

Don't blame us for potholes say Surrey's highway authority.

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The state of Surrey's roads is "no fault of the county council" its cabinet has heard, as councillors vowed to put more pressure on central government for highways funding. In what the council's leader called "pothole season", the problems facing the repair of the county's roads were set out at a meeting of the authority's cabinet on Tuesday (January 31).

Approving the budget for the next year, ahead of full council voting on it, cabinet agreed a 2.99 per cent increase to the authority's council tax share, or 94p per week for residents. This will be alongside any increases to come from Surrey's 11 districts and boroughs and a proposed £15 increase per year for the Police and Crime Commissioner.

Cabinet members agreed a final budget for the council in 2023/24 of £1.1 billion, an increase of £61.4m from 2022/23. The council tax increase will be made up of a 0.99 per cent increase in the core council tax and a 2 per cent increase in portion that is spend on adult social care.

In terms of the budget for roads in Surrey in 2023/24, the meeting heard that the budget was being set in the context of "hyper-inflation", seeing an increase in the cost of bitumen of nearly 30 per cent over the past year.

Councillor **John O'Reilly** (Conservative, Hersham), chairman of the communities, environment and highways select committee, pointed to three central government cabinet ministers being Conservative MPs, including the chancellor Jeremy Hunt, the MP for South West Surrey.

He said he hoped a central government review into highways funding was carried out earlier than next year, adding: "The state of our roads, through no fault of this council, do require not just pothole filling but resurfacing." Cllr O'Reilly told the meeting: "I'm sure we'll put as much of our influence as we possibly can on central government to address these issues of funding for highways, particularly potholes."

Speaking before the meeting, Cllr **Tim Oliver** (Conservative, Weybridge), the council's leader, said despite seeing more traffic than other areas, the county council got the same level of funding from central government. He said the potholes were a national problem, made worse at this time of year by the freezing weather in what he called "pothole season". But he added that additional investment from the council had paid off and led to fewer potholes, with 32,000 being filled last year compared to 75,000 the year before.

He told the LDRS: "We need the government to give us some one-off money for potholes."

Council will meet to approve the budget in full on Tuesday (February 7).

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