



Briefing 16-13

April 2016

Annual Local Authority Road Maintenance (ALARM) survey 2016 and 5 year comparison of ALARM survey results (2012-16)

To: All Chief Executives, Main Contacts and APSE Contacts in England and Wales

For information only to Scotland and Northern Ireland

Key Issues:

The purpose of this briefing is to advise our members of the release of the Annual Local Authority Road Maintenance (ALARM) survey 2016.

This briefing summarises the main themes of the report including:

- Funding
- Potholes
- Road surfacing frequency
- Utility openings
- Compensation claims

1.0 Introduction

The Asphalt Industry Alliance has issued the 21st Annual Local Authority Road Maintenance (ALARM) survey. It was completed by 56% of authorities responsible for roads in England and Wales, and was carried out during January and February 2016. The aim of the survey is to provide a snapshot of the general condition of the local road network based on the responses provided by those responsible for its maintenance.

For reference, "this year" or "2016" relates to the financial year 2015/16 ending 31 March 2016.

2.0 Main themes

2.1 Funding

The report highlights the current highway maintenance budget situation for local authorities:

- The total average highway maintenance budget per authority is £16.2m

- In England, the average highway maintenance budget per authority was £19.8m, down £3.6m since the 2015 survey, returning to a similar figure as reported in the 2014 survey (£20.4m)
- In London, the average was £9.0m which is £1.5m higher than the previous year and £4.8m higher than the result of the 2014 survey (£4.2m)
- In Wales, the average was £7.8m which is £0.7m higher than the previous year and £3.6m higher than the 2014 results (£4.2m)

The report notes that the percentage of the budget spent on reactive maintenance in England was 22% (compared with 23% last year), 32% in London (29% last year) and 34% in Wales (same as last year); this means all areas are above their ideal proportion of budget spending on unplanned repairs – England is over this year by 7%, London is over by 17% and Wales is over by 19%. The report states that the level of reactive maintenance required is a good indicator of the overall state of roads and that the need for unplanned repairs is less likely as the condition of roads improve. It is generally agreed that around 15% of budgets should be available for unplanned repairs but the poor condition of UK roads suggests much more needs to be spent on this activity than would ideally be the case.

The percentage of the road network in poor structural condition has improved across England (13%, 15% last year), London (12%, 17% last year) and Wales (6%, 16% last year). Results suggest that the majority of the road network is in acceptable condition with between 5 and 15 years life remaining.

The report highlights that a third of respondents indicated that they had to deal with unforeseen costs due to the effects of adverse weather, with Wales recording the highest increase (from 44% to 60% this year).

The majority of local authority highways maintenance programmes have a reported ideal term for funding of 5 years (England – 65%, London – 58%, Wales – 42%) and many others reported the ideal term as being 10 years (England – 28%, London – 34%, Wales – 42%).

It will take an estimated £11.8 billion to bring roads in England and Wales back into a reasonable condition, a drop of £0.36 billion from 2015's estimate of £12.16 billion. England (£88.8 billion) and London (£22.1m) have lower than usual estimates per authority and Wales (£31.9m) experienced a £2.5m increase on the previous year's estimate of £29.4m.

When asked about the difference between the estimated annual budgets departments think they need to maintain highways and that which they actually receive, the annual figure was £5.3m in England (up from £3.7m), £2.7m in London (up from £1.2m) and £3.7m in Wales (same as previous year).

The report estimates that the one-time catch-up cost to bring all road networks up to a reasonable standard is £11.8 billion, a drop from last year's figure of £12.2 billion; this breaks down to an average of £88.8m per authority in England (previously £93m), £22.1m in London (previously £25.2m) and £31.9m in Wales (previously £29.2m).

2.2 Potholes

70% of authorities surveyed use the guideline depth of 40mm to define a pothole, although the survey notes that this may not always be the most appropriate method of prioritising repairs with other factors, such as the location and nature of traffic, being important considerations.

This year's report shows decreases in the number of potholes filled per authority. There were 16,616 in England (compared to 20,702 last year), 4,099 in London (4,993 last year) and 5,217 in Wales (5,902 last year).

