



**Briefing 17/22    June 2017**

## **Annual Local Authority Road Maintenance (ALARM) survey 2017 and 5-year comparison of ALARM survey results (2012-13 to 2016-17)**

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 2017. The full survey report can be found [here](#).

This briefing summarises the main themes of the report including:

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

## **1.0 Introduction**

ALARM is an annual independent survey carried out by the Asphalt Industry Alliance of English and Welsh local authority highways departments, looking at “the condition of the local road network, funding, the type of maintenance and issues affecting maintenance service levels”. This is the 22<sup>nd</sup> edition of the survey, with responses from 63% of local authorities in England and Wales (114 in England without a PFI, 22 in Wales and 32 in London).

## **2.0 Results of the survey**

### **2.1 Funding**

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

- The total average highway maintenance budget per authority is £17.1m (up by £0.9m)
- In England, the average was £21.8m (up by £2.0m)
- In London, the average was £7.5m (down by £1.5m)
- In Wales, the average was £6.9m (down by £0.9m)

The report notes that the percentage of the carriageway maintenance budget spent on reactive maintenance in England was 22% (same as last year), 36% in London (32% last year) and 32% in Wales (34% last year); this means that all areas are above their ideal proportion of budget spending (England – 15%, London 29%, Wales 14%).

The percentage of the road network in poor structural condition with less than 5 years life remaining was 17% in England (13% last year), 16% in London (12% last year) and 18% in Wales (6% last year). While the results of the survey show that the majority of roads are in good structural condition with 15 or more years of life remaining, there is cause for concern that the number of roads in poor structural condition has increased since last year, especially in Wales.

Many local authorities reported unforeseen costs in 2016-17 due to factors such as adverse weather, increased weight/volume of traffic and the age of the network; 43% of English authorities reported unforeseen costs (32% last year), London had 53% (31% last year) and Wales had 56% (60% last year).

Respondents indicated that the ideal term for funding was 5 years, with 61% in England, 70% in London and 89% in Wales selecting this option. Many also suggested 10 years (England – 28%, London – 30%, Wales – 11%).

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 £5.0m in England (£5.3m last year), £2.5m in London (£2.7m last year) and £3.7m in Wales (same as last year).

It will take an estimated £12.06 billion to bring roads in England and Wales back into a reasonable condition, an increase from £11.8 billion from 2015-16's estimate. The average estimate per authority in England is £85.7m (£88.8m last year), £21.4m in London (£22.1m last year) and £26.9m in Wales (£31.9m last year).

## **2.2 Potholes**

Around 64% of responding authorities use the guideline depth of 40mm to define a pothole (down from 70%), although the report notes that "depth definition is not always the only means of prioritising repairs. This year's report shows there were 1,748,916 potholes filled in England and Wales with the average costs for filling one pothole being:

- As part of a planned programme –£49 on average, £46 in England, £72 in London and £53 in Wales
- As a reactive repair - £72 on average, £69 in England, £98 in London and £59 in Wales

The average number of potholes filled by authority was:

- 10,410 on average, 13,468 in England, 2,267 in London and 6,410 in Wales.

The total spent filling potholes in the past year was £102.3m, with £88.3m in England, £6.2m in London and £7.9m in Wales.

### 2.3 Road surfacing frequency

While the recommended frequency of road surfacing is between 10 and 20 years, which is only achieved by principal roads in London, the average road surfacing frequency per authority is 55 years in England (65 last year), 23 years in London (26 last year) and 63 in Wales (59 last year).

### 2.4 Utility openings

Utility openings of roads to install or maintain utilities in England was 12,236 (18,004 last year), 10,045 in London (9,828 last year) and 6,598 in Wales (4,894 last year). This led to spending of 12% in England, 19% in London and 21% in Wales of the structural maintenance budgets on premature maintenance.

