

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Decision Report

Decision Maker:	Executive Member for Economy, Transport and Environment
Date:	20 January 2015
Title:	Parish Lengthsman Scheme Update
Reference:	6392
Report From:	Director of Economy, Transport and Environment

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1. Executive Summary

1.1. The purpose of this paper is to seek approval for the continuation of an expanded Parish Lengthsman Scheme for the 2015-2016 financial year with a revised legal agreement to provide improved robust financial accountability.

1.2. This paper seeks to

- Set out the background to the project;
- Consider the finance for the current project and the impact on the budget;
- Considers the perceived impact the project has made on the performance of the County Council and any added value to the services provided;
- Identify the risks in abandoning the project;
- Consider the future direction of the project for the next financial year whilst an options appraisal is carried out for the future viability of the scheme.

2. Contextual information

2.1. Parish Lengthsmen were deployed in Hampshire until the late 1960s, carrying out routine maintenance work across the Parishes. Lengthsmen were given lengths of highway to maintain and were expected to do everything necessary to keep 'their' sections of road in good condition. They generally worked alone, using hand tools and tended to live in or near the parishes in which they worked, taking great pride in their area. They would have had a close relationship with the Parish authority and been aware of local needs. Unfortunately, mechanisation and reducing budgets sent the

service into decline and proved the downfall of the labour intensive Lengthsman's role.

- 2.2. In recent years the County Council recognised that, by working with parishes, an opportunity existed to improve local responsiveness, provide added value to the core service, and to improve the environment within the local communities by the re-introduction of a Parish Lengthsman scheme, but in a way that reflects more modern ways of working.
- 2.3. The current Parish Lengthsman scheme commenced in 2010 with two trial clusters of parishes in the Test Valley and Meon Valley areas involving 19 parishes. With increased interest from other parishes, this number has now expanded to include potentially 91 Hampshire parishes this year, although some agreements are yet to be signed and the final number this year may be slightly less. A list of parishes currently involved is included in Appendix 1.
- 2.4. Interest from other parishes continues to grow and an additional 24 Parishes have expressed an interest in joining the scheme in the next financial year. The list of parishes wishing to join the scheme is included in Appendix 2.
- 2.5. As the scheme continues to increase in popularity, the number of parishes wishing to participate is likely to increase year on year, and it is not unreasonable to anticipate that the majority of Hampshire town and parish councils may wish to be involved in the future.
- 2.6. In the current economic climate the continuing expansion of the scheme is likely to increase the financial burden on revenue expenditure and the planned options appraisal will investigate possible alternative funding mechanisms for future years beyond 2016.

3. Finance

- 3.1. Current funding is set at £1000 per parish with the exception of Fleet Town Council which receives £3000. A further 10% administration fee is paid to the Lead Parish of each cluster.
- 3.2. The cost of the project based on 91 Parishes for the current financial year will be in the region of £103,400.
- 3.3. When considering the known expressions of interest, added to the current level of involvement, the cost to operate the scheme for 2015/16 will be in the region of £130,000
- 3.4. There are 262 Parish and Town Councils in Hampshire. If the scheme was extended to enable all Parishes to join the scheme the cost, based on the current funding level of £1,000 per Parish, would be approximately £290,000 per annum.

- 3.5. Current funding of the Parishes is through the allocation of purchase orders issued throughout the year, and it is recommended that the funding to Parish Councils should be aligned with the start of each financial year.
- 3.6. It should be noted that the scheme is currently funded out of the revenue maintenance budget for Highways, which is facing unprecedented pressures and savings requirements.

4. Performance

- 4.1. The primary aims of the project are considered to be the provision of a closer link between local communities and the County Council on highway issues, to secure environmental improvements, and to enhance the standard of local maintenance on the highway.
- 4.2. Lengthsman are able to respond to local needs and priorities. This provides a sense of local ownership for the quality of the local highway network.
- 4.3. Lengthsmen regularly deal with issues of lower priority to the Highway Area Offices and assist with an improvement in the condition and effectiveness of local drainage, signs, and other assets with the potential to reduce longer term problems and costs.
- 4.4. A number of the Lead Parishes were recently contacted and have provided feedback about their view of the scheme. In summary the feedback was very positive and this reflects the growing interest in the scheme. In particular, parishes highly value the control it gives them to direct resources towards local priorities.
- 4.5. The scheme enables minor works, important to the local community, to be undertaken at a cheaper rate than would be achieved using the Term Highways Contract. Coupled with the other benefits outlined above the scheme is considered to provide value for money. However, the work is of a lower priority to core Highways Maintenance activity, and the continuation of the scheme would need to be considered in light of pressures on the revenue budget.

5. Other key issues

- 5.1. There is an expectation from parishes currently involved in the scheme that it will continue. Should funding be withdrawn or reduced, the scheme can only continue if parishes are willing to fund or part fund the Lengthsman themselves.
- 5.2. Parishes currently outside the scheme are becoming increasingly aware of the benefits and are expressing an interest. This is demonstrated by the 24 parishes currently indicating a wish to join the scheme in the next financial year, with further enquiries continuing to be received.

- 5.3. If the scheme continued and was restricted to those parishes currently involved it may be difficult in future years to justify why financial support is being offered to only approximately one third of the County's parishes.
- 5.4. If the scheme was permitted to expand, it would increase the financial burden on the Authority at a time when revenue budgets are under pressure.
- 5.5. There is an established working relationship with parishes currently operating within the scheme, and if the scheme is to be withdrawn at any stage it is possible that it will have a detrimental effect on the public perception of the highway service.
- 5.6. A number of individual parishes have been permitted to join the scheme as 'stand alone' or individual Parishes. If the scheme continues, these 'stand alone' parishes should be encouraged to form into clusters under a Lead Parish or to join existing clusters.
- 5.7. A reduction in the activities of Parish Lengthsmen could result in an increased number of enquiries for non-urgent defects being forwarded to the County Council, which were previously dealt with under the scheme.