Overall, 2.19 million potholes were filled in England and Wales with the average costs for filling one pothole being:

- As part of a planned programme - £47 in England, £80 in London, £49 in Wales
- As a reactive repair - £56 in England, £94 in London, £64 in Wales

2.3 Road surfacing frequency

The average frequency of road surfacing for all road classes was 57 years. The average frequency of road surfacing in England (65 years) and Wales (59 years) was consistent with levels in 2015, but the frequency of road surfacing in London (26 years) is at a 5 year low. As the recommended frequency for road surfacing ranges from 10 to 20 years, principal roads in London (18 years) are the only roads which currently meet this standard.

2.4 Utility openings

Utility openings of roads to install or maintain utilities has increased in England (18,004 – 15,776 last year) and has effectively remained the same in London (9,828 – 9,340 last year) and Wales (4,894 – 4,904 last year); this led to an increase in the total estimate of utility openings (2.53 million – 2.2 million last year) with an estimated average of 13% of maintenance budgets spent on premature maintenance to utility openings.

2.5 Compensation claims

The amount paid in road user compensation claims is down to a total of £13.5m. This year's figure for England (£8.9m) is the lowest for the last 5 years and a significant reduction from last year's figure of £20.2m; the average number of claims has also dropped in England from 554 to 330 this year.

Wales (£0.486m) figure was also a recent low, although with a much smaller reduction since 2015's £0.702m; Wales also experienced a reduction in the number of claims from 130 to 72.

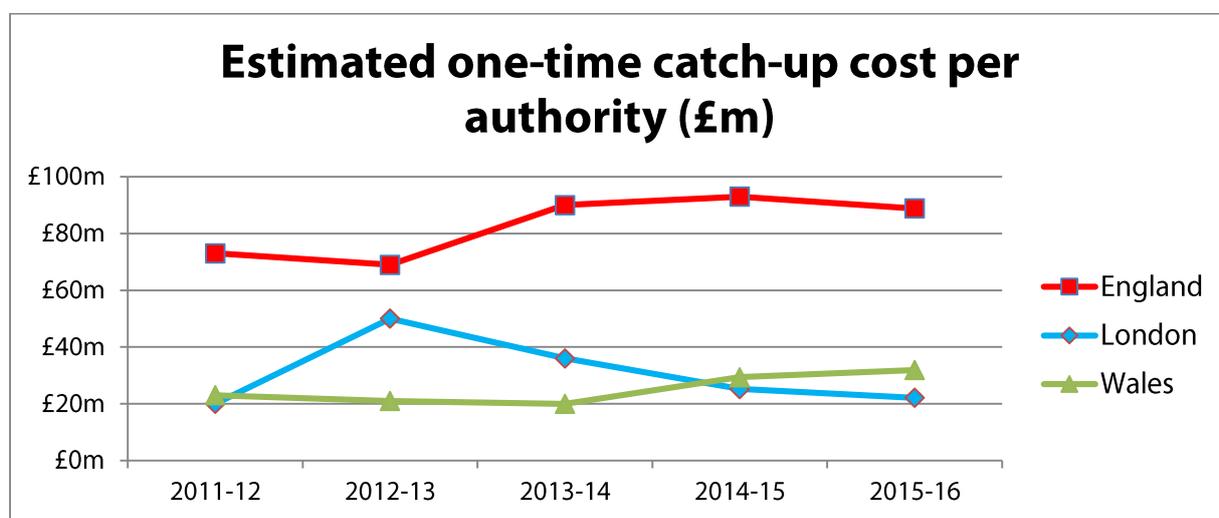
London (£4.1m) experienced the only increase in compensation claims from last year's figure of £2.2m, although this merely returned the amount paid to similar levels found in 2014 (£4.4m); despite the monetary increase, London followed the trend set in other areas with a reduction in claims numbers from 127 to 32.

3.0 Data trends in ALARM survey 2012-2016

Below is a series of graphs and data tables showing the trends across the ALARM surveys from 2012 to 2016 of the information most relevant to local authorities.

