

## Decision Report

Committee: Executive

Meeting Date: 1 April 2026

Key Decision: Yes



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### **Additional funding for Highway and Environmental Maintenance Activity**

Chair of Committee: Councillor Bill Revans, Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Governance and Communications

Executive Members: Councillor Richard Wilkins, Executive Lead Member for Transport and Waste Services and Councillor Federica Smith-Roberts, Executive Lead Member for Communities, Housing Revenue Account, Culture and, Equalities and Diversity

Local Members and Divisions affected: All

Executive Director: Chris Hall, Executive Director for Community, Place and Economy

### **Executive Summary**

Somerset Council's current highway maintenance programmes necessarily prioritise safety-critical works, which has meant that lower-priority but highly visible issues such as faded road markings, broken/deteriorated signs, and overgrown vegetation affecting footways/cycleways can remain unresolved for prolonged periods.

Communities have also expressed a desire for more frequent emptying of roadside gullies in areas most prone to flooding.

This report proposes the creation of a dedicated, time-limited programme of high-visibility additional highway maintenance that goes beyond the standard safety-led regime, with a Steering Group determining and flexing the precise programme of works to respond to emerging issues and public reporting.

### **Recommendations**

That Executive:

1. Approve £1m carry forward from the 2025/26 revenue budget. Combine it with the £1m allocated for 2026/27 to create a £2m budget to establish and mobilise a new programme of work overseen by a Steering Group to deliver additional, high-visibility highway maintenance activity.
2. Note that the wider ambition is to invest up to £5m over three years; and that funding beyond 2026/27 will be considered as part of future budget-setting processes.
3. Agree that the Steering Group will operate with a flexible programme approach, enabling resources to be directed quickly to priority locations/issues as determined by the Steering Group and informed by reporting, local intelligence and asset data.

## **Reasons for Proposals**

The proposed Steering Group and investment are intended to:

- Deliver visible improvements to Somerset's roads, pavements and cycleways that are not always addressed through the core safety-led programme.
- Respond to longstanding public concerns and rebuild confidence in local infrastructure through a high-profile programme.
- Improve the ability of residents to highlight issues for our teams to consider through enhancements to the Council's public reporting system, complementing a more flexible delivery model.

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## Main report and supporting information

### Background and purpose of report

1. Somerset Council's current highway maintenance programmes necessarily prioritise safety-critical works, which has meant that lower-priority but highly visible issues such as faded road markings, broken/deteriorated signs, and overgrown vegetation affecting footways/cycleways, can remain unresolved for prolonged periods.
2. Current gully emptying operates on a risk-based cycle (annual for high-risk, biennial for medium-risk, and quadrennial for low-risk areas). While efficient, this has led to public dissatisfaction regarding perceived infrequency of drain clearance.
3. The Council has announced an intention to spend up to £5m (subject to demonstrating financial stability) over the next 3 years to undertake additional maintenance. The aim is to deliver a range of visible improvements like clearing more drains and gullies, fixing and cleaning road signs, repainting faded road markings, collecting litter, and clearing overgrown vegetation, particularly near to walking and cycling routes.
4. The purpose of this report is to seek approval to allocate an initial £2m enable the establishment of the Steering Group and put in place the governance and delivery model needed to begin implementation.
5. A dedicated team from across the Council will lead planning, delivery and associated awareness raising of the initiative. Delivery partners include Somerset's existing highway contractor Kier who will undertake signing, lining and gully emptying activity; and the in-house Open Spaces Team who will undertake vegetation management and may also undertake other relevant work whilst operating in localities such as collecting litter.
6. Liaison will take place with other bodies such as city, town and parish councils to ensure there is no duplication with their work, and the teams will also be able to work with the community payback initiatives on certain types of work.
7. The programme will run for up to three years (2026/27 to 2028/29) with an emphasis on delivering high-impact interventions in year 1 sustained by further investment in the following years.
8. The following outcomes are expected to be delivered:
  - Enhanced Gully Emptying: One-year intensive clearance in areas vulnerable to '1 in 100-year' flood events (equating to approximately 65000 additional gullies in the 26/27 programme). Delivered by Kier.
  - Signs and Lines Renewal: Programme to refresh and replace signage and road markings across a significant proportion of A and B roads. Delivered by Kier.

