

Report from County Cllr Mary Evans

It was an honour last May to be re-elected as the County Councillor for Clare. I hugely appreciate the trust and confidence you have placed in me and will do my utmost to live up to it.

As you know, I always strive to be candid with you so you won't be surprised when I start this annual report by talking about highways – and more specifically potholes.

After a terrible winter of exceptional rainfall punctuated very sharp frosts, we have begun the permanent repair programme - as we do each year, once our crews have stopped their gritting work.

Suffolk has seen over 6,500 potholes repaired since 1 January 2018; with a further 950 scheduled over the next few weeks as county council continues its war on potholes.

Since the start of 2018, Suffolk Highways has received approximately 9,500 pothole reports from members of the public, some of which are duplicates. This is double the number received during the same period last year; demonstrating the impact that the severe winter has had on the county's road surface.

To give you an indication of how bad it has been we started gritting in early November and carried on until late March – our budget for the winter was £1.5m – we have spent £3m

Suffolk Highways has made some significant steps forward to deal with the high volume of reports. Additional gangs have been brought in to undertake pothole and road repairs across the county, different materials are being used and existing resources are being diverted to help deal with the backlog of reports.

Also, a new approach is being trialled where areas with particularly high volumes of reports are 'blitzed'. This means that inspectors are visiting areas with high concentrations of potholes, many of which are at varying degrees of severity, and ordering repairs for all defects as long as they meet Suffolk Highways' repairs criteria. They're then dealt with all at the same time.

Most of the work is then picked up in a co-ordinated approach, with gangs working their way through streets, rather than works being scheduled based on size and required response time. The exception to this is where the location of the defect means complex traffic management is required, such as busy roads or junctions.

The first area addressed was Haverhill where there were over 70 reports of potholes, which resulted in approximately 50 works being ordered.

Inspections and works have also been completed in Withersfield (40), Hundon (30), Newmarket (30) and Pakenham (30). Gangs are currently focused on completing work in Bury St Edmunds and the other locations are currently being scheduled for coming days and weeks.

On 5 March, Suffolk Highways also begun trialling a new approach using a machine called a 'Roadmender'. The Roadmender is a highways vehicle with an asphalt mixer on the back. It works by keeping the material at a consistent and ideal temperature for compaction and only uses the quantities needed, limiting any waste material. This is an alternative treatment technique and the results are currently being analysed.

This extra push to repair the high volume of potholes in the county is being assisted by the extra £2.5m from the government for potholes and a further £21 million funding which has been borrowed to surface dress a quarter of all roads managed by Suffolk Highways, by 2021. That's a 1000miles of our 4,000 mile network

Two other areas of the county's work about which I spoken to you in the past are our education and children's services

Since the launch of the council's Raising the Bar programme in 2012, Suffolk has risen 59 places in national rankings for GCSE attainment in English and Maths. 87% of schools in Suffolk are judged by Ofsted to be 'Good' or 'Outstanding'.

Our children's services were rated Good by Ofsted last November – it is a very thorough inspection – and puts us in the top 25%.

We have around 800 children in care – fostered, adopted in care homes or under supervision of social workers but living with their families. Our staff work extremely hard to ensure these children are safeguarded. It is a constant challenge to find foster homes.

We have some very troubled children we have to move out of the county for their safety and in some cases because we need to place them in secure accommodation – which can run to thousands of pounds a week.

New Chief Executive for Suffolk County Council

Nicola Beach has recently been appointed as Suffolk County Council's new Chief Executive.

Nicola, who is currently Executive Director of Infrastructure and Environment at Essex County Council, will take up her new role this month.