

Date: 13th February 2024

Contact: [REDACTED]

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PE28 4YE

Caroline Jones
Assistant Coroner
for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough
HM Coroner's Office

Dear Ms Jones,

REGULATION 28 REPORT – RESPONSE

I write in response to the Regulation 28 Report to Prevent Future Deaths, dated 20 December 2023, which followed the Inquest into the death of Joanne Constable. This letter details Cambridgeshire County Council's response to the matters of concern that were raised, as listed below:

1. *"In the course of evidence from the local authority's highway maintenance manager, I heard concerning testimony as the apparent lack of systems and processes in place to record complaints or reports of hazards or defects with the highway. Consequently, there seemed to be no way of identifying which reports had been actioned or inspected and even when the system indicated that an inspection had taken place and led to a recommendation for work to be carried out within a statutory timeframe, there was no information available on the system to show if or when any work was carried out, much less to what specification."*
2. *"On the evidence I heard, the circumstances prevailing at the entrance to Bypass Field onto the A141 Isle of Ely Way are replicated at many points across the county and therefore, should those with a statutory responsibility to maintain the highways, including verges, at public cost be unaware of the status of reported hazards or defects, there is a clear risk of future deaths occurring due to those with the responsibility not taking steps to remedy the problem and more fatal road traffic collisions occurring."*

The County Council has considered with care the issues that you have raised. The Council does have systems and processes in place to record reports of hazards or defects, which I will refer to later in this letter. However, the Council also continuously develops its systems and approaches to improve the management of the highway and to ensure that we meet our statutory duty to maintain them safely.

I have set out below the processes that we have in place. Furthermore, as part of the County Council's commitment to continued improvement I set out changes that the Council has, or is in the process of implementing, that should ensure the risk of future similar incidents is reduced and further mitigated across the highway network.

Issue 1: Systems and processes that are in place to record complaints or reports of hazards or defects with the highway.

- A clear process is in place for the inspection of the highway network. The inspection regime used by the Council is risk based and operates in accordance with UK Roads Liaison Group (UKRLG) Code of Practice 'Well-managed highway infrastructure. The County Council's [Highway Operational Standards](#)¹ document sets out our operational policies and identifies the types of defects to be inspected also details the required intervention and repair timescales for these defects. These standards are reviewed on a regular basis.
- The inspections are carried out by dedicated Highway Inspectors. Principal A-Roads (such as the A141 Isle of Ely Way), and main and secondary distributors are inspected monthly, in accordance with the Highway Operational Standards. Identified defects are recorded on the County Councils Highways Asset Management System.
- The County Council's Highway Inspectors are accredited with a City and Guilds qualification in highway inspections to provide assurance that those undertaking inspections are appropriately qualified to do so. The City and Guilds training is based on the County Council Highways Operational Standards document.
- In addition, members of the public can report defects they have identified themselves. This can be done directly through the Cambridgeshire Highways 'Report it' tool on the County Council's website, where any defect, concern or issue can be raised. This is achieved by dropping a pin onto a digital map and then completing a description of the issue.

In relation to the location on Isle of Ely Way where the collision that resulted in the death of Joanne Constable occurred:

- The County Council does cut back vegetation and cut grass to ensure visibility at junctions and key accesses to the highway.
- However, the field access in question is private and not a part of the adopted highway and therefore would not be routinely cut back by the Council under this regime.

The County Council is implementing a new Highways Asset Management System which will replace and improve on the current IT system. The new system has been specified to deliver a range of enhancements, alongside a new public reporting system. This report system will function as an integral part of the wider

¹ <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/travel-roads-and-parking/transport-plans-and-policies/highway-policies-and-capital-maintenance-programme#highway-operational-standards-2-0>

Highways Management System supporting single source records and continuity of information from report to works completed to customer feedback. This will therefore provide further assurance that all required works are logged and implemented in accordance with the Highways Operational Standards

Issue 2: Awareness across the county of circumstances replicated at Bypass Field onto the A141 Isle of Ely Way

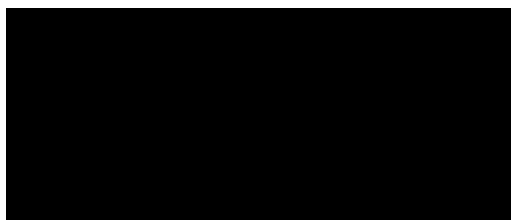
- The County Council has a Green Infrastructure Team which is responsible for the safe management of vegetation to ensure the Council effectively meets its duty to maintain the highway in accordance with the Highways Act 1980.
- The Green Infrastructure Team is responsible for the management of verges, hedges, and trees within the highway. The team will enable and deliver approaches to the safe management of vegetation that is consistently applied across the county's road network.
- The Green Infrastructure Team is resourced so that it can proactively manage areas of known risk and identify similar locations, raising works orders to attend to overgrowing vegetation on a cyclic and reactive basis. This will include proactively cutting back vegetation on major stretches of road that require maintenance.
- As outlined above the implementation of the new highways management system will provide increased assurance that such works are logged and implemented in accordance with the Highway Operational Standards.

Summary

The County Council's Highways Service has appropriate systems in place to manage risk on the highway and is taking action to further improve these to ensure the risk of future deaths from similar circumstances and situations is minimised as far as practicable.

I understand that this response may be shared with the interested persons and would therefore wish to take this opportunity to express my sincere condolences to Joanne's family on behalf of Cambridgeshire County Council.

Yours sincerely,



Chief Executive