

MEETING	Communities Scrutiny Committee
DATE	1 October 2026
TITLE	Emergency Road Closures
REASON FOR SCRUTINY	Ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place for the management and co-ordination of road closures in urgent and emergency circumstances.
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1. Why does it need to be scrutinized?

Road closures associated with urgent and emergency works are a cause of public concern, and it is important that roles, responsibilities and communication arrangements are clearly understood.

2. What exactly needs to be scrutinized?

The effectiveness of the Council's arrangements for coordinating, monitoring and communicating urgent and emergency works.

3. Summary and Key Issues

The report outlines the responsibilities of statutory undertakers and the Council, the distinction between urgent and emergency works, road closure arrangements, communication arrangements and lessons for the future.

4. Background / Context

4.1. INTRODUCTION

4.1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide background information and clarification on the way in which street works are managed and coordinated across Gwynedd on the county highway network?. These activities operate within a national legislative framework, principally the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991 and the Traffic Management Act 2004, together with relevant national codes of practice and guidance. This framework establishes the rights and responsibilities of statutory undertakers and defines the Council's role in coordinating and monitoring activities across the highway network.

4.1.2 Although this report refers to street works in general, its primary focus is on the arrangements relating to road closures and traffic restrictions associated with urgent and emergency works. Due to their nature and the limited notice typically available, these situations often have the most direct impact on road users, local communities and public services.

4.1.3 Urgent and emergency works present unique challenges, as action is often required at short notice and the exact nature of the problem, together with the full extent of the work required, is not always clear to statutory undertakers (for example, utility companies) at the outset. In many cases, the location of a defect or the extent of the repair required cannot be confirmed until excavation works

have commenced. As the works progress, new information may emerge that requires changes to the working method or traffic management arrangements in order to maintain safety and complete the works effectively.

- 4.1.4 As a result, traffic management arrangements, the duration of works and diversion routes may change as the works progress. This may mean that traffic management measures need to be upgraded, access arrangements revised or road closures extended in order to maintain the safety of both the workforce and road users.
- 4.1.5 Road closures associated with urgent and emergency works often cause concern and frustration for residents, businesses and road users. However, in many cases these arrangements are necessary to protect the public, make a site safe or restore an essential service as quickly as possible.
- 4.1.6 This report explains the Council's role in coordinating, monitoring and, where appropriate, challenging arrangements, as well as the responsibilities of statutory undertakers, including water, gas, electricity and telecommunications companies, when carrying out works on the public highway.
- 4.1.7 The aim of this report is to provide a clear understanding of the challenges associated with managing urgent and emergency works, the balance that must be struck between safety and disruption, and the steps taken by the Council to minimise the impact on local communities and the highway network as far as is reasonably practicable.

4.2 OVERVIEW OF STREETWORKS

- 4.2.1 Street works refer to works carried out on, above or below the public highway by statutory undertakers and other bodies responsible for the provision and maintenance of essential services.
- 4.2.2 These works may include the installation, maintenance, repair or renewal of infrastructure associated with services such as electricity, gas, water, sewerage and telecommunications.
- 4.2.3 Many street works are planned in advance and coordinated by the Council's Street Works Service in order to minimise disruption to road users and local communities. However, some works may arise unexpectedly as a result of infrastructure failures or damage, such as a burst water main, a power outage, an accident, or damage to utility apparatus that could pose a risk to public safety.
- 4.2.4 In such circumstances, the undertaker may need to take urgent action to protect the public, prevent further damage to infrastructure or restore an essential service as quickly as possible.

4.3 OVERVIEW OF THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE COUNCIL AND STATUTORY UNDERTAKERS

- 4.3.1 It is important to understand the distinction between the role of the Council and that of statutory undertakers, such as water, gas, electricity and telecommunications companies.
- 4.3.2 These undertakers have statutory rights to install, maintain, repair and renew their apparatus within the public highway. As a result, the Council cannot prevent such works from being undertaken, nor can it require undertakers to obtain permission from the Council before commencing works.

4.3.3 This is particularly relevant in relation to urgent and emergency works. Where a defect or issue affects an essential service, an undertaker may need to commence works at short notice in order to protect the public or restore the service as quickly as possible.

4.3.4 The undertaker is responsible for ensuring that works are carried out safely and that appropriate traffic management arrangements are in place throughout the duration of the works. Undertakers are also responsible for minimising disruption to road users wherever reasonably practicable. In practice, most undertakers work in partnership with specialist traffic management contractors who possess the necessary expertise and qualifications to assess risks and design suitable traffic management arrangements. These arrangements may range from temporary signage and traffic signals to full road closures, depending on the nature, location and associated risks of the works being undertaken.