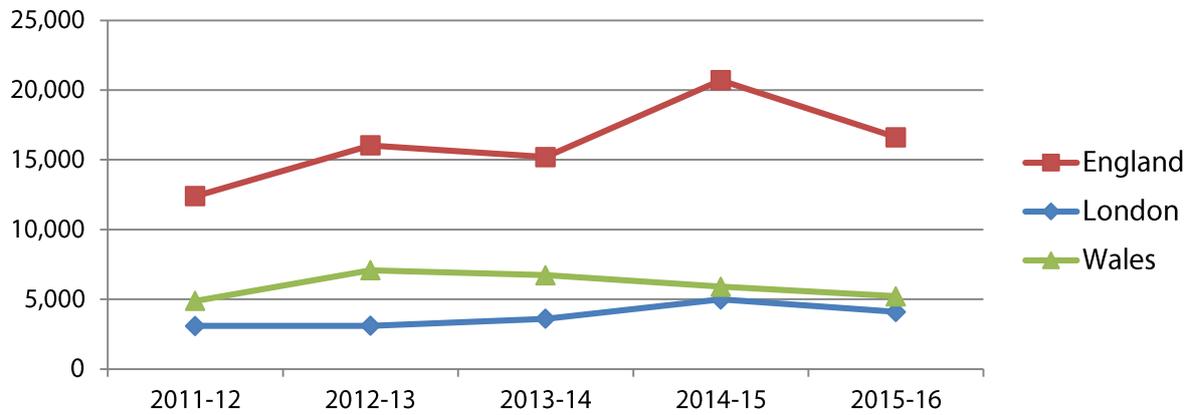
This features tables on:

- Estimated one-time catch-up cost per authority (£m)
- Average number of potholes filled per authority last year
- Average cost to fill one pothole (£)
- Shortfall in annual road structural budget (£m)
- Average annual budget shortfall per authority (£m)
- Frequency of road surfacing (all road classes) in years
- Estimated time to clear carriageway maintenance backlog
- Amount paid in road user compensation claims (£m)
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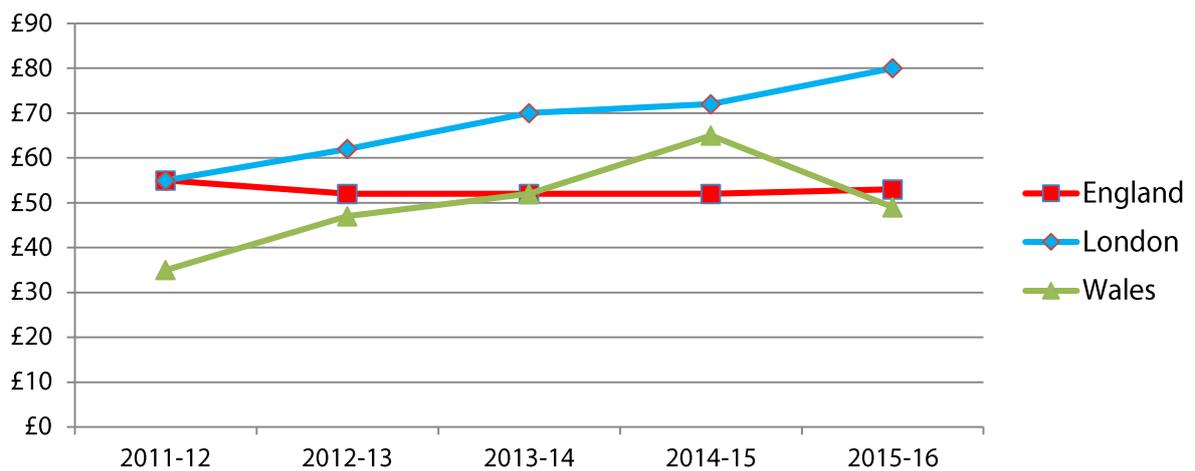
Estimated one-time catch-up cost per authority (£m)			
	England	London	Wales
2011-12	£73m	£20m	£23m
2012-13	£69m	£50m	£21m
2013-14	£90m	£36m	£20m
2014-15	£93m	£25.2m	£29.4m
2015-16	£88.8m	£22.1m	£31.9m