- Vegetation Management: Programme targeting encroachment on urban walking and cycling routes in Somerset towns. Delivered by 4 dedicated open spaces teams (each comprising 4 operatives and 2 vehicles) working out of Wellington, Glastonbury, Yeovil and Bridgwater).
  - Other improvements to public spaces: The additional resource will be able to undertake certain other activities where this is not close to fast moving traffic such as litter picking and can work with community payback initiatives to undertake works such as painting, graffiti removal, underpass tidy ups.
  - Public Reporting Mechanism: Integration with the council's 'Report It' platform with referrals of relevant non-safety requests to the teams involved.
9. The detail of the work programmes will be agreed by the Steering Group, with different data underpinning that decision-making process, depending on the workstream, for example asset data, customer contact and local knowledge.

### **Links to Council Plan and Medium-Term Financial Plan**

10. The Council Plan 2023–2027 sets out the vision: “Somerset Council will build a fairer, greener, resilient, more flourishing Somerset that cares for the most vulnerable and listens to you”, and priorities including A Greener, More Sustainable Somerset and A Flourishing and Resilient Somerset.
11. This proposal supports delivery of those priorities by improving the quality and usability of the local highway network (roads, pavements, and cycleways), including works that enhance day-to-day journeys and the public realm.

### **Other options considered**

12. Various funding profiles have been considered, and the proposed allocation of £2m for 2026/27 is financially achievable now that the Council has set a balanced budget for 2026/27.

### **Key considerations for the Council**

#### **Scrutiny comments / recommendations:**

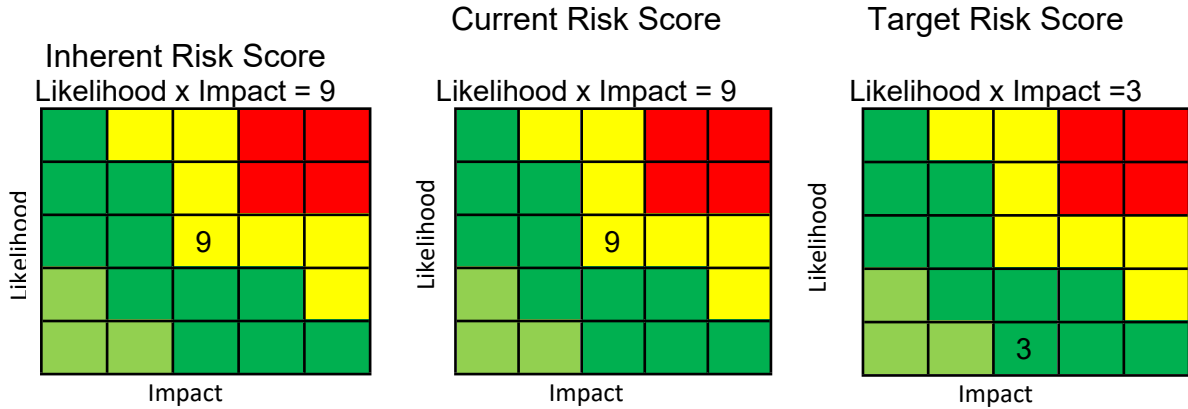
13. The proposal has not been considered by a scrutiny committee.

### **Consultation and feedback**

14. The proposal is based on a large amount of public feedback and dissatisfaction with the levels of service that can currently be achieved within current financial resources.

