

Road Maintenance Programme

Denbighshire County Council

September 2025

About us

We have prepared and published this report under section 17 (2)(d) of the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 to help enable the Auditor General to be satisfied (or not) that the Council has put in place proper arrangements to secure value for money in the use of its resources.

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Audit snapshot

What we looked at

- 1 We looked at the Council's Road Maintenance Programme to understand how it is developed and delivered, and how the Council can assess if it is delivering value for money for residents.
- 2 As part of this work, we looked at the Council's understanding of current and future trends that will affect their roads, how it manages performance and risk, and how it plans and manages its resources for road maintenance.
- 3 We did this through a combination of document reviews and interviews with officers and Members.

Why this is important

- 4 Well-maintained roads are essential for Local Authorities in Wales as they support the delivery of many vital services and enable people to travel safely and efficiently. Good road infrastructure helps keep communities connected, ensures emergency and public services can reach those who need them, and supports local businesses and the wider economy. Reliable roads also contribute to residents' quality of life by making daily journeys easier and safer for everyone.

What we have found

- 5 The Council understands the condition of its road network and prioritises its annual program based on evidence. Service performance measures focus on outputs which limit its ability to measure its success. The Council focuses its planning on the short term but lacks a clear medium-term strategy for the service.

What we recommend

- 6 We make two recommendations which look at the Council's performance management arrangements and its ability to assess if it is achieving value for money, and resource planning over the long term.

Key facts and figures

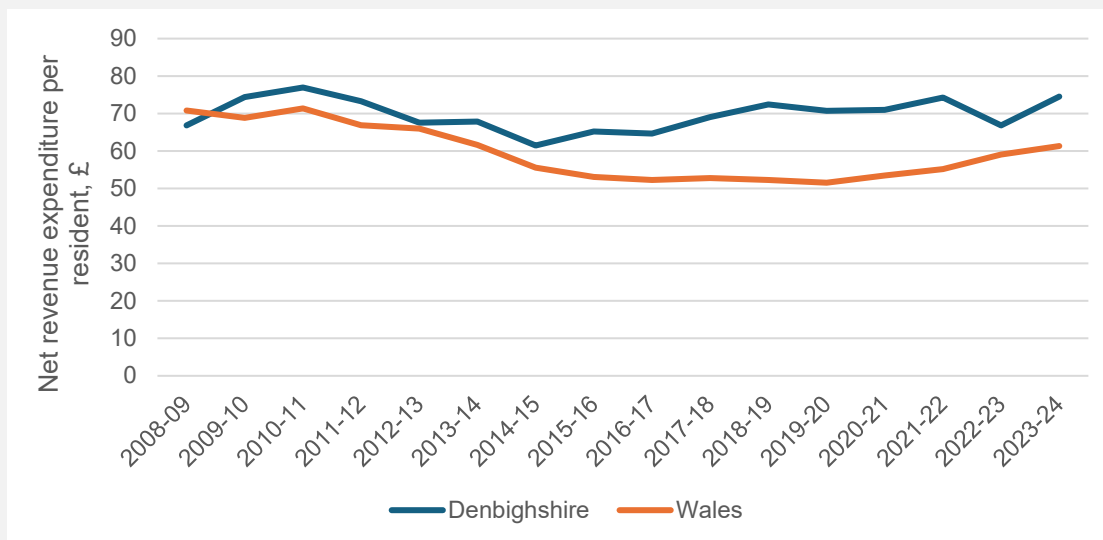
Road lengths in Denbighshire:¹

- All 'A' roads – 207 km
- All 'B' roads – 141 km
- All 'C and U' roads – 1,095 kms
- Total length – 1,443 km

Net revenue expenditure on highways and roads per resident:²

- in 2023-24, Denbighshire spent £74.54 per resident on highways and roads, higher than the Wales average of £61.34 per resident; and
- spending in Denbighshire per resident has been above the Welsh average since 2009-10 and has increased in six of the last nine reported years.

