

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Decision Report

Decision Maker:	Executive Member for Environment and Transport
Date:	19 January 2017
Title:	Parish Lengthsman Scheme Update
Reference:	8048
Report From:	Director of Economy, Transport and Environment

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1. Executive Summary

1.1. The purpose of this report is to provide the Executive Member with an update on the Parish Lengthsman Scheme (“the scheme”).

1.2. This paper seeks to

- Set out the background to the scheme;
- Consider the finance for the scheme and the impact on the budget; and
- Consider the future direction of the scheme (next steps).

2. Contextual information

2.1. The scheme was first trialled in 2010 with two clusters of approximately 10 parishes, each with a lead parish. Under the scheme, Hampshire County Council funds individual parishes at a rate of £1,000 each per annum to employ a local Lengthsman to carry out simple and straightforward tasks such as vegetation clearance and sign cleaning on highway and parish areas. Since then the number of parishes involved has increased year on year, with 44 parish councils joining in the current financial year, bringing the total number of participating councils up to 138.

2.2. The lead parish for each cluster engages the Lengthsman and administers payments. Where work is required, work schedules are arranged by the individual parishes, thus creating a close working relationship between the parishes and the lengthsman.

2.3. There are currently 24 lead parishes who administer a cluster consisting of between one to twelve parishes. A 10% administration allowance is added to the £1,000 per parish and this is paid to the lead parish of each cluster.

- 2.4. When the lead parishes were questioned on whether or not the scheme should continue, there was a unanimous view amongst respondents that it should continue.
- 2.5. However, it is recognised that, given the current austere economic climate and diminishing revenue budgets, the continuation of the scheme in its current form is now in question. The scheme is discretionary and funded out of the Highway Maintenance revenue budget which is under severe pressure. It is therefore considered important to review the current scheme and assess what options there may be to make it sustainable for the future.
- 2.6. To date a further 38 parishes have submitted requests to join the scheme and are currently on a waiting list for consideration to be included within the 2017/18 financial year.
- 2.7. Any additional parishes wishing to join the scheme will only be permitted if expressions of interest have been received prior to 31st January 2017 and additional funding for any parishes joining the scheme can be identified from sources other than the Highways Revenue Budget.
- 2.8. In addition, three parish councils employ lengthsman without any County Council funding and these operate under a similar contract with the County Council.

3. Finance

- 3.1. With 136 parishes participating at an expense of £1,100 each (including the administrative fee), and Fleet and Yateley town councils receiving £3,300m, the total cost to the County Council's Highways Revenue budget for the 2017/18 financial year will be £156,200. The Economy, Transport and Environment budget will fund £126,200 subject to the continual contribution of £30,000 from the Culture, Communities and Business Services Department.
- 3.2. The County Council supports the principal of extending the scheme to include other parishes wishing to join, which is expected to be between 30 and 40 parishes at a cost of up to £44,000. With the Highways Revenue budget under increasing pressure, such an expansion would be subject to additional funding being confirmed from other sources.
- 3.3. In the 2016/17 financial year the Culture, Communities & Business Services Department contributed £30,000 to the scheme to fund works carried out by lengthsman on footpaths, bridal paths and other Rights of Way. The Department has indicated its intention to contribute a similar sum for the 2017/18 financial year.

4. Performance

- 4.1. Details of the works carried out by lengthsman, on behalf of the parishes, are included in reports provided by the parishes when submitting their invoices, and also through monitoring carried out by the Highway Depots. However, there are still a number of issues which require more consideration. These include:

- A mixed standard of reporting levels on completed work;
- Difficulty in obtaining invoices from parishes within each financial period;
- A lack of visibility of works programmes being undertaken by the lengthsman that could be cross referenced to County Council work programmes.

- 4.2. Work completed by lengthsman on countryside elements of work is supplied by the parishes through Rights of Way management's IT system, known as CAMSweb (Countryside Access Management System).
- 4.3. It is also considered that the current Parish Lengthsman agreement should be reviewed and redrafted to ensure it adequately reflects the Health & Safety and Traffic Management requirements for all works carried out on, or adjacent to, the highway network.

5. Future direction

- 5.1. Several parishes have expressed a wish to expand the list of tasks that lengthsman are permitted to carry out, for example:

- Working on high speed roads;
- Clearing blocked grips, gullies and weir kerbs;
- Strimming of vegetation on junctions for visibility;
- Use of small plant such as mini excavators;
- Use of chemicals for weed treatment;
- Erection of traffic management (signing and guarding); and
- Pothole repairs.

- 5.2. Before lengthsman can be permitted to carry out an extended range of tasks consideration needs to be given to the County Council's statutory responsibilities in relation to repairs to highway defects; the competencies of the lengthsman and the need to protect the safety of the lengthsman and highway users with appropriate traffic management while works are carried out.
- 5.3. Within the new Hampshire Highways Service Contract (HHSC), due to start on 1 August 2017, the contractor will be required to provide support in the area of Community Engagement, including support and assistance with the Parish Lengthsman Scheme. Such assistance could come in the form of additional training for lengthsman on safe working practices on the highway and assistance with traffic management.

- 5.4. It is considered that there is a need to undertake a comprehensive review of the scheme in order to prepare it for the future. On this basis a suggestion might be made to the Economy, Transport and Environment Select Committee that the Task and Finish Working Group on the Parish Lengthsman Scheme is reconvened in order to work with Officers and Hampshire's Association of Local Councils (HALC) to carry out the proposed review. Such a review could be undertaken within the next 9 months in order for the Select Committee to make known its findings and any recommendations to the Executive Member by September 2017.

6. Recommendations

- 6.1. That the Executive Member for Environment and Transport gives approval for the continuation of the Parish Lengthsman Scheme for the 2017-2018 financial year with Highway funding for the participating parish and town Councils maintained at 2016/17 funding levels.
- 6.2. That the Executive Member for Environment and Transport approves the principal of extending the existing Parish Lengthsman Scheme to include additional parish and town councils who have expressed an interest in joining the scheme prior to 31st January 2017.
- 6.3. That authority is delegated to the Director of Economy, Transport and Environment, in consultation with the Executive Member for Environment and Transport, to make the necessary arrangements to extend the scheme to new parishes when funding is confirmed.

CORPORATE OR LEGAL INFORMATION:

Links to the Corporate Strategy

Hampshire safer and more secure for all:	yes
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	
Maximising well-being:	yes
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	
Enhancing our quality of place:	yes
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents

The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)

Document

Location

None

IMPACT ASSESSMENTS:

1. Equality Duty

1.1. The County Council has a duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 ('the Act') to have due regard in the exercise of its functions to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Act;
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, gender and sexual orientation) and those who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

Due regard in this context involves having due regard in particular to:

- a) The need to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons sharing a relevant characteristic connected to that characteristic;
- b) Take steps to meet the needs of persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
- c) Encourage persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

1.2. Equalities Impact Assessment:

The Parish Lengthsman Scheme seeks to ensure that local highways and amenity issues are resolved at a local level promoting a good quality of life, now and in the future. It seeks to benefit all users encompassing all those with protected characteristics, and the flexibility of local prioritisation provides scope to address particular issues at a community level.

2. Impact on Crime and Disorder:

2.1 The development of the scheme has no impact on Crime and Disorder.

3. Climate Change:

3.1. How does what is being proposed impact on our carbon footprint / energy consumption?

3.2. How does what is being proposed consider the need to adapt to climate change, and be resilient to its longer term impacts?

The scheme promotes works to be carried out manually by local contractors with very little use of mechanical plant which will not adversely affect the carbon footprint of the activities completed.