

QUESTION 4

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 10 FEBRUARY 2022

Question to Cllr David Williams Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport

By Cllr Pardesi

Question

The AA recently declared the pothole situation “a national emergency”. Underfunding is part of the problem. Does this Council accept that reducing funding on this issue and prioritising only the more problematic potholes is simply denying the seriousness of the situation and accumulating further problems for the future?

Reply

The current level of capital funding provided by government for local road maintenance each year is less than half of what is actually needed just to keep roads and footways in their current condition.

Until this funding situation improves potholes will continue to be an all-too-common problem.

Our current process for repairing potholes and other road defects is built on managing risk to the public, liability to the County Council and living within our means. As the increasing number of defects outstrips the resources needed to repair them the law is very clear that our repair teams must prioritise those that present the greatest risk to public safety.

This approach is actually the most efficient way of managing risk and liability, as well as being the most productive in terms of use of scarce resources. However, it is frustrating that our crews are having to repair individual defects rather than places, and that the repairs themselves can often only be described as ‘holding repairs’ – keeping a location safe, even sometimes repeatedly, until such time as the funding is made available to do the proper full-scale repair that is actually needed.

Prior to the COVID pandemic and in response to recommendations made by the Transport Select Committee in Nov 2019 the government had made a commitment to significantly increase funding for local road maintenance. In 2020/21 an extra 30% of capital funding was provided, which for Staffordshire equated to almost £9M extra. However, faced with the financial challenges of COVID the government has not been able

to repeat that commitment during 21/22 and funding for the next three years is expected to remain at the same reduced level.

That is why during 22/23 we will be investing an extra £15M of the council's own capital funding into local road maintenance.

This money will be used to:

- Tackle over 20,000 additional pothole repairs, significantly reducing the post-winter workstack;
- Pilot a new approach to 'right-first-time and single street repairs;
- Provide around 70 kilometres of additional pothole prevention treatments;
- Carry out around 200 drainage defect repairs; and
- Provide around 6Kms of road resurfacing schemes, replacing worn out road surfaces at key gateways across the county.

In addition, we'll also investing £2M of the council's own revenue, which will be used to:

- Increase the capacity of the council's highways contract management team, providing extra assurance on the quality of repairs that are carried out by contractors and ensuring that value for money is being achieved;
- As well as improving the ability to engage with local members to influence investment programmes and deliver community priorities.

This investment by the council is not going to solve the pothole problem. However, it will help to buy us time whilst central government continues to search for a long-term sustainable funding model for local road maintenance.