### 2.5 Compensation claims

The amount paid in road user compensation claims is down to a total of £6.0m from £13.5m last year, with £3.3m spent on staff costs on claims. The average per area breaks down to:

- **Number of claims** – 281 in England, 34 in London and 39 in Wales
- **Cost of claims** - £5.3m in England, £0.64m in London and £0.0435 in Wales
- **Staff costs** - £2.6m in England, £0.68m in London and £0.0438 in Wales
- **Total cost** - £7.9m in England, £1.3m in London and £0.087 in Wales

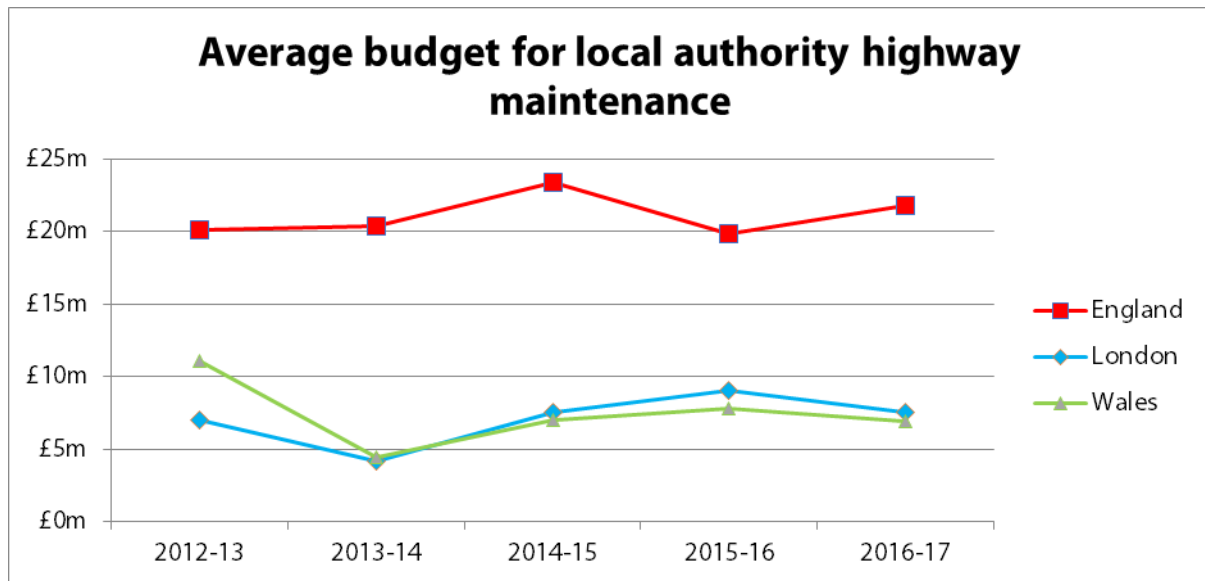
## 3.0 5-year comparison of ALARM survey results (2012-13 to 2016-17)

Below is a series of graphs and data tables showing the trends across ALARM surveys from 2012-13 to 2016-17 of the information most relevant to local authorities.

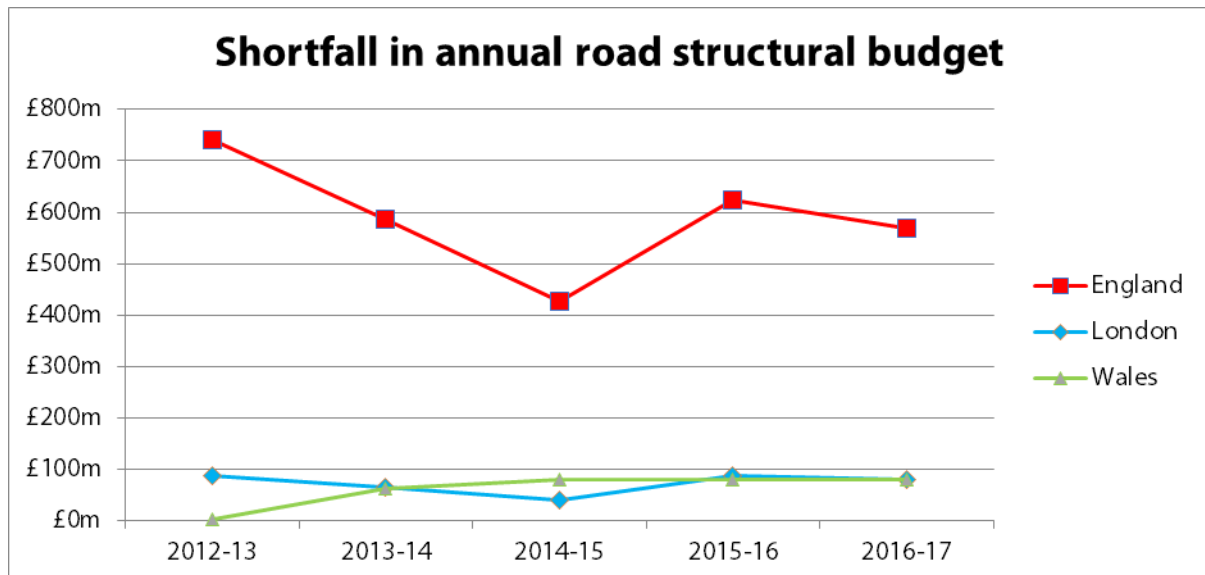
This features tables on:

