
To: Communities and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Board (4)

Date: 3 September 2026

Subject: Highway Maintenance Including Pothole Repairs

1 Purpose of the Note

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Communities and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Board on current operational arrangements, performance, challenges and future priorities relating to highway maintenance and pothole repairs across Coventry.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Communities and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Board (4):
- 1) Consider the actions and initiatives currently being implemented to address pothole defects and maintain highway safety.
 - 2) Consider the current and future funding position for highway maintenance and pothole repairs.
 - 3) Make recommendations as appropriate to the Cabinet Member for City Services.

3 Information and Background

- 3.1 Highways are responsible for the inspection, maintenance and repair of Coventry's highway network. This includes carriageways, footways, drainage systems, road markings, street lighting, bridges and other highway assets.
- 3.2 The service has a statutory duty under the Highways Act 1980 to maintain the highway in a safe condition and undertake repairs where intervention criteria are met. A key element of this function is the identification and timely repair of potholes and other carriageway defects.

4 Pothole Formation

- 4.1 Potholes develop through a simple but destructive process. Small cracks appear in the road surface due to age, traffic loading and general wear and tear. Water enters these cracks and weakens the structure beneath the surface.

- 4.2 During colder weather, water within the cracks can freeze and expand, causing the surface to break apart. Repeated traffic loading further loosens material, resulting in potholes forming within the carriageway.
- 4.3 Periods of prolonged rainfall significantly accelerate this process by increasing water penetration into the highway structure. During recent winters, above average rainfall has contributed to increased deterioration of road surfaces across the country.

5 Highway Inspection and Repair Process

- 5.1 Coventry City Council operates a risk-based highway inspection regime that is designed to identify defects that may present a safety risk to highway users.
- 5.2 Defects reported by members of the public, Councillors and staff, together with those identified through routine inspections, are assessed and prioritised according to severity. The highest-risk defects are classed as Priority 1 and targeted for urgent repair within 5 days, while lower-risk repairs have a 20-day target.
- 5.3 The Council seeks wherever possible to undertake a permanent repair using a right first-time approach. This normally involves saw-cutting the defect and completing a permanent reinstatement.
- 5.4 Temporary repairs may be undertaken where:
- Immediate action is required to make the highway safe.
 - Permanent repair work is already planned.
 - The surrounding road conditions make permanent repair uneconomical.
 - Weather or operational constraints prevent immediate permanent repairs.
- 5.5 Temporary repairs help keep the highway safe and protect the public until permanent works can be completed.

6 Current Service Performance

- 6.1 Highways currently operate 10 pothole repair gangs across carriageways and footways. Additional investment secured in the previous financial year increased capacity from the 6 teams historically deployed on this work. This resource has been retained in the current financial year to help manage rising repair demand.
- 6.2 The average end-to-end repair time for P1 carriageway potholes is currently 12 days. This includes from inspection to completion of the repair.
- 6.3 Performance varies depending on traffic management requirements, weather conditions, specialist resource availability and the need to group repairs efficiently.
- 6.4 The Council's local target for Priority 1 carriageway repairs is 5 days. While many defects are completed within this timescale, demand can exceed available resources during peak periods. This target is ambitious compared with neighbouring authorities such as Solihull and Warwickshire, which both operate 7-day targets. A larger proportion of their work is also recorded in the lower Priority 2 category, where their target is 28 days, compared to our 20-day target.

- 6.5 At the time the source briefing was prepared, 31 Priority 1 carriageway repair jobs were beyond the five-day target.
- 6.6 Prior to receiving additional funding in April 2025, utilising the six-gang model, there were approximately 350 Priority 1 carriageway repair jobs beyond the five-day target.

7 Recent Pothole Repair Statistics

- 7.1 The Council continues to undertake a significant programme of reactive pothole repairs across the highway network. During 2025/26, it is estimated that around 6,010 potholes were repaired across Coventry's highway network.