4.3.5 Whilst the Council cannot prevent statutory works from being carried out, it has an important role in coordinating and monitoring activities across the county highway network, including the sharing of information and communication with stakeholders. The Council monitors compliance with the relevant legislative and operational requirements, undertakes inspections of works sites and may take action where required standards are not met.

As part of the coordination process, the Council also works closely with undertakers to plan works in advance in order to minimise disruption across the network. This may include requesting that planned works are rescheduled to avoid conflicts with other activities in the same area, reduce impacts on local events, or take advantage of quieter periods when traffic flows are lower. In some cases, the Council may also ask undertakers to consider alternative working hours, such as evening or overnight working, or other arrangements to minimise disruption to road users and local communities.

4.3.6 Undertakers also have a duty to cooperate with the Council by providing information regarding their works and submitting the necessary notices as early as possible.

4.3.7 In simple terms, responsibility for planning, managing and delivering works safely rests with the undertaker, whilst the Council's role is focused on coordinating and monitoring activities, ensuring compliance with relevant requirements, and communicating updates to elected members, stakeholders and the wider public.

4.4 FURTHER INFORMATION ON THE ROLE OF THE COUNCIL

4.4.1 Cyngor Gwynedd acts as the Highway Authority and is responsible for coordinating street works and using the powers available to minimise disruption to road users, residents and businesses as far as is reasonably practicable.

It is important to note that Gwynedd Council is only responsible for county and local roads. The trunk roads within Gwynedd, namely the **A55, A5, A487, A470 and A494**, are managed separately by the Welsh Government.

4.4.2 As part of its coordinating role, the Council works with statutory undertakers to identify opportunities to minimise the impact of works on local communities. This includes considering whether a full road closure is necessary or whether alternative traffic management arrangements could be implemented.

- 4.4.3 The Council will challenge the need for a full road closure and request that the undertaker review its proposals in order to reduce the duration of the works. This may include asking contractors to extend working hours, deploy additional resources on site, or undertake works during weekends in order to minimise disruption to the public, particularly in traffic-sensitive locations.
- 4.4.4 However, an appropriate balance must be maintained between minimising disruption and protecting the safety of those working on the highway. It is the responsibility of the undertaker to assess the risks associated with the works and design the necessary traffic management arrangements to protect its workforce, road users and the wider public. Safety should not be compromised in order to reduce inconvenience. Nevertheless, undertakers are expected to justify the arrangements they propose and demonstrate that they are proportionate to the nature and scale of the works.
- 4.4.5 It is also important to recognise that the full extent of some works is not always known until excavation has commenced. In many cases, it is difficult to determine the precise location or extent of a defect within underground apparatus until investigative works have begun. As a result, circumstances may change as works progress. For example, works initially expected to be confined to the edge of the carriageway may extend towards the centre of the road, meaning that the original traffic management arrangements are no longer suitable. In such circumstances, traffic management measures may need to be upgraded from temporary traffic signals to a full road closure in order to maintain appropriate safety standards for both the workforce and road users.
- 4.4.6 Whilst such changes can understandably cause frustration, they often reflect new information that emerges during the course of the works. In these situations, the Council works closely with the undertaker to ensure that any additional restrictions are proportionate to the risks involved and that disruption is kept to a minimum for as short a period as possible.
- 4.4.7 Although resources are limited, with three Street Works Inspectors covering the whole of Gwynedd, every effort is made to monitor works across the network. Given the size of the county and the number of active sites at any one time, it is not possible for inspectors to be present at every location. Priority is therefore given to works that have the greatest impact on the public, particularly urgent and emergency works that result in the closure of key routes or cause significant disruption to the highway network.
- 4.4.8 The presence of inspectors at such sites enables the Council to monitor progress, challenge arrangements where necessary and ensure that accurate and up-to-date information is available. This is particularly important in supporting the Street Works Coordinators, who regularly receive enquiries from elected members, town and community councils, emergency services and members of the public regarding the status and progress of street works across the county.
- 4.4.9 Whilst the Council does not have the power to prevent statutory works, or urgent and emergency works undertaken in accordance with the legal rights of statutory undertakers, it nevertheless has an important role in providing constructive challenge, coordinating activities and seeking to ensure that the impact of works on the highway network and local communities is minimised as far as reasonably practicable.

