

Divisions Affected – ALL

PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE **4 February 2026**

Repairing of Defects and Superuser Report

Report by the Director of Environment and Highways

RECOMMENDATION

1. The Committee is RECOMMENDED to

Review the information from the officers' report and use as a basis for further discussion within the Scrutiny session planned for 4 February 2026.

Executive Summary

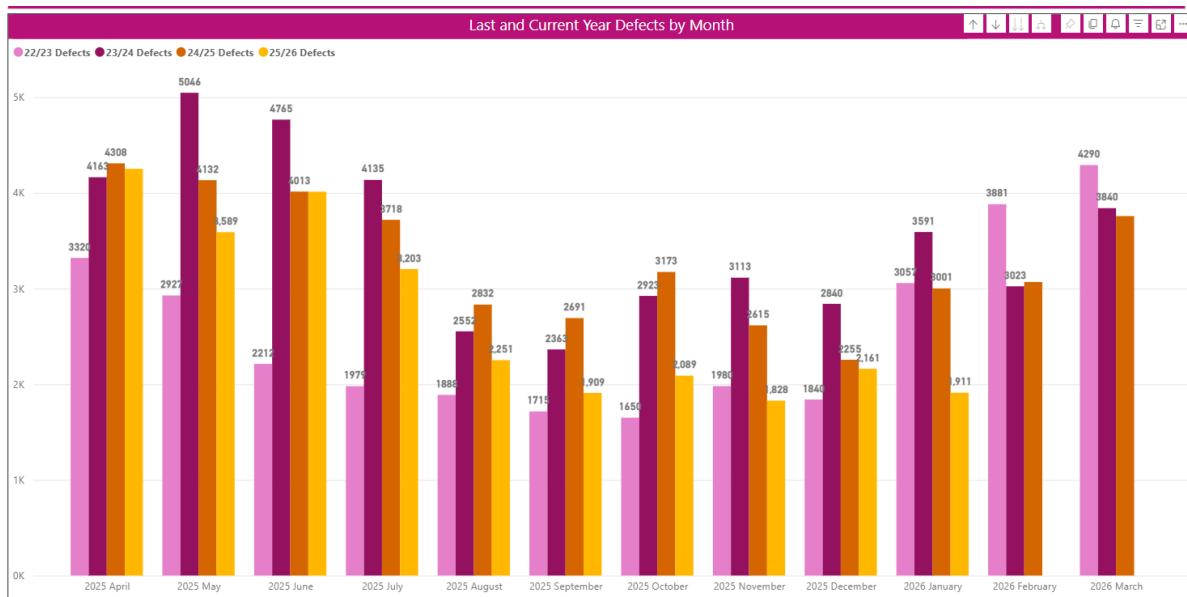
2. The purpose of this report is to outline the process involved in the repairing of defects in Oxfordshire, outline areas of challenge, benchmarking, and detail the Council's response to quality of repairs. It also explains prioritisation, repair processes, trend identification.

Background

3. Since 1 January 2025, Oxfordshire County Council (the Council) has raised over 41,000 highway defects and actioned, with approximately 25% originating from Fix My Street, (FMS) reports. At least 90% of defects are carriageway potholes instructed by Oxfordshire County Council Inspectors, Superusers, and Customer Service Teams. Where situations arise where a first-time fix is not possible, due to position in the highway or dealing with emergencies, temporary repairs are carried out, which will then be returned to facilitate a permanent repair. Around 2% of all pothole repairs are temporary – which means taking the approach of quickly sweeping out the hole and filling it, rather than cutting back to sound carriageway filling and sealing. The remaining being defects to kerbs, drainage, signs, overhanging trees, street furniture etc.

4. The Council's highway maintenance services are delivered in partnership through M Group, who operate a mixed delivery model comprising both direct labour crews and approved subcontractors. All defect repairs are carried out in accordance with the Council's Highway Safety Inspection Policy and associated standards.

5. The following table shows the current and previous 3 years defect in numbers. Total for complete months repairs from April to December 2025, 25293 repairs were undertaken compared with 29737 for the same period last year.



6. As part of the services continuous improvement programme, a joint Project Improvement Team (PIT) team was established
7. The PIT initiative focuses on identifying efficiencies and solutions for key issues such as duplicate system information, correct price list allocation, minimising and ideally removing abortive visits, ensuring suitable traffic management and clarity responsibilities, defect coding accuracy, improved insurance claim resolution (red & green), and asset & cost data management.