- Average budget for local authority highway maintenance
- Shortfall in annual road structural budget
- Average annual budget shortfall per authority
- Estimated one-time catch-up cost per authority
- Average number of potholes filled per authority last year
- Average cost to fill one pothole (planned)
- Frequency of road surfacing (all road classes)

- Estimated time to clear carriageway maintenance backlog
- Amount paid in road user compensation claims

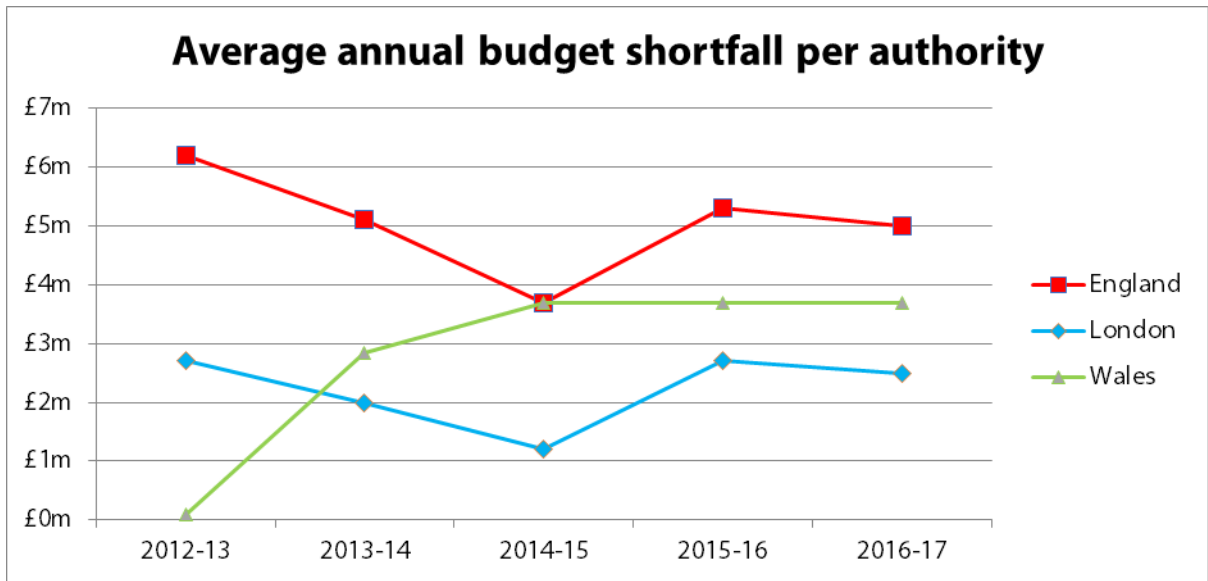


Average budget for local authority highway maintenance (£m)			
	England	London	Wales
<b>2012-13</b>	£20.1m	£7m	£11.1m
<b>2013-14</b>	£20.4m	£4.2m	£4.4m
<b>2014-15</b>	£23.4m	£7.5m	£7m
<b>2015-16</b>	£19.8m	£9m	£7.8m
<b>2016-17</b>	£21.8m	£7.5m	£6.9m