Average number of potholes filled per authority last year



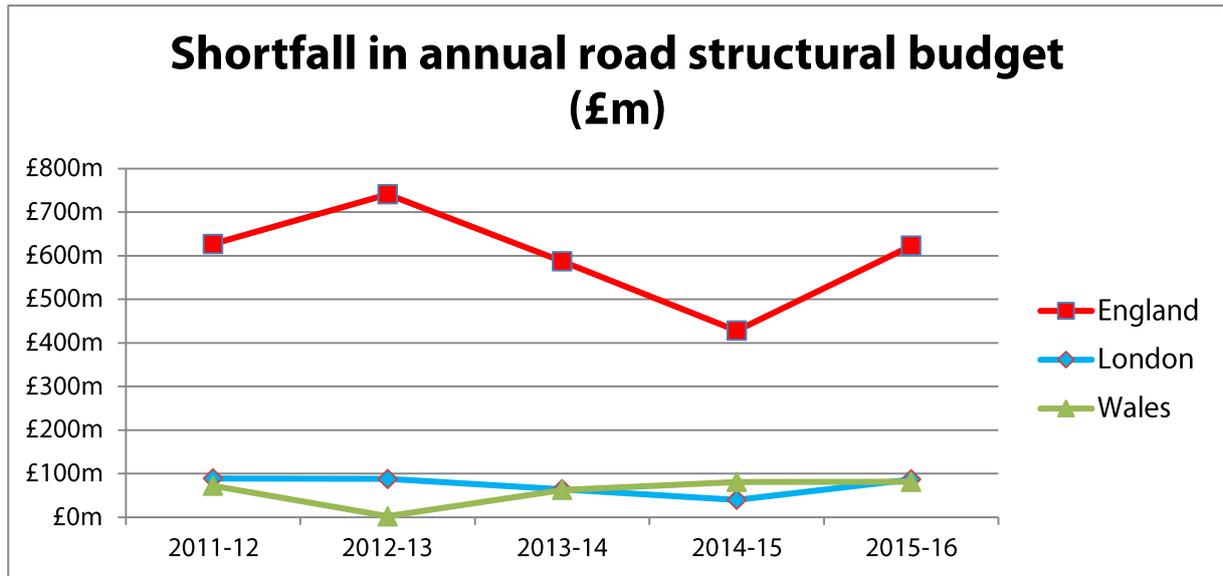
Average number filled per authority last year			
	England	London	Wales
2011-12	12,392	3,083	4,880
2012-13	16,041	3,102	7,082
2013-14	15,195	3,602	6,730
2014-15	20,702	4,993	5,902
2015-16	16,616	4,099	5,217

Average cost to fill one pothole (£)



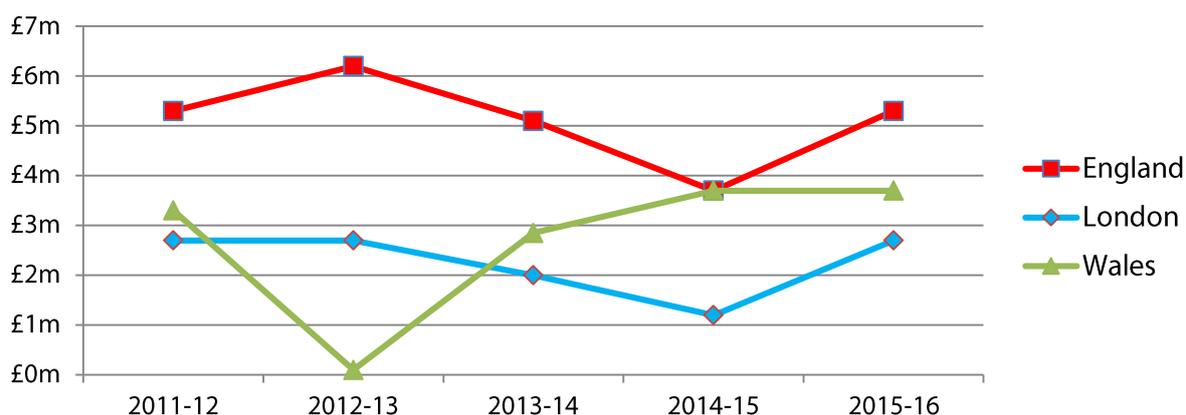
Average cost to fill one pothole (£)			
	England	London	Wales
2011-12	£55	£55	£35
2012-13	£52	£62	£47
2013-14	£52	£70	£52
2014-15	£52	£72	£65
2015-16	£53*	£80*	£49*

* Average cost as part of a planned programme. Average reactive repair is £56 for England, £94 for London and £64 for Wales.