Project Improvement Team (PIT)

8. The PIT followed a structured approach with a set of clear objectives. The PIT was represented by both County Council and M Group operational, commercial and contractual staff. Three workshops between June and September 2025 had taken place to identify and deliver efficiencies to the current road safety defect process that can be gained from reviewing the new end-to-end process.
 - a. Systems & Process issues: System & process issues resulted in some duplicate defect requests (there are several teams and routes for raising works), the quality of works instruction was found to vary, defects sometimes being prematurely closed on system without being completed, fix-my-street enquiry response not always clear (note wider management of FMS is a separate project outside of PIT)..
 - b. Quality issues: Concerns over adherence to OCCs specification requirement, defect data recording including quality of photos logged, lack of consistency and quality of service for find-and-fix initiative, confidence in the level of works inspection carried out by OCC.
7. Thirty-six specific actions were identified, with twenty-two having been completed (14 still to be completed but are in the final stages), including improvements in defect completion coding, guidance on materials and its lead times, find-and-fix

and adherence to agreed permanent repair benchmarks, insurance claim processes, quality inspections, and handling of large defects.

8. The success factors of the PIT joint leadership from both the County and M Group, maintaining clear scope, involving key stakeholders, fostering collaboration with shared values, data-driven problem understanding, realistic timelines, and the importance of in-person sessions. A closedown workshop was undertaken in December 2025, with a view that a second phase of the review be carried out to focus on the remaining actions which is now underway.
9. Benefits from these operational improvements are now being recognised as most repairs are now being delivered to the new benchmarking for defect repairs and seeing a reduced rate of failure. These continued to be jointly monitored so that the improvements made remain effective.

Repair Delivery and Quality Assurance

10. The Council's highway maintenance services are delivered in partnership with MGroup, who operate a mixed delivery model comprising both direct labour crews and approved subcontractors. All defect repairs are carried out in accordance with the Council's Highway Safety Inspection Policy and associated standards.
11. The specification as set out in the contract coupled with national guidance sets out the benchmark for defect repairs that all work is required to follow.
12. On occasion, it is reasonable and accepted that it may not be possible to achieve a permanent repair, in this situation, temporary repairs may be required to be carried out – this is treated as an exceptional circumstance. These may be where the area around the repair area is in poor condition and to break back to solid material would be impractical, area unsafe, or area is subject to future programmed improvement works. Temporary obstructions are an issue that may trigger a temporary repair, such as parked vehicles or adverse weather conditions. The nature of the road is also a factor, if carrying out a permanent repair means extensive disruption or full TM required, then a temporary fix may be carried out until suitable planning for a permanent repair can be undertaken.
13. M Group plays a critical role in identifying and addressing further defects while on site. We have an initiative called "**find and fix**" whereby crews are empowered to repair additional issues not originally specified in the initial instruction. As these repairs are documented, including with before-and-after photographs and uploaded to our internal systems, we have suitable controls in place for audit and quality assurance.
14. To ensure the quality and consistency of repairs, the Council conducts post-completion inspections on 20% of all works, this is an increase to the 10% that has previously been carried out. These inspections are selected randomly and are designed to assess both the completeness and workmanship of the repair. Where a repair is found to be substandard or incomplete, it is recorded as a non-compliant defect, requiring rectification at no additional cost to the authority. Any ad hoc

reports of non-conformance are also followed through, which are in addition to the 20%.

15. This process offers a structured opportunity for both the council and MGroup to review, challenge, and evaluate the methods and materials used at each location of concern. It also supports continuous improvement by identifying trends in poor practice and ensuring corrective actions are implemented
16. Recurring issues or poor performance can lead to financial adjustments to the overall contract value and may negatively impact the contractor's Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). This performance-linked approach ensures accountability and reinforces the Council's commitment to delivering high-quality, safe, and cost-effective highway maintenance services.
17. In line with our commitment to value for money and long-term asset resilience, Highway Officers have the authority to escalate sections of carriageway for future surface treatment consideration. These referrals are assessed by our Highway Schemes Team for inclusion in planned maintenance programs