4.5 URGENT AND EMERGENCY WORKS

- 4.5.1 It is important to distinguish between urgent and emergency works, as each is treated differently under street works legislation.
- 4.5.2 Emergency works are works that must commence immediately due to a serious risk to people or property, or to prevent a significant interruption to an essential service. Examples include a burst water main, a gas leak, a dangerous electrical cable, or circumstances where a significant number of customers are without an essential service. This can be particularly important where vulnerable individuals are affected, such as older people, individuals with medical conditions, or customers registered on a Priority Services Register who depend on a continuous supply of water, gas or electricity. In such cases, the need to restore the service as quickly as possible is a key factor in determining that the works constitute emergency works.
- 4.5.3 Urgent works, on the other hand, are works that require prompt attention but do not meet the threshold of an immediate emergency. For example, the identification of a defect in apparatus that could result in a service failure if left unattended may be classified as urgent works. In such cases, the undertaker will normally provide the Council with short notice before works commence, although the level of immediate response required is not generally the same as in an emergency situation.
- 4.5.4 In practice, both types of work can have a significant impact on the highway network and local communities. However, emergency works often provide less opportunity for advance planning, consultation on traffic management arrangements, or prior notification to the public. As a result, decisions frequently need to be made and implemented at very short notice.
- 4.5.5 The Council works with undertakers in both circumstances to minimise disruption to road users as far as is reasonably practicable. However, where an emergency situation affects public safety or the continuity of an essential service, priority must be given to resolving the issue and ensuring safety before considerations of convenience or disruption to the highway network can be addressed.

4.6 URGENT, EMERGENCY WORKS AND ROAD CLOSURES

- 4.6.1 Planned works provide an opportunity for the Council and the undertaker to discuss arrangements in advance, consider the potential impact on the highway network and provide information to the public before works commence.
- 4.6.2 Where planned works require a road closure, a formal statutory process is followed. This includes prior consultation with relevant stakeholders such as the emergency services, public transport operators, education transport providers, waste collection services, local members, town and community councils, and others who may be affected by the works. This process allows comments to be considered and advance notice to be provided to the public.
- 4.6.3 Where a road closure is required as part of urgent or emergency works, the same formal consultation process that applies to planned works cannot be undertaken in advance. The priority is to protect public safety and restore essential services as quickly as possible. Nevertheless, once the Council becomes aware of the situation, every effort is made to inform relevant stakeholders at the earliest opportunity and provide information regarding the works, diversion routes and anticipated progress.

- 4.6.4 During such situations, the Council works closely with the undertaker to monitor progress, challenge arrangements where appropriate and seek to minimise the impact on local communities. However, responsibility for determining the method of working, assessing risks and providing appropriate traffic management arrangements rests with the undertaker.
- 4.6.5 For this reason, urgent and emergency works can present particular challenges for the Council, road users and local communities. Whilst every effort is made to provide timely information and minimise disruption, circumstances can change rapidly as works progress and additional information becomes available. In such cases, a balance must be struck between restoring an essential service or protecting public safety as quickly as possible, and minimising the impact on the community and the highway network.
- 4.6.6 Any works carried out on the highway, including urgent and emergency works, must comply with the *Safety at Street Works and Road Works Code of Practice* and the relevant requirements of Chapter 8 of the *Traffic Signs Manual*. Responsibility for compliance rests with the undertaker and its traffic management contractor. The Council's role includes inspecting sites, monitoring compliance, challenging arrangements where appropriate and taking action where there is evidence that required standards are not being met.
- 4.6.7 Where an urgent or emergency situation arises, it is the responsibility of the statutory undertaker to assess the circumstances, evaluate the risks to the public and workforce, and determine the most appropriate method of working. When considering whether a road closure is required, factors such as the nature of the defect, the location of the works, carriageway width, visibility, safety considerations, alternative traffic management options and the need to restore essential services as quickly as possible are taken into account.
- 4.6.8 Urgent and emergency works can arise at any time and in any location. In some circumstances, this may affect traffic-sensitive routes or communities where alternative routes are limited. As a result, traffic management arrangements may be required that have a significant impact on road users, including diversion routes that are longer than would normally be desirable.

In such circumstances, undertakers and their contractors are expected to give full consideration to the impact of the works on local communities, road users and local services. However, any arrangements implemented must first and foremost ensure the safety of the public, road users and the workforce on site.

As part of its coordinating role, the Council will discuss and challenge proposed arrangements where appropriate to ensure that the impact on communities and the highway network is minimised as far as reasonably practicable.

Recent experience has highlighted the practical challenges that can arise in such circumstances. For example, during an emergency incident near Barmouth where electricity supplies to properties needed to be restored as quickly as possible, traffic management arrangements had to be introduced on a network that was already affected by other works in the area. Once the Council was notified of the situation, experienced officers attended the site to monitor progress, discuss arrangements with the undertaker and seek to ensure that up-to-date information was shared with

stakeholders as soon as practicable. As is often the case during emergency situations, the circumstances evolved as further information became available, creating challenges in providing timely and consistent updates.