6. Opportunities for Outside Funding

- 6.1. The Department for Communities & Local Government (DCLG) have recently published a prospectus entitled 'Delivering Differently in Neighbourhoods' within which bids are being sought for developing new approaches for delivering services at a neighbourhood level.
- 6.2. The aim of the funding is to support projects that seek to devolve greater responsibility to Parish & Town Councils to deliver improved services. The DCLG initiative is intended to support around 25 authorities to develop a neighbourhood service delivery approach.
- 6.3. If successful, unringfenced grants of up to £90k will be made to authorities to help:
 - Develop options appraisals or feasibility studies for new models;
 - Develop an implementation plan for the chosen model;
 - Develop a Cost Benefit Analysis for the chosen model.
- 6.4. The County Council is preparing a joint bid, in partnership with the Hampshire Association of Local Councils (HALC), to be considered for the development of the current Parish Lengthsman pilot into a redesigned scheme, working closer with the Parish Councils to develop the scheme for the future.
- 6.5. Any enhanced scheme would include the possible expansion of the Lengthsman's role to incorporate local flood relief work, such as dealing with

the identification of riparian responsibilities of land owners, and enhanced ditch clearance works, gully clearance, etc.

7. Future direction

- 7.1. As a revenue funded activity, it is considered appropriate to review this scheme as part of the current and future saving targets.

8. Recommendations

- 8.1. That the current Parish Lengthsman Scheme be continued for the 2015-2016 financial year, funded at a rate of £1,000 per Parish, with Fleet Town Council receiving £3,000, and with an additional 10% administration fee paid to the Lead Parishes.
- 8.2. That the scheme be expanded for the 2015-2016 financial year to include the 24 parishes that have already expressed an interest in joining the scheme.
- 8.3. That new annual agreements for all participating parishes are issued from 1 April 2015 in line with the financial year.
- 8.4. That an Options Appraisal is undertaken for the continuation of the scheme beyond the next financial year, which will explore opportunities for outside funding.

CORPORATE OR LEGAL INFORMATION:**Links to the Corporate Strategy**

Hampshire safer and more secure for all:	no
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	
Maximising well-being:	no
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.)

DocumentLocation

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 helps to enhance Hampshire's quality of place and to deliver lower priority highways works which are of benefit to all, including groups with protected characteristics. The proposal to continue and expand the scheme for the coming year will sustain and broaden these benefits. Any future changes to the delivery of the scheme as a result of the options appraisal will be subject to an equalities impact assessment to ensure that opportunities to improve outcomes for groups with protected characteristics are maximised, and that any negative impacts are kept to a minimum

2. Impact on Crime and Disorder:

2.1. None.

3. Climate Change:

- 3.1. How does what is being proposed impact on our carbon footprint / energy consumption? The project encourages local delivery of services which has the potential to reduce the County Councils carbon footprint and energy consumption. However, savings are dependant on who is employed as the lengthsman by the Lead Parish.
- 3.2. How does what is being proposed consider the need to adapt to climate change, and be resilient to its longer term impacts? Should the scheme expand to involve more town and parish councils this could lead to greater reductions in the future.

List of Parishes Currently Involved in the Scheme

Test Valley

Stockbridge
Wherwell
Chilbolton
Longstock
Houghton
Broughton
Mottisfont
Lockerley
Michelmersh & Timsbury
Leckford

New Forest

Fordingbridge
Alderholt (Dorset County Council)
Breamore
Damerham
Godshill
Hale
Hyde
Martin
Rockbourne
Sandleheath
Whitsbury
Woodgreen
Ellingham, Harbridge and Ibsley

Bransgore
Burley
Sopley

Milford on Sea

Minstead

Lyndhurst

Brockenhurst
Sway
East Boldre
Boldre

Copythorne
Bramshaw
Netley Marsh (Test Valley parish)
Wellow (Test Valley parish)

Fawley
Hythe & Dibden

Winchester

Crawley
South Wonston
Sparsholt
Hursley
Badgers Farm
Olivers Battery
Compton & Shawford
Twyford
Otterbourne
Colden Common

Itchen Valley
Micheldever
Barton Stacey (Test Valley parish)
Wonston
Headbourne Worthy
Old Alresford
Medstead (East Hampshire parish)
Ropley (East Hampshire parish)
Bighton

Winchester Meon Valley

Shedfield
Cheriton
Bramdean & Hinton Ampner
West Meon
Corhampton & Meonstoke
Droxford
Swanmore
Bishops Sutton
Soberton
Hambleton

Basingstoke

St Mary Bourne
East Woodhay
Burghclere
Ecchinswell, Sydmonton & Bishops Green
Whitchurch
Longparish (Test Valley parish)
Ashmansworth
Newtown
Hurstbourne Priors
Highclere

Hart

Fleet Town Council

Dogmersfield

Church Crookham

Crookham Village

Rotherwick

Ewshott

East Hampshire

Hawkley

Grayshott

Bentley

Binstead

Froyle

Headley

Kingsley

Lindford

List of Parishes Expressing an Interest in Joining the Scheme in 2015/16

New Forest

Ringwood Town Council
Hordle

Basingstoke

Newnham
Bramley
Pamber
Mapledurwell and Up Nately

Ashford Hill with Headley

Overton

Herriard

Hart

Blackwater & Hawley
Crandall
Elvetham Heath
Eversley
Greywell
Hartley Wintney
Hook
Long Sutton and Well
Odiham
South Warnborough
Winchfield
Yateley

Mattingley

Eversley

East Hampshire

Selborne