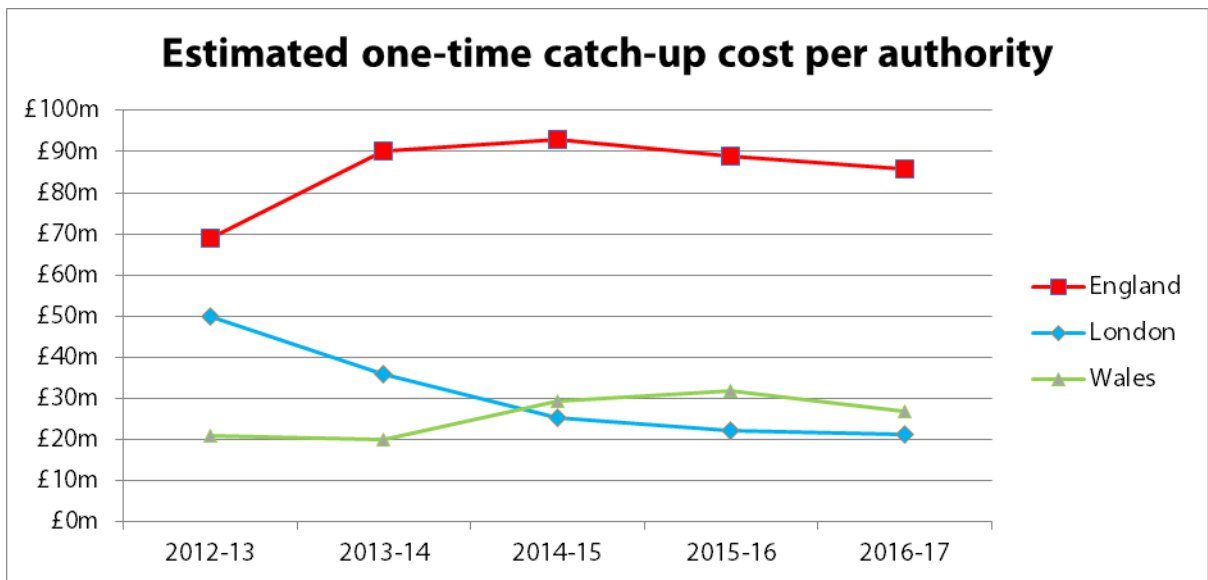


Shortfall in annual road structural budget (£m)			
	England	London	Wales
<b>2012-13</b>	£741m	£88m	£2m
<b>2013-14</b>	£587m	£64m	£62.7m
<b>2014-15</b>	£428m	£39.8m	£80.8m

<b>2015-16</b>	£623m	£86.7m	£81.2m
<b>2016-17</b>	£569.8m	£79.8m	£80.3m

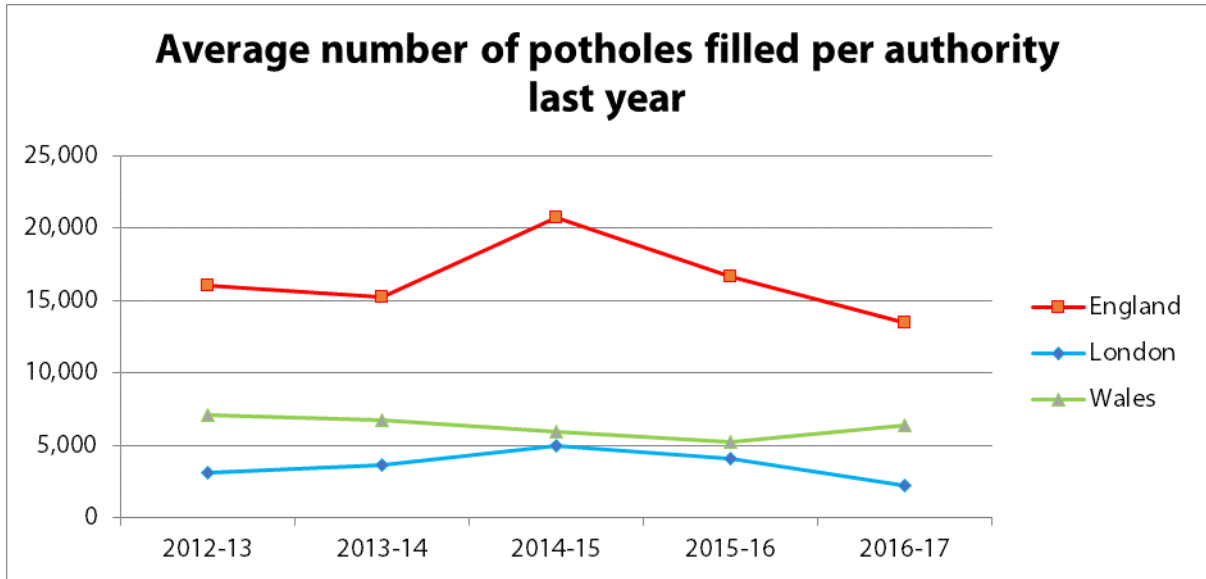


Average annual budget shortfall per authority (£m)			
	England	London	Wales
<b>2012-13</b>	£6.2m	£2.7m	£0.1m
<b>2013-14</b>	£5.1m	£2.0m	£2.85m
<b>2014-15</b>	£3.7m	£1.2m	£3.7m
<b>2015-16</b>	£5.3m	£2.7m	£3.7m
<b>2016-17</b>	£5.0m	£2.5m	£3.7m