Exhibit 2: net revenue expenditure on highways and roads per resident in Denbighshire and Wales



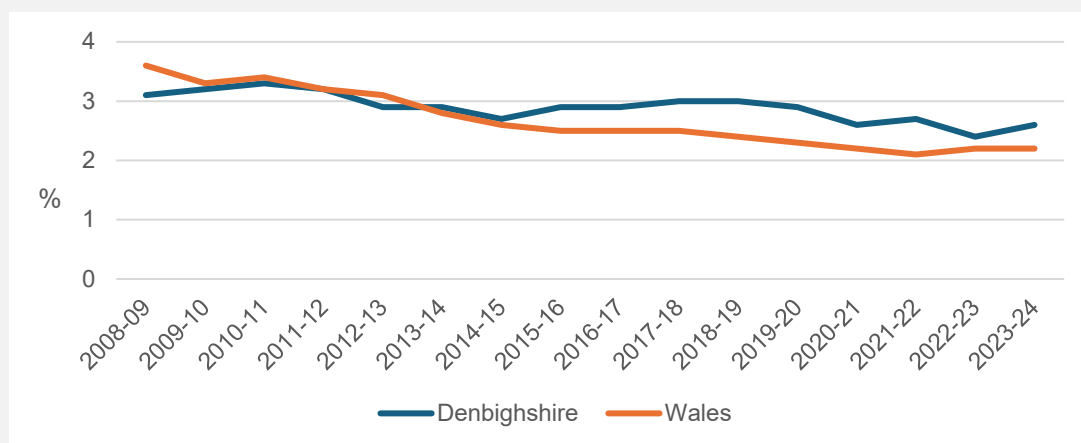
¹ gov.uk, RDL0202: [Road length \(kilometres\) by road type and local authority in Great Britain 2024](#)

² Audit Wales analysis of net revenue expenditure data

Proportion of total service expenditure spent on highways and roads:³

- in 2023-24, Denbighshire spent 2.6% of its total service expenditure on highways and roads, compared to the Wales average of 2.2%;
- Denbighshire has spent a higher proportion of its total service expenditure on highways and roads than the Wales average in every year in 2014-15; and
- the proportion of total service expenditure spent on highways and roads in Denbighshire has fallen in three of the last five reported years.

Exhibit 3: proportion of total service expenditure spent on highways and roads in Denbighshire and Wales

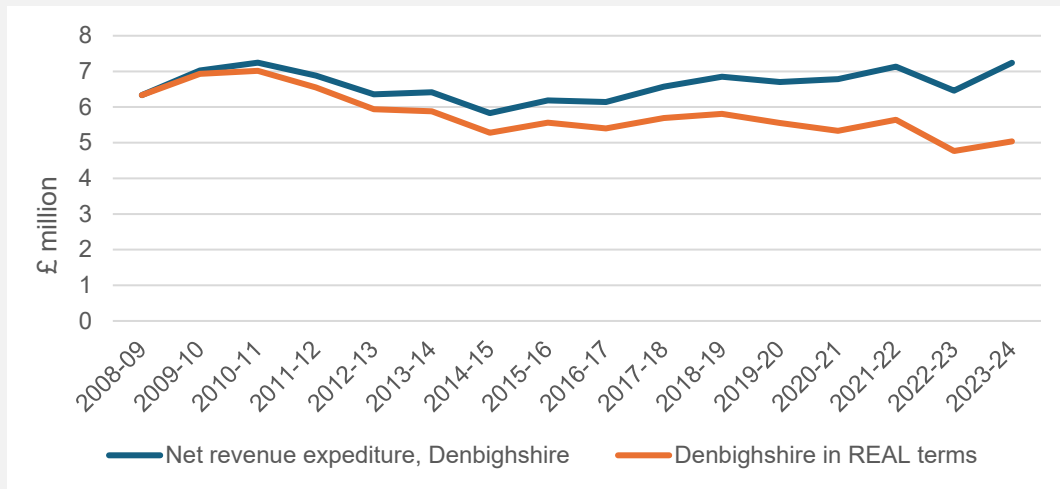


Net revenue expenditure, actual and in real terms⁴:

- In 2008-09, Denbighshire spent £6.334 million on its highways and roads service.
- This cash figure had risen to £7.242 million in 2023-24.
- In real terms, adjusted for inflation relative to 2008-09, spending in 2023-24 was £5.036 million. This is a decrease of £1.298 million since 2008-09.