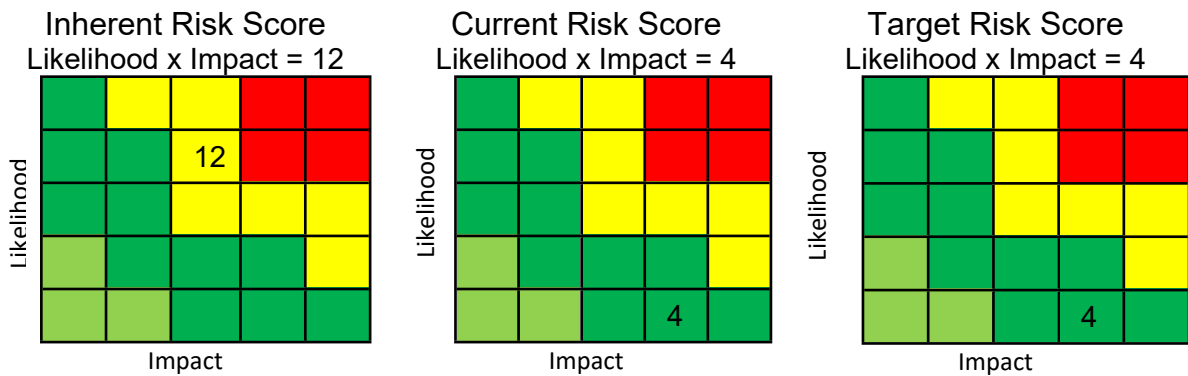
## Risk Implications

**Deliverability and capacity risk:** The approach relies on mobilising sufficient operational capacity to “hit” priority areas; resourcing constraints and the need for clear prioritisation were highlighted in delivery discussions.



Key existing mitigation & live actions: Will need to work closely with recruitment team to prioritise and streamline recruitment process for operatives.

**Health & safety / operational risk:** Some activities (e.g., highways litter on roads without a safe working zone) may be constrained without traffic management, which may affect what can be delivered quickly and safely.



Key existing mitigation & live actions: Good health and safety practice in place and will continue to train staff to ensure they do not attempt work in high-risk areas and provide appropriate training and induction regarding working methods and use of tools.

## Financial Implications

15. Within the existing revenue budget, there is a £1m annual provision, specific to delivering the Council’s priorities. This remains unspent with no allocation against this budget for the financial year 2025/26, and it is proposed this is carried forward into 2026/27, creating a budget provision of £2m.

16. Funding beyond 2026/27, up to the wider ambition of a total spend of £5m, will be subject to the Council's ability to demonstrate financial sustainability and will be considered as part of the 2027/28 MTFP budget setting

### **Legal Implications**

17. Existing highway contracts can accommodate the proposed additional works within their existing scope. Legal services note that this is purely a financial decision and therefore have no legal comments to add.

### **Procurement Implications**

18. This work will be delivered through existing contracts or an in-house workforce so there are no procurement requirements.

### **HR / Workforce Implications**

19. Four fixed-term Grounds Operatives will be recruited to assist the Open Spaces team with delivering the vegetation management programme over 2026/27.
20. The Steering Group referenced throughout the report are current staff assigned to work on these projects as part of business as usual. No additional staffing required to complete this work.
21. Support for Enhanced Gully Emptying and the Signs and Lines Renewal programmes, will be met by Kier and will not adversely impact Business as Usual type activity.

### **Equalities Implications**

22. Implications are positive in that the additional vegetation clearance work will improve access for older people and people with disabilities. Vegetation which may not have been a safety hazard but may have had a detrimental impact on accessibility will be able to be undertaken.
23. There could be a negative impact on accessible routes been obstructed due to safety barriers. Suitable alternative will be provided so disabled people are not at a disadvantage.

### **Community Safety Implications**

24. The works will improve visibility of signing and road markings and make relevant active travel routes more attractive to use.

### **Climate Change and Sustainability Implications**

25. The works will ensure active travel routes are kept more clear of vegetation with a positive impact on people's propensity to walk and cycle.

## Health and Safety Implications

26. The workforce will adopt appropriate health and safety practice in delivering the works.

## Health and Wellbeing Implications

27. The works will ensure active travel routes are kept more clear of vegetation, with a positive impact on people's propensity to walk and cycle.