Performance measure	2025/26	2026/27 (to 18.08.26)
Estimated potholes repaired	6,010	2,823
Permanent reactive repairs	5,281	2,558
Temporary reactive repairs	729	265
Permanent repair proportion	88%	91%
Current carriageway and footway repair gangs	10	10
Average carriageway P1 pothole repair time	27 days	24 days (12 days from Aug 26)
Council target for Priority 1 carriageway repairs	5 days	5 days
Priority 1 carriageway jobs over target at source date	476	31
Average reactive permanent repair cost	£58.00	£67.57

- 7.2 The data indicates that the majority of recorded repairs are completed using permanent reactive methods, supporting the Council's right first-time approach wherever practical.

8 JCB Pothole Pro Machine

- 8.1 The service uses a specialist JCB Pothole Pro alongside conventional patching gangs to complete larger carriageway repairs efficiently. Since its introduction in February 2022, the machine has repaired more than 45,000m² of carriageway and can complete around 100m² per day. However, it only undertakes the excavation element of the repair, meaning additional labour and plant are still needed for resurfacing. Its operation also requires more road space than a conventional patching team and often needs a full road closure to ensure the work can be completed safely.
- 8.2 The Pothole Pro is most effective where several defects are present in one location, or where early intervention can prevent further surface failure. These sites are generally grouped into larger repair areas of around 100m², enabling the machine to make best use of its speed, scale and specialist capability.
- 8.3 As many of the initial suitable sites were completed during 2022/23, the machine is now used flexibly as a multi-purpose asset. In addition to pothole repair work, it supports footway schemes, cycleway construction, drainage works and winter gritting operations.
- 8.4 Suitable pothole repair sites are now batched and programmed periodically, allowing the machine to be deployed where it can deliver the greatest operational benefit, with the latest batch of repairs completed in July and August 2026.

9 Demand and Customer Enquiries

- 9.1 Pothole repair demand continues to rise, with a clear seasonal pattern as requests typically increase during winter when potholes are more likely to form. During January and February this year, the Council received approximately 2,000 pothole-related enquiries, which exceeded the total number of enquiries received throughout the previous calendar year.
- 9.2 This reflects growing public concern regarding road condition together with the impact of adverse weather conditions on the highway network. The increase in reported defects places additional pressure on inspection, repair and customer service functions across the highways service.

10 Funding and Investment

- 10.1 The budget allocated to pothole repairs remains broadly consistent with the previous financial year. While the Council's own investment in highway maintenance has been maintained, external funding levels are expected to become more challenging over the coming years.
- 10.2 The Government has announced, through the West Midlands Combined Authority, a roads maintenance funding package of approximately £240 million for the West Midlands covering the period 2027 to 2032. However, the new funding arrangements will reduce annual funding available to Coventry compared to current allocations.
- 10.3 In recent years, the Council has received an average of £9.8 million per annum through regional transport funding arrangements. Under the future arrangements, this will reduce to circa £8.3 million per annum, a decrease of approximately £1.5 million each year. By way of comparison, this reduction is only around £0.5 million

less than the Council's entire core highways capital allocation (£1.97 million) and is equivalent to 43% of the current annual carriageway resurfacing budget (£3.5 million).

- 10.4 Further funding pressures are anticipated from 2030, when the current agreement with Citizen, which provides an average of £1.53 million per year to support footway maintenance and improvement works, is due to conclude.
- 10.5 In addition, continuing inflationary pressures on labour, materials and plant costs will further erode the real value of maintenance funding over time. As a result, despite positive national announcements regarding investment in local roads, the overall position for Coventry is that available maintenance funding will be lower than that available in recent years, increasing the importance of prioritising investment where it delivers the greatest benefit to the highway network.

11 Impact of Recent Funding Changes

11.1 Potential Operational Impacts

- Reduced ability to undertake preventative carriageway and footway resurfacing and structural maintenance programmes.
- Increased reliance on reactive pothole repairs rather than planned preventative interventions.
- Greater pressure on existing repair gangs and operational resources.
- Increased deterioration across all sections of the highway network that would otherwise be treated through preventative maintenance.
- Reduced flexibility to respond to severe weather and unusually high defect volumes.
- Loss of DfT Green Status for Highways Maintenance, awarded to only 16 local authorities in 2025.

