

Briefing Note

Title: Briefing Note on Potholes in City of Wolverhampton

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Intended Audience:

Internal

Partner organisation

Public

Confidential

Purpose or recommendation

To brief the Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel on the issue of potholes within the City of Wolverhampton.

Overview

The safe and efficient movement of traffic is an integral factor to the health and economy of our city. Overall capacity of the highway network and effective traffic control will play a significant part in ensuring this, however the ongoing quality and condition of the existing infrastructure is also key. It is imperative that our limited resources are used in the most efficient and effective manner to maintain the highway.

Background and context

City of Wolverhampton has around 450 miles (735 km) of highway. As Highway Authority City of Wolverhampton Council has a statutory duty to maintain a "highway maintainable at public expense" in a safe and serviceable condition. Failure in this duty can lead to claims against the Council for compensation for personal injury, loss and damage.

It is widely acknowledged that there has been a national underfunding of highway maintenance for a sustained period of time. The rate of deterioration has vastly out paced the levels of maintenance and the prevalence of potholes/defects is a common issue. The Asphalt Industry Alliance commissions an independent annual survey into road condition (Annual Local Authority Road Maintenance Survey (ALARM)). The 2019 survey reiterated that to bring all of the country's roads back up to a "reasonable" standard would take 10 years to complete and cost £9.8 billion. For CWC this equates to approximately £24 million. Our annual resurfacing budget is in the region of £3 million.

With available resources it is not possible to reach a position where all of Wolverhampton's roads are defect free. This is acknowledged in law and there is a statutory defence to compensation claims where the authority can demonstrate that it has acted reasonably.

Proposal/Options

City of Wolverhampton has an adopted policy setting out Highway Inspection regimes and the criteria governing intervention/action. All roads and footways are inspected at least once a year with those more heavily trafficked receiving more frequent attention.

Response rates are also graded in relation to the degree of risk that they represent:

Category 1 defects are those that require prompt attention because they represent an immediate or immanent hazard, or there is a risk of short term structural deterioration.

Category 2 defects are all others that are deemed not to represent such an imminent risk. Scheduling of these repairs will be much less of a priority and will take into account considerations of factors like access requirements, planned works in the near future, traffic levels, the possibility of combining with other works etc.

Our defined response times are as follows:

Category 1A defects have a response target of 2 hours.

Examples include:

- Missing covers to large chambers, manholes, gully gratings, etc.
- Substantial debris or obstruction of carriageway (e.g. brick, large piece of metal, fallen tree branch)
- Exposed electrical wiring
- Any significant highway structure in imminent danger of collapse including, for example, street lighting columns, traffic signs, traffic signal poles, retaining walls or large chamber/ manhole covers

Category 1B defects have a response time of 24 hours

Examples will include:

- Trips greater than 25mm in busy footways and pedestrian areas (e.g. city centre, on the carriageway at controlled pedestrian crossings)
- In carriageways any pothole greater than 50mm deep, or any other defect causing a trip/ sharp difference in levels greater than 50mm
- Any other defect that, in the surveyor's view, requires urgent attention because it represents an immediate or imminent hazard to highway users.

Category 2A High Priority - Category 2 (30 Day Repair) defects are those that will, in the opinion of the inspector, become Cat 1 within 3 months if not attended to.

Category 2B Medium Priority - Category 2 (90 Day Repair) defects are those that are likely to become Cat 1 in 3-12 months' time.

Category 2C Low Priority - Category 2 (180 Day Repair) defects are those that are likely to become Cat 1 in 3-12 months' time.

Numbers of defects reported / repaired

Rather than “potholes” we tend to refer to “defects” as there is some debate about what constitutes a pothole.

Below are the numbers taken directly from Confirm system.

Year	No reported	No Repaired
2017	4274	4213
2018	7481	6880
2019 (to date)	3876	3591

Please note that in 2018 CWC commenced a 10-week trial with spray injection patching. This is a rapid mobile pothole repair technique dramatically increasing our responsive capacity. This was repeated in 2019 however the figures above do not yet include this aspect of our response.

Examples of techniques utilised

Temporary emergency repair



This is used where a quick/temporary repair is necessary for example in a busy traffic sensitive location or where further, more permanent works are possible in the near future. A range of different materials have been used for this purpose.

Permanent localised repairs



These are where the affected area is cut out and patched, sealing the edges. These repairs take longer to carry out, have more affect on traffic/congestion but will normally last longer than temporary repairs.

Large scale patching



This is much more intensive but can be more efficient where there are a number of defects in close proximity.

Spray Injection repairs

A relatively new technique where pre-coated aggregate is sprayed at high velocity into a sealed defect. The technique is very fast, minimising disruption, however the repairs have been demonstrated to be relatively robust.

