

WRITTEN QUESTIONS PURSUANT TO STANDING ORDER 44

1. Question from Councillor Kathryn Field to the Lead Member for Transport and Environment

Does the County Council require its staff and its contractors to turn off their engines when a vehicle is stationary? Why do so few roadworks have instructions to drivers to turn off their engines while waiting at roadworks?

Answer by the Lead Member for Transport and Environment

Whilst we would encourage all staff to turn their engines off where possible and most modern vehicles do this automatically when stationary, it is not always a viable option for those delivering highway works on the network. The engine may be left running to charge small plant/equipment and works tablets used for recording works and reviewing work programmes. During the winter months it can be particularly unpleasant working outside and therefore operatives may keep the engine running to keep the vehicle warm while they take their prescribed breaks.

With the new highways contract from 1 May, for works of 3 days or longer duration that use temporary traffic signals, we are planning to introduce signage as part of the works that encourages drivers to switch off their engine while queuing. Whilst this will apply to highway works, we cannot insist that this applies to utility or developer works. However, we will be encouraging these organisations to follow a similar approach.

2. Question from Stephen Shing to the Lead Member for Transport and Environment

Pothole repairs

Our council repaired 7,299 potholes since the beginning of the year (including 2,598 up to February). More potholes being repaired is good performance and welcomed by our residents.

Residents are asking why many of the repaired potholes are of a poor standard which do not last very long, typically deteriorating within week. They do not understand why this is happening?

Will the new maintenance contractor for County Highways provide a better quality of repair? Residents would also like to know in 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 how many potholes were repaired and at what cost? How many of those potholes were subsequently have repaired again within 12 months and 18 months? What was the cost for the repeat repairs?

Answer by the Lead Member for Transport and Environment

Potholes are repaired to a set standard but this can, on occasions, be difficult to achieve during prolonged wet and cold weather. Over this winter we did see a slight increase in the number of potholes requiring a second repair shortly after being repaired (around 5%) – however this was very much due to the poor weather conditions – but the team were well prepared with more than double the number of gangs carrying out repairs to not only to deal with the increase in potholes but also the expected increase in failed repairs requiring a repeat visit.

Overall the number of potholes requiring a re-repair remains relatively low and in 2021/2022 financial year only around 2% of the 18,000 potholes we repaired required a second repair. The team do not hold the data for 2020/2021 financial year as pothole remedial repairs were not recorded in the same way.

As you are aware, any pothole that requires a second repair within the two year guarantee period are fixed at the cost of our contractors – and no additional cost is incurred by the authority. We would encourage members to report any such failures on line so the contractor can attend asap.

Finally the new contract has been designed to improve the day to day engagement and service. Pothole repairs are a key part of this contract and responsibility to ensure/determine the best and most efficient way to repair potholes will be the responsibility of the contractor to drive efficiency to the service and provides value for money for the authority. The performance of the contractor will be monitored against key performance indicators with penalties for poor performance.