- 11.2 These risks are significant because there is a strong trend between increasing pothole numbers when preventative maintenance programmes are reduced. The most cost-effective approach to highway asset management is to intervene before roads reach the point at which potholes begin to develop extensively.

11.3 Inflationary Pressures

In addition to lower annual allocations, inflation continues to reduce the purchasing power of highway maintenance funding. Even where budgets remain stable in cash terms, the amount of work that can be delivered can reduce over time due to rising labour, material, plant, equipment, fuel and traffic management costs.

11.4 Service Response

To mitigate the impact of funding reductions, the Highway Operations Service will continue to focus on prioritising safety-critical defects, maximising gang productivity, delivering permanent repairs wherever appropriate, grouping works to reduce mobilisation costs, seeking external funding opportunities and targeting preventative maintenance where it will provide the greatest long-term benefit.

- 11.5 Whilst funding announcements suggest increased investment in highways maintenance nationally, the proposed allocation methodology means Coventry is

forecasting a significant reduction in annual funding compared with current levels. Combined with inflationary pressures, this presents a major challenge to maintaining and improving the condition of the city's highway network.

12 Highway Liability Claims

- 12.1 The Council receives claims from motorists alleging damage to vehicles caused by road defects. Drivers can make claims where they can prove that the City Council did not have a reasonable maintenance system in place.
- 12.2 This requires evidence that the Council was negligent in its duties in relation to Section 58 of the Highways Act. The Council's average annual expenditure on pothole-related compensation claims over the last four years has been approximately £19,311. This is broadly in line with, and marginally below, the estimated national average for highway authorities, which recent RAC obtained Freedom of Information data suggests is approximately £20,000 per authority per annum.

13 Local Issues and Developer Roads

- 13.1 Not all roads within Coventry are the immediate responsibility of the City Council. For example, Hillmorton Road currently remains the responsibility of Keepmoat Homes under the terms of an existing Development Agreement with the Council.
- 13.2 The Council continues to engage with the developer to secure the completion of outstanding highway obligations and monitors the condition of the road to ensure it remains safe for users. Following inspections, repair orders have been raised where appropriate and recent works have addressed reported safety defects on both Hillmorton Road and Milverton Road.

14 Key Achievements and Service Successes

- 14.1 Despite increasing demand, adverse weather conditions and ongoing funding pressures, the Highway Service has continued to deliver significant improvements in pothole repair performance and network safety.
- 14.2 Coventry was recently awarded a green rating by the Department for Transport for its approach to local highway maintenance. The rating recognises strong performance in road condition, capital investment and the adoption of best practice, including the use of innovative methods to fix and prevent potholes more efficiently. Coventry was one of only 16 authorities nationally to achieve green status.
- 14.3 Coventry has participated in the National Highways and Transportation Network survey since 2015/16, using it to benchmark performance against other authorities through 157 customer satisfaction measures. The 2025 survey results show Coventry is overperforming by +10.2% on pothole indicators compared to the national average.

15 Summary of Ongoing Service Initiatives

- 15.1 The following summarises the key challenges and ongoing initiatives within the highway maintenance service:

- Maintain highway safety through risk-based inspections and responsive pothole repairs.
- Reduce the number of overdue Priority 1 defects.
- Improve repair productivity and efficiency through planned programming and grouping of works.
- Continue investment in pothole repair gangs and operational resources.
- Deliver permanent repairs where appropriate while retaining the flexibility to undertake temporary safety repairs.
- Maximise external funding opportunities to support highway maintenance programmes.
- Ensure effective management of developer-owned roads and outstanding highway agreements.
- Improve customer communication and public understanding of highway maintenance activities.

16 Health Inequalities Impact

- 16.1 Maintaining highway assets in a safe condition contributes positively to public health and wellbeing. Effective pothole repairs improve road safety for motorists, cyclists and pedestrians, reduce the risk of accidents and injuries, and help support reliable transport networks.
- 16.2 A well-maintained highway network also supports economic activity, public transport reliability and active travel initiatives across the city.

Peter Ullah

Highways Operations and Development Manager
City Services
Email: Peter.Ullah@coventry.gov.uk