- 4.6.9 Where it is safe and reasonably practicable to do so, access to properties, businesses and community facilities should be maintained. Consideration should also be given to pedestrians, disabled users, vulnerable individuals and the emergency services.

4.7 COMMUNICATION AND TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT

- 4.7.1 Where road closures or traffic restrictions are required, it is important that the arrangements are as clear, safe and effective as possible.
- 4.7.2 This includes ensuring that signs are positioned in appropriate locations, are easy to understand, and that diversion routes, where applicable, are clearly signed to assist road users in planning their journeys.
- 4.7.3 However, traffic management involves much more than the provision of signage alone. Consideration must be given to the needs of residents, local businesses, pedestrians, cyclists, vulnerable individuals, emergency services, and public and education transport providers. Where safe and reasonably practicable, efforts should also be made to maintain access to properties, businesses, schools and community facilities.
- 4.7.4 Responsibility for providing, maintaining and amending traffic management arrangements associated with the works rests with the undertaker.
- 4.7.5 Whilst the Council is not responsible for designing traffic management arrangements, it has an important role in reviewing and challenging them where appropriate. For example, the Council may request that signage is repositioned, information is made clearer, or diversion routes are amended to better reflect local circumstances. This can be particularly important in rural areas and communities where access to services and properties depends upon a limited number of routes.
- 4.7.6 Diversion routes can sometimes appear lengthy. This is because consideration must be given to both the safety and suitability of alternative roads to accommodate additional traffic. In most cases, traffic is diverted along routes of a similar standard to the road that has been closed. Whilst local residents may be aware of shorter alternatives, official diversion routes must be suitable for all road users, including heavy goods vehicles and motorists unfamiliar with the area.
- 4.7.7 The Council also works closely with undertakers to ensure that up-to-date information is shared with relevant stakeholders, including emergency services, public transport operators, schools, waste collection services, local members, and town and community councils.
- 4.7.8 Where traffic management arrangements change, it is important that both onsite signage and information provided to the public are updated as quickly as possible. However, this can be particularly challenging during urgent and emergency works, where circumstances may change from day to day, or even hour to hour.

4.7.9 As noted previously, works may begin with relatively straightforward traffic management arrangements but, as excavation progresses, it may become apparent that the defect is more extensive or complex than originally anticipated. In such circumstances, traffic management arrangements may need to be revised, diversion routes amended, or the duration of a road closure extended. This can create challenges in ensuring that all stakeholders, including local members and the public, receive the latest information at the earliest opportunity.

Fortunately, modern technology and communication channels provide greater opportunities than ever before to share information quickly. The Council and statutory undertakers utilise social media, websites and other communication platforms to provide regular updates on the progress of works, changes to traffic management arrangements and anticipated timescales.

4.7.10 Effective communication between the undertaker, the Council and key stakeholders is therefore a fundamental element of the management of street works. Whilst the undertaker is responsible for traffic management arrangements, the Council uses its local knowledge and coordinating role to help ensure that arrangements and information provided to the public are clear, appropriate and proportionate. The aim is to minimise disruption to local communities whilst maintaining high standards of safety for both the workforce and road users.

However, achieving this can be challenging during urgent and emergency situations where circumstances develop rapidly. As new information becomes available, programme dates, traffic management arrangements and anticipated completion dates may need to be revised. In the past, this has occasionally resulted in different messages being issued at different stages of a scheme, leading to confusion or uncertainty amongst stakeholders and members of the public.

The Council and statutory undertakers recognise this challenge and continue to work collaboratively to improve communication and information-sharing arrangements. This includes strengthening the flow of information between works sites and office-based teams, making greater use of digital communication channels, and seeking to provide consistent and timely updates throughout the duration of works. Whilst it may not always be possible to avoid changes in rapidly evolving situations, the aim is to ensure that the public receives the most accurate and up-to-date information available at any given time.

4.8 CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

4.8.1 Experience gained over a number of years has demonstrated that urgent and emergency works can place significant pressure on the normal arrangements for traffic management, communication and the coordination of activities across the highway network.

4.8.2 Whilst many of these challenges are unavoidable due to the nature of the works, each incident provides an opportunity to review existing arrangements and identify areas for improvement. This is particularly relevant where incidents result in prolonged road closures or have a significant impact on local communities.

4.8.3 It is important to recognise that no urgent or emergency incident is ever likely to be managed perfectly. Decisions often need to be made quickly, based on incomplete information and within

circumstances that can change rapidly as works progress. In such situations, challenges relating to traffic management, communication and meeting public expectations are inevitable.