³ Audit Wales analysis of net revenue expenditure data

⁴ Audit Wales analysis of net revenue expenditure data

Exhibit 4: net revenue expenditure, actual and real terms, in Denbighshire

Our findings

The Council is building on its evidence base to support strategic road maintenance planning

- 7 The Council's Road Maintenance Programme is supported by a broad and improving evidence base. It draws on internal and external data and is set to benefit further as surveys and inspection regimes are reintroduced. The Council also works in collaboration with partners such as Network Rail and Natural Resources Wales to develop co-ordinated maintenance schemes. This breadth of evidence allows the Council to identify priority areas for maintenance across its network.
- 8 The Council has clear processes to identify and prioritise risks within its Road Maintenance Programme. Evidence shows that officers assess risks by using multiple data sources and engineer input, leading to a prioritised work plan. This ensures that urgent network needs are addressed first, especially those on key routes and A and B classified roads.⁵
- 9 The Council demonstrates a good understanding of long-term factors affecting the network, including the increasing impact of climate change and extreme weather events, and the overall condition of the road network.
- 10 The Council has ideas to improve effectiveness. For example, using recyclable material in surface repairs and utilising AI technology in Council vehicles to expand the capabilities of its road condition surveys. Evaluating and reviewing innovation techniques could help deliver an efficient and effective service.
- 11 Strategically, the Council's Road Maintenance Programme is guided by the Highways Asset Management Plan (HAMP). The annual service area plan defines the direction and integrates with other key internal and external strategies. Nevertheless, the HAMP lacks qualitative outcome measures, which limits the assessment of wider service impact.

Performance management arrangements require strengthening

- 12 Performance management arrangements are largely output-based with limited outcome-focused reporting. The information provided through reporting shows whether planned works have been completed, with little qualitative or value for money analysis. This restricts insight into whether defined service outcomes are being achieved.

⁵ Welsh Government, [Road lengths and conditions](#), August 2024

- 13 Monitoring and scrutiny arrangements of the Road Maintenance Programme are fragmented. Updates are given to Member Area Groups, which gives Members the opportunity to contribute to the design and monitoring of the service. The Capital Scrutiny Group receives bids for funding from services, makes decisions on which projects to fund, and monitors the progress of these projects. However, both groups sit outside the Council's formal scrutiny process. This restricts accountability and reduces opportunities for learning and continuous improvement for the Road Maintenance Programme.
- 14 Additionally, performance information and financial data for the Road Maintenance Programme is considered separately and is not joined up. This limits the Council's ability to understand if value for money is being achieved by the service.

The Council does not take a longer-term view of resource planning

- 15 The Council's approach to resourcing its Road Maintenance Programme is short term. The programme is in receipt of funding from multiple internal and external sources, most of which are single-year allocations.
- 16 The Council has a statutory responsibility to maintain its road network, which includes responding to winter storms and extreme weather events. Funding for the Council's response to extreme weather events and winter storms is impacting on the service's budget. Winter maintenance was listed as a reason for the service overspending in the outturn report for 2024-25. With such events increasing in frequency and impact, this funding gap is likely to grow in the medium term.
- 17 Some routine maintenance work is funded through Council borrowing. Over time, the interest repayments could impact on the service's financial position and increase the risk that short-term resource planning will not help the Council to secure value for money over the longer term.
- 18 Uncertainty of funding makes it difficult to plan its resources over the medium to long term and align to corporate strategic aims. However, resource planning over a longer period can help the Council better understand the challenges it faces, as well as supporting longer-term solutions that cannot be implemented in an annual cycle.

Recommendations

R1 Performance management

To help the Council evaluate whether it is delivering value for money and the intended outcomes of its road maintenance programme, it should strengthen the performance information provided by:

- 1.1 developing outcome measures and detail how it will measure progress against them; and
- 1.2 setting out how it will monitor and evaluate the value for money of its road maintenance programme.

R2 Strengthen medium to long-term resource planning

To support a sustainable service and mitigate longer-term cost pressures, the Council should develop an approach to resource planning of its road maintenance programme over the longer term as far as is practical.

Appendices

1 About our work

Scope of the audit

This audit reviews the Council's arrangements for planning and delivering its road maintenance programme

Audit questions and criteria

Questions

We asked three questions to support our overall audit question. These were:

Does the Council have arrangements to strategically plan its Road Maintenance Programme that are informed by a good understanding of current and future trends?

Does the Council have arrangements to manage performance and risk of its Road Maintenance Programme?

Does the Council have arrangements to plan and manage the resources of its Road Maintenance Programme?

Criteria

To answer our audit questions, we looked at the Council's understanding of current and future trends in road maintenance, how the service links with other key strategic plans, how the Council identifies risks and measures activity, and how the service identifies if it is providing value for money to residents.

Methods

We reviewed documents available on the Council's website and provided to us by the Council. We also interviewed a range of officers and Members involved in the service.

2 About us

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