Outstanding Repairs

18. As of 18 January 2025, we are behind in the completion of defect repairs, with 875 currently outside of the 28day repair period target for category 2 defects, this is 35% of 2,500 being processed. To confirm all category 1A (2hr) and category 1B (24hr) have and are being completed on. One major factor causing this delay is the below-freezing weather that started in early December, which has led to the formation of new potholes due to freeze/thaw cycles affecting the entire county simultaneously – the consequence and subsequent surface breakdown is not immediate hence the lag.
19. This widespread phenomenon is putting pressure on both our scheduled inspections and ad hoc ones in response to public enquires. Demand for defect repairs does vary across the season and MGroup have faced resource challenges in securing the extra resource this year due to significant national demand being seen. Furthermore, a significant portion of the outstanding defects are larger in nature and requires specialist use of Bobcat and other equipment for repairs.
20. Although we have seen notable improvements in repair quality with this strategy, it has resulted in fewer repairs being completed per day by both Bobcat and pothole teams.
21. To reduce the number of repairs outstanding, the council and M Group are employing more sub-contractors, redirecting the dragon patcher to tackle safety defects full time, and retaining the Bobcat crews for larger defect repairs rather than scheduled maintenance.

Volunteers - Superusers

22. A key and vital support for the service is Superusers an initiative under Oxfordshire together. The Council has expanded its network of trained local volunteers, known

as 'Super Users'. These individuals play a vital role in inspecting, escalating priority issues, such as potholes and drainage concerns, and placing instructions directly with M Group.

23. By leveraging their local knowledge, Super Users help to identify defects that meet intervention criteria and facilitate faster repairs. Additionally, they serve as a conduit between residents and the Council, ensuring that community concerns are effectively communicated and addressed

24. The Super User (SU) role was set up as part of the Oxfordshire Together (OxToG) programme in 2018/19. The scheme provides several volunteer initiatives each described within a one page 'How to Guide'. These guides provide a brief outline of the different activities.

25. The SU function is a well-received initiative, reinforcing the success of scheme working with the communities with over 230 signed up volunteers. They play a pivotal role supporting their local communities across the county. Of this number, over the last year approximately 180 have been active in raising reports (aprx 78%)

26. The success is also evident in the number of defect orders that have been actively reported. Since January 25 of last year, 3,167 have been raised by the SUs, helping to identify and resolve issues more quickly.

27. Additionally, they have supported by completing numerous out of scope reports and provide an essential role as the local eyes and ears.

28. Super Users are trained to raise works orders for CAT2 (28 day) defects on:

- Unclassified and 'B' roads, with pavements and a speed limit of 30mph or less
- Specifically approved 'A' roads with pavements and a 20mph speed limit.
- Footways (pavements) and segregated cycleways which run alongside the above roads

The categories include:

- Potholes – up to 5m² (mini 150 x150mm and 40mm deep)
- Paving - up to 5m² (mini 150 x150mm and 20mm deep)
- Kerbing – up to 5m long
- Drains/Gullies – emptying/cleaning

Training consists of 2 main parts:

Part1 - An online presentation (approx.1hr) with question/answer session - outlining the job role/scope, H&S and a live demonstration of the reporting system.

Part2 - An in-person visit (approx. 1-2hrs) in the volunteer's town/parish. This will involve the provision of PPE and reporting of a live defect repair order. In addition there are follow up training sessions and support through a monthly newsletter.

Financial

29. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.
30. Maintenance funded from the Highway Operations revenue budget; costs vary with weather and growth rates. Typical expenditure to fund road safety defect repair can range between £3.1 to £4.2m each year. Any fluctuations in the spend versus budget allocation is managed from within the service budget.
31. Comments checked by Filipp Skiffins Finance Business Partner, filipp.skiffins@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Legal

32. The activities described above comply with the highway authority's rights and duties under Highways Act 1980 and associated policies such as The Highway Safety Inspection Policy.
33. The use of Fix My Street and MGroup and other third parties such as the Super Users is lawful under the general power of competence in Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011.
34. Comments checked by Jennifer Crouch, Principal Solicitor, jennifer.crouch@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Staff

35. Managed within existing resources.

Equality and Sustainability

36. This was assessed at the time of the Highway Asset Management Plan and specific policies adoption stage. There is no specific impact arising from this report.

Paul Fermer
Director of Environment and Highways

Key Contact Officers
Sean Rooney – Head of Highway Maintenance & Road Safety.
Andrew Vidovic – Team Leader – Inspections
Nigel Clark – Team Leader – Volunteer Coordination

January 2026

Annex:<https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/transport-and-travel/transport-policies-and-plans/highway-maintenance>