Shortfall in annual road structural budget (£m)			
	England	London	Wales
2011-12	£627m	£89m	£72m
2012-13	£741m	£88m	£2m
2013-14	£587m	£64m	£62.7m
2014-15	£428m	£39.8m	£80.8m
2015-16	£623m	£86.7m	£81.2m

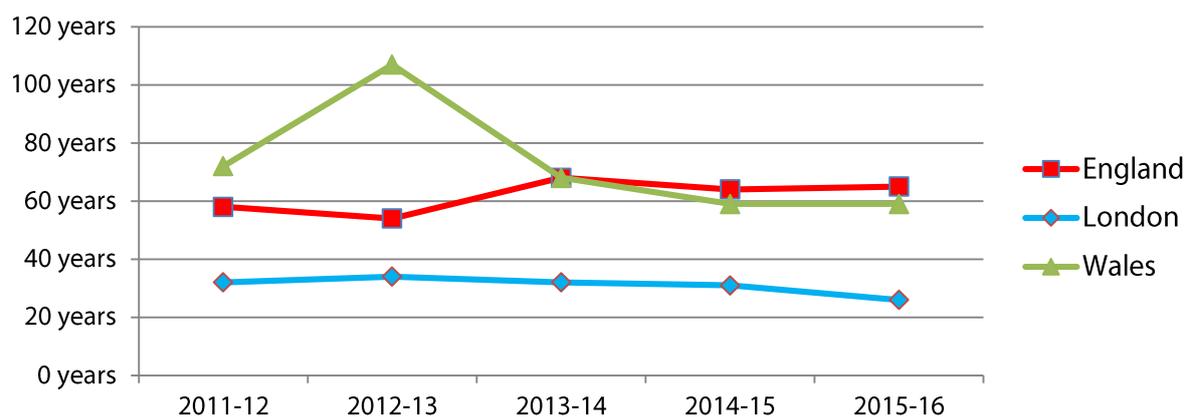
Average annual budget shortfall per authority (£m)



Average annual budget shortfall per authority (£m)

	England	London	Wales
2011-12	£5.3m	£2.7m	£3.3m
2012-13	£6.2m	£2.7m	£0.1m
2013-14	£5.1m	£2.0m	£2.85m
2014-15	£3.7m	£1.2m	£3.7m
2015-16	£5.3m	£2.7m	£3.7m

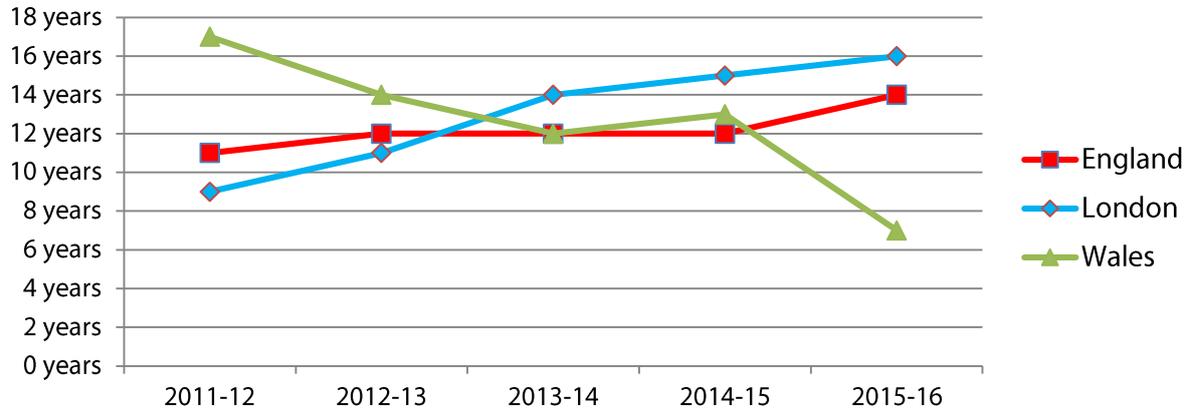
Frequency of road surfacing (all road classes)