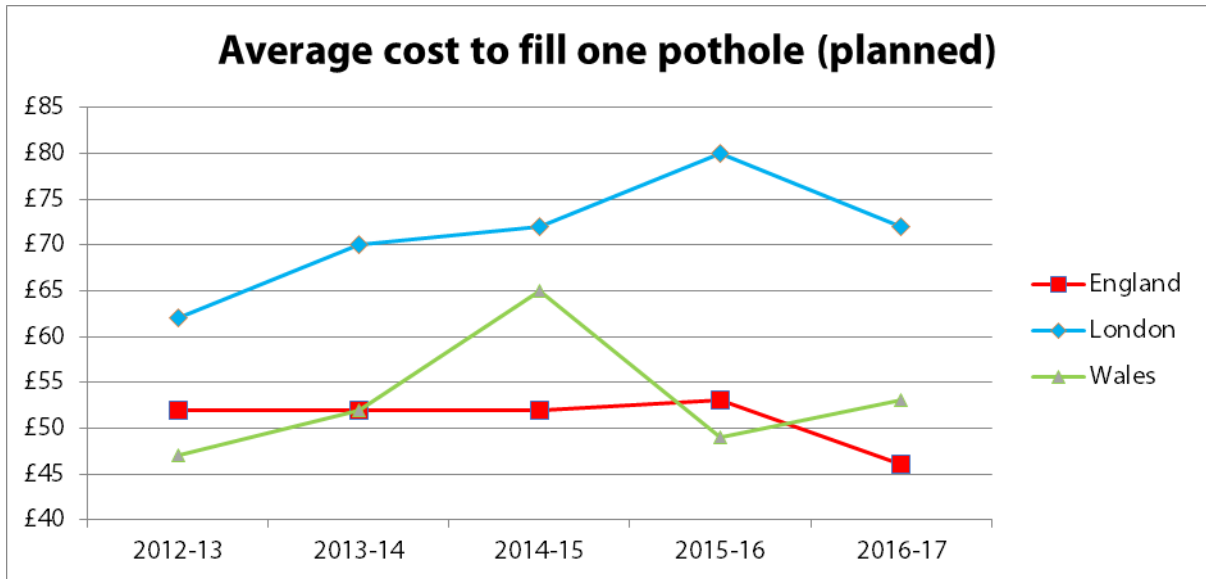


Estimated one-time catch-up cost per authority (£m)			
	England	London	Wales
<b>2012-13</b>	£69m	£50m	£21m
<b>2013-14</b>	£90m	£36m	£20m

<b>2014-15</b>	£93m	£25.2m	£29.4m
<b>2015-16</b>	£88.8m	£22.1m	£31.9m
<b>2016-17</b>	£85.7m	£21.4m	£26.9m