## Social Value

28. Provides a further opportunity to link in with community payback schemes.

## Background Papers

29. None

## Appendices




- None

## Report assurance

	Officer Name	Date Completed
Legal Implications	Kehinde Awojobi	12/3/26
Finance & Procurement	Nicola Hix	20/3/26
Executive Director	Relevant Executive Director	12/3/26
Executive Lead Member	Relevant Lead Member	12/3/26
<b>Consulted:</b>	Councillor Name	
Local Division Members	List local members	
Opposition Spokesperson(s)	Relevant Opposition Spokesperson	Emailed 20/3/26
Relevant Scrutiny Chair(s)	Relevant Chair	Emailed 20/3/26

## Somerset Equality Impact Assessment

Before completing this EIA please ensure you have read the EIA guidance notes – available from your Equality Officer or [www.somerset.gov.uk/impactassessment](http://www.somerset.gov.uk/impactassessment)

<b>Organisation prepared for (mark as appropriate)</b>	 <b>Somerset</b> Council		 <b>NHS</b> <b>Somerset</b>		 <b>NHS</b> <b>Somerset</b> NHS Foundation Trust
<b>Version</b>	1	<b>Date Completed</b>	11/03/26		
<b>Description of what is being impact assessed</b>					
Proposal to allocate £2m to undertake additional vegetation clearance on footways and cycleways, to clear additional gullies and to implement additional road signs and lining.					
<b>Evidence</b>					
<b>What data/information have you used to assess how this policy/service might impact on protected groups?</b> Sources such as the <u>Office of National Statistics</u> , <u>Somerset Intelligence Partnership</u> , <u>Somerset’s Joint Strategic Needs Analysis (JSNA)</u> , Staff and/ or <u>area profiles</u> ,, should be detailed here					
Professional Judgement					
<b>Who have you consulted with to assess possible impact on protected groups and what have they told you? If you have not consulted other people, please explain why?</b>					
No consultation undertaken					

<b>Analysis of impact on protected groups</b>				
<p>The Public Sector Equality Duty requires us to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations with protected groups. Consider how this policy/service will achieve these aims. In the table below, using the evidence outlined above and your own understanding, detail what considerations and potential impacts against each of the three aims of the Public Sector Equality Duty. Based on this information, make an assessment of the likely outcome, before you have implemented any mitigation.</p>				
<b>Protected group</b>	<b>Summary of impact</b>	<b>Negative outcome</b>	<b>Neutral outcome</b>	<b>Positive outcome</b>
<b>Age</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provides additional vegetation clearance on walking routes, and improves legibility of signs and lines which may benefit older people.</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>Disability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provides additional vegetation clearance on walking routes, and improves legibility of signs and lines which may benefit people with poor mobility or eyesight.</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>Disability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accessible routes may be reduced due to safety barriers being installed.</li> </ul>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Gender reassignment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>None identified.</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

<b>Marriage and civil partnership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• None identified.</li></ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Pregnancy and maternity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• None identified.</li></ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Race and ethnicity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• None identified.</li></ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Religion or belief</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• None identified.</li></ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Sex</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• None identified.</li></ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Sexual orientation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• None identified.</li></ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

<b>Armed Forces (including serving personnel, families and veterans)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None identified.</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Other, e.g. carers, low income, rurality/isolation, etc.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None identified.</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Negative outcomes action plan**  
Where you have ascertained that there will potentially be negative outcomes, you are required to mitigate the impact of these. Please detail below the actions that you intend to take.

Action taken/to be taken	Date	Person responsible	How will it be monitored?	Action complete
Where accessibility routes are reduced suitable alternatives will be provided so disabled people and others reliant on these routes can travel unobstructed.	14/05/2026	Head of Steering Group	Through feedback from the public	<input type="checkbox"/>
Text	Select date	Text	Text	<input type="checkbox"/>
Text	Select date	Text	Text	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Text	Select date	Text	Text	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>If negative impacts remain, please provide an explanation below.</b>				
Not identified.				
<b>Completed by:</b>	Mike O'Dowd-Jones			
<b>Date</b>	11/03/26			
<b>Signed off by:</b>	Mike O'Dowd-Jones			
<b>Date</b>	11/03/26			
<b>Equality Lead sign off name:</b>	Tom Rutland			
<b>Equality Lead sign off date:</b>	12/03/26			
<b>To be reviewed by: (officer name)</b>	Mike O'Dowd-Jones			
<b>Review date:</b>	12/10/26			