Frequency of road surfacing (all road classes)

	England	London	Wales
2011-12	58 years	32 years	72 years
2012-13	54 years	34 years	107 years
2013-14	68 years	32 years	68 years
2014-15	64 years	31 years	59 years
2015-16	65 years	26 years	59 years

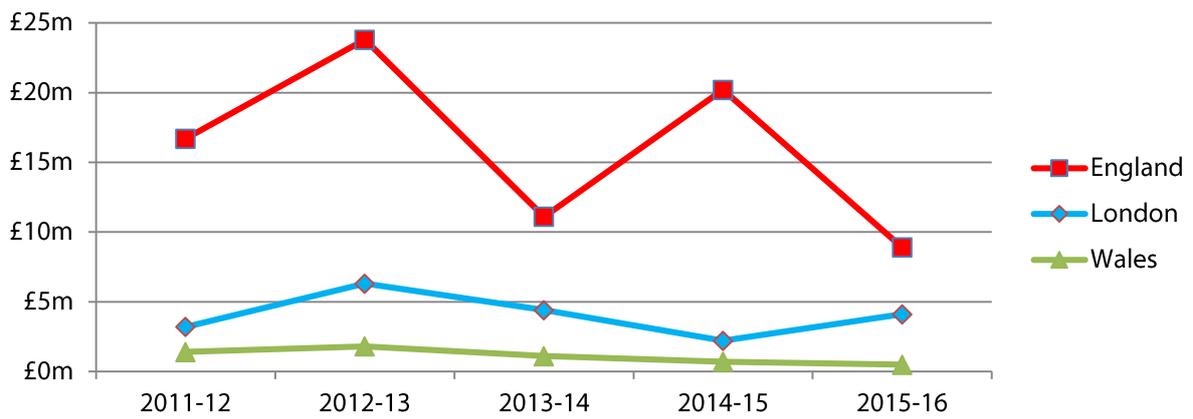
Estimated time to clear carriageway maintenance backlog



Estimated time to clear carriageway maintenance backlog

	England	London	Wales
2011-12	11	9	17
2012-13	12	11	14
2013-14	12	14	12
2014-15	12	15	13
2015-16	14	16	7

Amount paid in road user compensation claims



Amount paid in road user compensation claims			
	England	London	Wales
2011-12	£16.7m	£3.2m	£1.4m
2012-13	£23.8m	£6.3m	£1.8m
2013-14	£11.1m	£4.4m	£1.1m
2014-15	£20.2m	£2.2m	£0.702m
2015-16	£8.9m	£4.1m	£0.486m

4.0 APSE Comment

This report highlights that the resilience of the local road network is continuing to be tested, despite the best efforts of local highways teams to improve efficiencies and achieve “more with less” through means such as self-assessment, benchmarking, proactive long-term planning and the widespread adoption of Highways Asset Management Plans in England. The report criticises the “managed decline” of road networks through the prioritisation of maintenance in key routes and points to sustained underfunding and annual budget shortfalls (alongside the inevitable longer, wetter winters) as the causes of further deterioration of the network.

APSE will continue to promote new initiatives and approaches across the highways sector encourage those authorities to share their experience and expertise with other authorities. Best practice presentations from the most recent APSE roads, street lighting and winter maintenance seminar in March 2016 are now available online [here](#).

APSE’s Performance Networks service is the largest voluntary public sector benchmarking service across the UK and covers roads, highways and winter maintenance services. Developed in conjunction with the Society of Chief Officers in Scotland (SCOTS) and County Surveyors Society Wales (CSS Wales), the service provides an asset management model covering carriageway, footway, traffic management as well as bridges and structures. For more information on the service, please [click here](#) to view our prospectus.

The full ALARM survey report can be found [here](#). APSE will endeavour to discuss the report findings at future meetings of the APSE Roads, Highways and Street Lighting Advisory Group. APSE members are able to attend this group, which is a free of charge network for APSE member authorities, by registering online. You can register your interest in this group [here](#).

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