

<b>TITLE</b>	<b>Advanced Signing During Road Flooding</b>
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 2 July 2014
<b>WARD</b>	All
<b>DIRECTOR</b>	Heather Thwaites, Director of Environment

**SUMMARY OF REPORT**

Corporate Service Overview and Scrutiny have raised the issue of advanced signing being made available during periods when roads are flooded. The highways and transport team follow a set process when roads are closed and attempt as best as possible to give early warning of road closures.

**Reason for the report.**

This matter was raised by the Committee during a review of issues for it to consider. It was suggested that an item be added relating to the recent flooding in the Borough. Members asked why advance warning signs were not displayed around the Borough during the recent bad weather to forewarn residents of the flooded areas. Some roads were closed due to flooding and residents had not been made adequately aware.

**Background**

The winter of 2013/14 was exceptionally wet and there were a number of flooding incidents across the Borough. As well as property flooding several roads were affected and a number of roads were closed to protect road users.

The highway authority has the power to erect barriers under section 287 of the Highways Act 1980 “for the purpose of securing public order or public safety” with the intention of prohibiting traffic. No notice is necessary in this instance nor notification of road users other than the signs associated with the barriers.

Similarly the police have powers granted under section 67 of the road traffic act 1984 to place signs on the highway prohibiting traffic.

The authority employs a contractor (Balfour Beatty Living Places) to undertake emergency works on the highway including implementing necessary closures. Some closures are instigated by the contractor working as a delegated authority to the highway authority without any direct involvement of officers. This is rare but can happen out of hours when there is no officer available to make a decision.

This approach has been implemented successfully for many years without any serious complaint from road users.

**Operational Issues**

When the highway authority erects barriers and signs to close a road in an emergency it will try to take in to account the following:-

Access to properties  
 Other social implications of the closure (schools, hospitals, etc)  
 Ability of vehicles to turn at the closure  
 Alternative routes  
 The likely variability of the hazard  
 The vulnerability of the signs and barriers

Signs are erected as close to the hazard as possible. This minimises the length of road affected. However signing also has to try to offer road users the chance to turn safely or use an alternative route. Flooded roads tend to be dynamic hazards and as such can be difficult to sign particularly when conditions change rapidly. Clearly if road closed signs are erected too far from a hazard then they will be widely ignored and will be seen to be ineffective in dissuading road users from trying to use a section of road deemed dangerous.

In addition to the signs immediately next to a hazard the highway authority will attempt to erect prior warning signs such as "road ahead closed". In the recent bad weather the highway authority hired a number of mobile matrix signs that could be programmed to give road users more information about likely road closures and subsequent delays. In addition the authority has invested in a number of static matrix signs that can also display this type of information.

Temporary closures are monitored by the contractor in order to repair or replace signs and remove signs and barriers when the hazard has been cleared.

The gang employed to carry out this work (generally out of normal working hours) is called upon to carry out numerous activities including responding to emergency call out for flooding, road traffic accidents, dangerous structures and roads, fallen trees and other hazards on the highway.

As well as signs on site the authority utilises text message alerts for all road closures where possible, publishes the information on its website and social media and informs local radio and media of the closures.

We do not specifically inform local residents directly affected as this would require a significant resource. The contractor is willing and able to provide this service but this will significantly increase the cost of the out of hours service. A very rough assessment of the service would require a doubling of the resource currently provided for the out of hours support resulting in an additional cost of approximately £100,000.

The highways and drainage teams have no records of complaints during the 2013/14 winter from residents relating to lack of information about road closures.

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