor breakages or problems are identified with the drainage system they are considered and prioritised by the Local Area Teams for progression via the minor works programme. In 2013/14 we have a budget for minor drainage repairs of approx £1.4million. This represents an increase of approx £700,000 from the 2012/13 allocation. To date over 300 orders have been placed for minor drainage repair during 2013/14 of which about 250 have been completed or commenced.
20. Jammed and broken gully lids are also progressed via the minor works programme to repair and replace as necessary.

Conclusions:

21. Gully cleaning is an essential maintenance activity that contributes to the management of surface water on the highway network and assists in protecting the integrity of the road structure.
22. Recent contractual changes have been positive with regards to the gully cleaning programme with noticeable improvements in programme adherence and the success of follow up activities such as clearing blocked connections.
23. The increase in budget for minor drainage repairs has proved beneficial in resolving a significant number of drainage issues.

Recommendations:

24. That the Select Committee
- a) Notes and comments on the progress of the gully cleaning programme.
 - b) Endorses the allocation of a minor works budget to support the gully cleaning programme.

Next steps:

The performance of the subcontractors will continue to be monitored and improvements developed as required.
The gully cleaning programme will be optimised for 2014/15 and website details updated.
The Select Committee will be updated on progress in Spring/Summer 2014.

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