- 4.8.4 It is also important to acknowledge that the Council operates within limited resources and with a relatively small team. Despite this, every effort is made to attend and monitor sites that have the greatest impact on the highway network, particularly where urgent or emergency works result in the closure of key routes or significant disruption to local communities.
- 4.8.5 Local Members often play an important role in highlighting local impacts, sharing information with communities and identifying practical issues that may not be immediately apparent to organisations operating across a wider geographical area.
- 4.8.6 It must also be recognised that officers cannot be present everywhere at the same time. Should multiple urgent or emergency incidents occur simultaneously across Gwynedd, the Council must prioritise those locations that pose the greatest risk to public safety or have the most significant impact on the highway network.
- 4.8.7 Previous experience has also highlighted the importance of clear, timely and consistent communication. During major incidents, information can change rapidly as further details emerge. This can occasionally result in different messages being communicated at different times by different organisations or stakeholders. Whilst this often reflects the evolving nature of the situation rather than any error, it can lead to confusion and frustration amongst members of the public. Consequently, the Council continues to work with its partners to strengthen communication arrangements, improve information sharing and ensure that messages are as accurate, consistent and up to date as possible.
- 4.8.8 Whilst it will never be possible to eliminate all disruption or avoid every challenge associated with urgent and emergency works, the aim is to learn from each incident and continually improve. By working closely with statutory undertakers, public service providers, local members and communities, the Council seeks to ensure that future incidents are managed as effectively as possible, balancing the needs of local communities with the need to protect public safety and restore essential services.
- 4.8.9 The timing of urgent and emergency incidents can also influence the speed of response and the availability of information. Where incidents occur outside normal working hours, during weekends or over public holidays, it may take longer to gather information and engage with relevant stakeholders. Nevertheless, every effort is made to provide updates and support as quickly as reasonably practicable.

4.9 CONCLUSION

- 4.9.1 Street works are an essential part of maintaining and improving the services upon which residents, businesses and public organisations rely on a daily basis. Whilst these works are necessary, some disruption is inevitable from time to time, particularly where urgent or emergency works require traffic restrictions or road closures to be introduced at short notice.

- 4.9.2 This report has highlighted that statutory undertakers have specific legal rights to carry out works within the public highway. However, they also have responsibilities to plan and undertake those works safely, provide appropriate traffic management arrangements and work collaboratively with the Council and other relevant stakeholders.
- 4.9.3 Whilst the Council cannot prevent statutory works from being undertaken, it plays an important role in coordinating activities, monitoring sites, challenging arrangements where appropriate and seeking to minimise the impact on local communities and road users.
- 4.9.4 It is also important to recognise that urgent and emergency situations are rarely straightforward. Decisions often need to be made quickly, based on incomplete information and within circumstances that can change significantly as works progress. As a result, no such incident is likely to be managed perfectly, and challenges relating to communication, traffic management and public expectations are, despite best efforts, sometimes unavoidable.
- 4.9.5 Despite these challenges, the Council continues to make every effort, within the resources available, to fulfil its coordination and monitoring responsibilities effectively. This includes working closely with statutory undertakers, emergency services, public transport providers, local members, town and community councils, and other stakeholders to ensure that information is shared effectively and that the impact of street works is minimised wherever reasonably practicable.
- 4.9.6 Experience gained from urgent and emergency situations has provided valuable lessons and opportunities to review existing arrangements. By building upon those experiences, strengthening communication processes and continuing to work closely with partners, the Council can further improve the management of similar incidents in the future.
- 4.9.7 Ultimately, the aim is to strike an appropriate balance between the following equally important objectives:
- protecting public safety and maintaining essential services,
 - minimising the impact on local communities, businesses and road users.

Although this balance is not always easy to achieve, it remains central to the Council's approach to managing street works across Gwynedd. Whilst every decision may not satisfy all parties, the Council will continue to use the powers, local knowledge and resources available to it to ensure that urgent and emergency works are managed as safely, effectively and proportionately as possible.

5. Consultation

The report has been prepared by the Environment Department taking into account recent operational experiences and ongoing discussions with statutory undertakers and relevant stakeholders.

6. Well-being of Future Generations Act

The arrangements promote collaboration, prevent problems where possible, and ensure that the needs of communities and road users are taken into account in decision-making.

7. Impact on Equality, the Welsh Language and Socio-Economic Duty

The report recognises the need to consider vulnerable people, access to services and the communication of information bilingually.

8. Next Steps

Consider the comments of the Scrutiny Committee and continue to strengthen communication, co-ordination and monitoring arrangements in relation to urgent and emergency work.