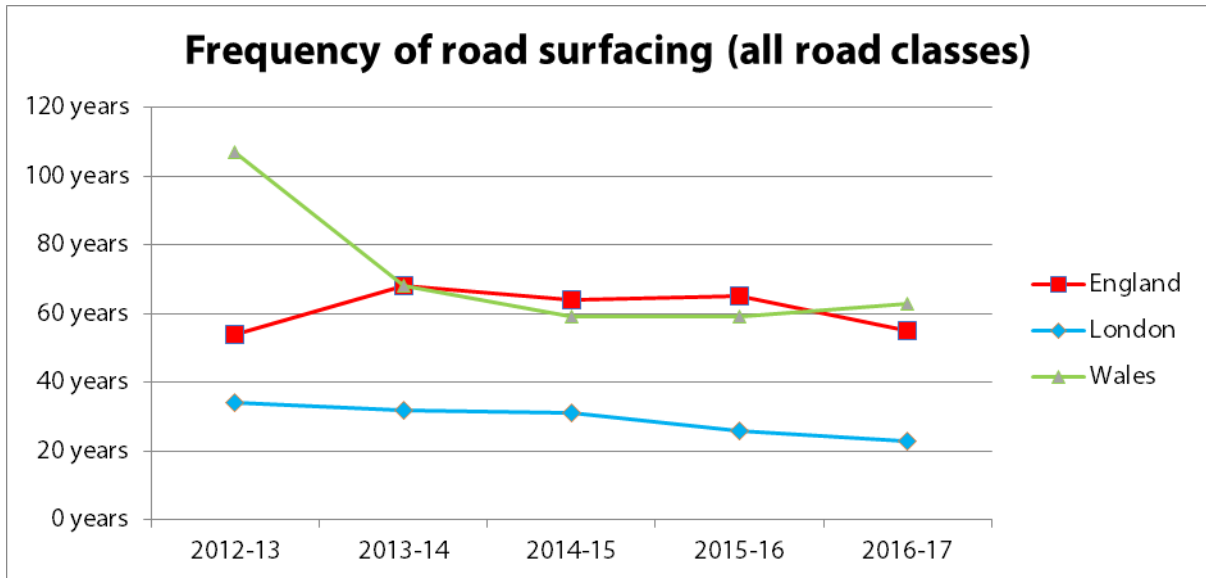
<b>Average number filled per authority last year</b>			
	<b>England</b>	<b>London</b>	<b>Wales</b>
<b>2012-13</b>	16,041	3,102	7,082
<b>2013-14</b>	15,195	3,602	6,730
<b>2014-15</b>	20,702	4,993	5,902
<b>2015-16</b>	16,616	4,099	5,217
<b>2016-17</b>	13,468	2,267	6,410



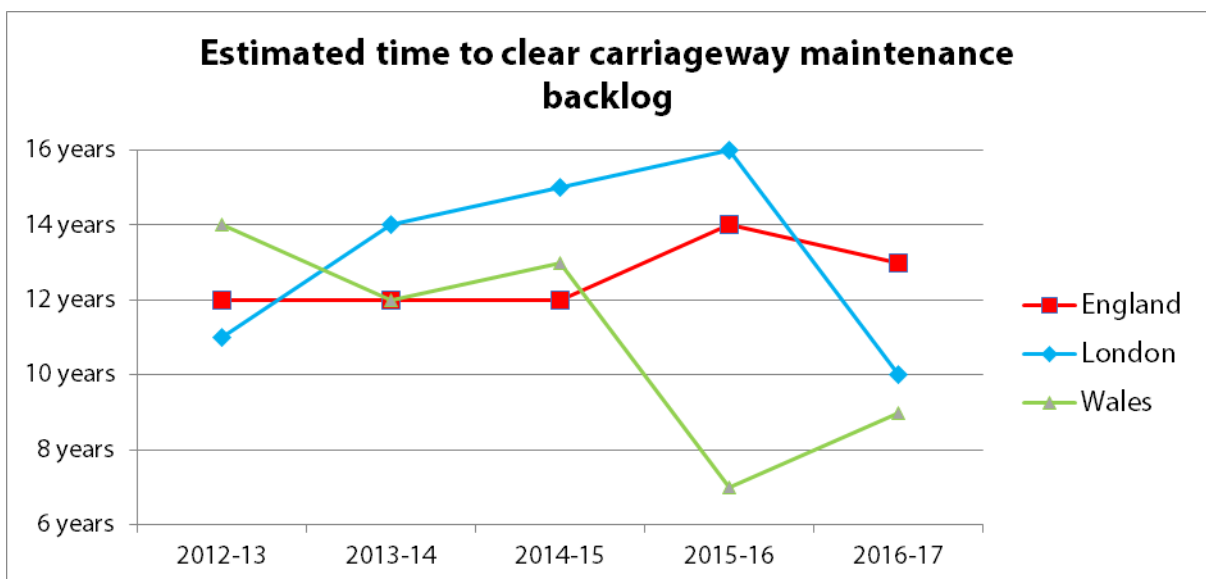
<b>Average cost to fill one pothole (planned)</b>			
	<b>England</b>	<b>London</b>	<b>Wales</b>
<b>2012-13</b>	£52*	£55*	£35*

<b>2013-14</b>	£52*	£62*	£47*
<b>2014-15</b>	£52*	£70*	£52*
<b>2015-16</b>	£53	£80	£65
<b>2016-17</b>	£46	£72	£53

