

County Council Meeting – 14th March 2024**Question to Councillor David Williams
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport****By Councillor Nigel Yates**

Question

Over winter we have experienced an unprecedented increase damaging potholes so much so that it appears that both the Inspection Team and the responsive maintenance teams (Amey) have clearly been unable to cope – exemplified by potholes reported on 5th January, not being inspected until 22nd February, categorised for an emergency repair and still unresolved a full week later, this situation is being compounded by the delay in repairing Cat 3 potholes, that have deteriorated to the extent of being de facto Cat 1's or Emergency potholes responsible in many cases for vehicle damage.

Is there an option in the Highways Maintenance contract to directly use alternative local contractors on a responsive basis to expediently repair these serious potholes outside of the contract with Amey, and thus prevent the potential for vehicle damage and risk of subsequent claims?

Reply

This winter has been particularly challenging and has recently been reported as the wettest winter in 130 years – seeing 2.5 – 3 times more than normal rainfall. Following 10 named storms since the late autumn, rivers have been full and the ground saturated, together with cold winter nights the impact on fragile road surfaces has also been significant – with close on trebling of emergency and high-risk defects that we've ever recorded previously.

Our highways teams deserve great credit for responded remarkably well to the challenge: moving resources and working tirelessly 24-hours-a-day and 7-days-a-week to ensure those defects that pose the greatest risk to public safety have been made safe as quickly as possible. We've also been boosting our capacity in the inspection team to deal with the increase in enquiries.

Throughout January and February across the county:

- 98% of emergency defects were attended to within 2hrs;
- 94% of category 1 defects were attended in 24-hours; and
- Just under 70% of category 2 defects were repaired within 7-days.

In the Biddulph North Division alone 103 jobs have been completed since 1 January 2024.

As we now start to wind-up the winter gritting operations and head towards the warmer and dryer main road repair season our full armoury of pothole repair resources will be ramped up again, including the high output seasonal velocity patcher crews.

Over the next three years we're investing an extra £50m into local road maintenance. Through this investment we will be delivering an enhanced programme of capital maintenance schemes to replace sections of life-expired roads as well as carrying out around 100 miles of pothole prevention surface treatments and 30,000 individual pothole repairs each year.

Delivering this extra investment will of course require increasing operational capacity. We have the option of doing this directly or as sub-contractors through the contract with Amey.