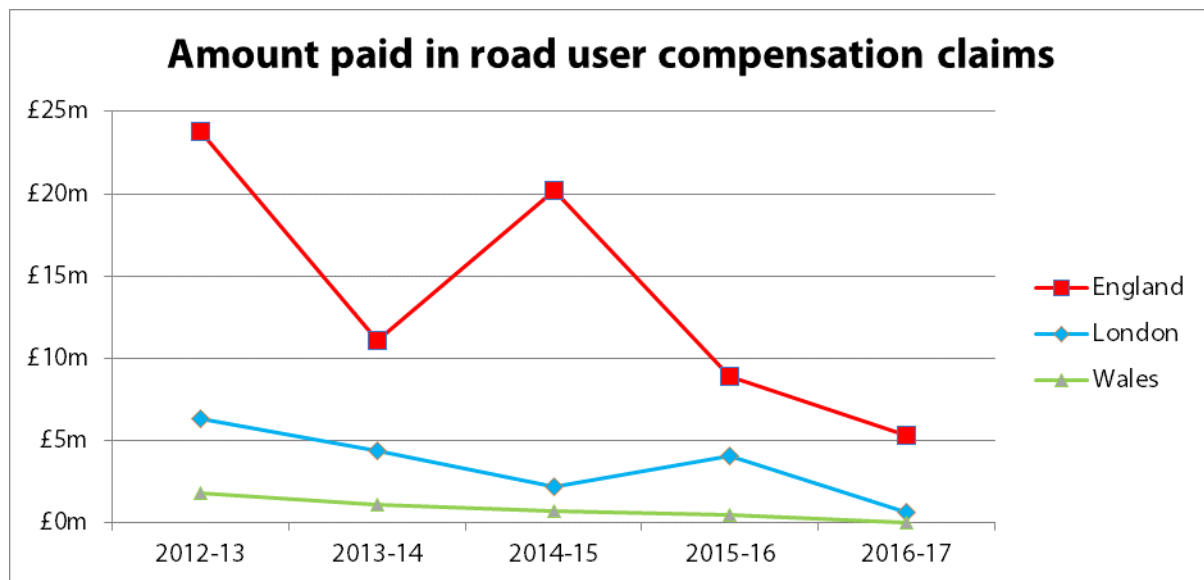
\*Before 2015-16, the results were not separated into planned and reactive maintenance costs. In 2016-17, the average reactive repair cost £69 in England, £98 in London and £59 in Wales



Frequency of road surfacing (all road classes)			
	England	London	Wales
<b>2012-13</b>	54 years	34 years	107 years
<b>2013-14</b>	68 years	32 years	68 years
<b>2014-15</b>	64 years	31 years	59 years
<b>2015-16</b>	65 years	26 years	59 years
<b>2016-17</b>	55 years	23 years	63 years



<b>Estimated time to clear carriageway maintenance backlog</b>			
	<b>England</b>	<b>London</b>	<b>Wales</b>
<b>2012-13</b>	12 years	11 years	14 years
<b>2013-14</b>	12 years	14 years	12 years
<b>2014-15</b>	12 years	15 years	13 years
<b>2015-16</b>	14 years	16 years	7 years
<b>2016-17</b>	13 years	10 years	9 years



<b>Amount paid in road user compensation claims</b>			
	<b>England</b>	<b>London</b>	<b>Wales</b>
<b>2012-13</b>	£23.8m	£6.3m	£1.8m
<b>2013-14</b>	£11.1m	£4.4m	£1.1m
<b>2014-15</b>	£20.2m	£2.2m	£0.702m
<b>2015-16</b>	£8.9m	£4.1m	£0.486m
<b>2016-17</b>	£5.3m	£0.640m	£0.043m

#### **4.0 APSE Comment**

APSE welcomes the release of this year's ALARM survey, and hopes that the information within helps to inform highways departments in England and Wales of how their service compares to other authorities. Like many other local authorities services, highways departments are having to prioritise maintenance activity due to the perceived underfunding by central government, with an increasing number of roads classed as 'poor' and a backlog of road surfacing work that will take an estimated 51 years to clear, and an estimated 12 years to clear the carriageway maintenance backlog.

Best practice presentations from the most recent APSE Highways, Street Lighting and Winter Maintenance seminar in March 2017 are now available online [here](#). APSE also regularly runs national and regional Highways and Street Lighting advisory groups; for more information, past presentations and minutes [click here](#). These presentations show the many innovative approaches that local authorities are taking to delivering



maintenance, utilising resources, managing risk and communicating effectively with the general public.

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