

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Decision Report

Decision Maker:	Executive Member for Economy, Transport and Environment
Date:	19 November 2020
Title:	Parish Lengthsman Scheme Update
Report From:	Director of Economy, Transport and Environment

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Purpose of this Report

1. The purpose of this report is to set out proposals for the County Council to continue to fund the Parish Lengthsman scheme which has been in place since 2010, while taking opportunities both to increase the scope of works that can be undertaken, and secure an enhanced view on return of spend as a result of funding the scheme.

Recommendations

2. That the Executive Member for Economy Transport and Environment confirms the County Council's intention to continue to fund the Parish Lengthsman scheme at existing levels, for the year 2021/22.
3. That arrangements are made to enable Parish Lengthsmen to undertake works on the live carriageway from 1 April 2021, subject to the relevant individuals undertaking mandatory Traffic Management training, to be funded from the Hampshire Highways Service Contract (HHSC), in order to ensure they are able to work safely and with appropriate signage in place.
4. That the Executive Member agrees an updated process for securing returns from parishes, to ensure that the County Council's view of return on spend meets auditable standards.

Executive Summary

5. The current Parish Lengthsman scheme in Hampshire has been in place since 2010. It enables Parish Councils to undertake a range of permitted duties in support of local responsiveness, and the improvement of the environment on a local basis. The scheme adds value to the wider Highways Maintenance activities undertaken by the County Council on a countywide basis.
6. Lengthsmen are empowered to resolve issues which may be seen as relatively low priority in the context of the wider Highways Maintenance programme, but which improve the environment and conditions on a local basis.

7. Currently, 185 parishes across Hampshire take advantage of the scheme, normally receiving £1,000 per annum funding from the County Council to finance works undertaken (with some historical exceptions, on a case-by-case basis). The total current cost of the service is £203,000 per year.
8. For the reasons given above, the Parish Lengthsman scheme is valued by Parish Councils and the County Council alike. It is therefore important to the County Council to continue to fund the scheme for a further year and ensure the continuation of the value that it brings.
9. The County Council has an ongoing commitment to ensuring that lengthsman are able to undertake works in a way that ensures that the wider scheme is best fit for purpose. As a result, it seeks to permit an increased scope of works from 1 April 2021 by enabling existing permitted duties to be undertaken on the live carriageway, subject to the completion of relevant Traffic Management training, which will be provided at no cost to Parish Councils, via the Hampshire Highways Service Contract (HHSC).
10. The County Council also seeks to secure an enhanced view of return on spend resulting from its ongoing funding of the Lengthsman Scheme. As such, it will introduce a new process for Parish Councils to follow from 1 April 2021. Parish Councils will continue to be expected to submit returns on a quarterly basis and will be introduced to the new process alongside best practice examples for how to complete returns. The County Council considers it important to have returns of an auditable quality and to ensure that it is getting value from its ongoing financial contribution to the scheme.

Contextual information – Increased Scope and Associated Training

11. Since the inception of the current Parish Lengthsman scheme in 2010, the County Council has permitted a number of duties to be undertaken by Lengthsman, under the broad headings of 'Minor Works', 'Drainage' and 'Signage'. At the same time, the County Council has made it clear which types of duty are not permitted to be undertaken by a Parish Lengthsman.
12. At this point in time, it is not proposed to increase the duties that Lengthsman are permitted to undertake. However, this report does recommend widening the scope of the Scheme by enabling these permitted duties to be undertaken on the live carriageway, which has not previously been allowable.
13. The County Council can only permit duties to be undertaken on the live carriageway where this is done in a manner which is safe for both the Lengthsman undertaking the duties and road users alike, which will involve correct use and placement of signage. It is crucial therefore, that the correct training is undertaken by Lengthsman working on the highway.
14. Currently, Lengthsman are expected to undertake Health & Safety training prior to undertaking their roles. Prior to widening the scope of the scheme as outlined above, the County Council would like all Lengthsman and Parish Clerks to undertake Traffic Management Training, to ensure that duties can be carried out safely, and with the appropriate signage in place.
15. Lengthsman will be expected to undertake a full 1.5-day Traffic Management course, and Parish Clerks will be expected to undertake an introductory 0.5 day Traffic Management course. This training can be made available shortly after a

decision is taken, with a view to all relevant individuals having undertaken training by 1 April 2021. Lengthsmen will not be permitted to work on the live carriageway until this training has been undertaken.

16. The training provided to Parish Clerks will allow further understanding of the types of works that Lengthsmen can be commissioned to undertake.
17. The training will be provided to Lengthsmen and Parish Clerks at no cost. The training will be provided via the HHSC.
18. It is intended that all parties will benefit from this additional scope and associated training, as both the County Council and parish councils will benefit from the increased ability of Lengthsmen to resolve issues on a local level.
19. A full list of currently permitted tasks is included at Appendix A. It is felt in particular that the tasks of clearing drainage pipes and gullies, cutting back vegetations and grass-strimming, and sign cleaning will be enhanced by permitting works to be undertaken on the live carriageway. This is as these tasks will often be undertaken on rural lanes without footways or wide verges, where lengthsmen can otherwise work.
20. In reference to works undertaken, the annual contracts between Hampshire County Council and participants ensure that the Parish Councils and the Parish Lengthsmen take out and maintain Public Liability insurance, which shall, for any one occurrence or series of occurrences arising out of one event, be not less than £10,000,000.
21. Additionally, the contracts restrict the list of activities that can be carried out and locations where the Lengthsman can operate. The proposed additional Traffic Management training will reinforce these requirements.
22. The County Council does not rule out increasing the scope of duties that can be undertaken in future, and as a result may pilot new duties on a local level in 2021/22. This could potentially be associated additional training requirements.
23. However, the County Council will continue to be clear in communications with Parish Lengthsmen and Parish Clerks, around which tasks are permitted and which are not. The above training will support this approach.

Contextual Information – Improved Process for Parish Council Returns.

24. Parish Councils are expected to submit returns to the County Council on a quarterly basis. Both the quality of the returns from parishes, and the regularity at which they are received, are inconsistent currently. Only around 50% of Parish Councils provided the expected return at the end of Quarter 1 2019/20.
25. While the County Council does not dispute the local value that is generated by the duties that Lengthsmen are undertaking, it will still be prudent to improve the frequency and quality of returns. This will ensure the County Council has an auditable view of return on spend and that value is derived from the County Council's ongoing financial support for the scheme.
26. As a result, the County Council plans to write to all Parish Councils that are part of the scheme prior to 1 April 2021, to set out an improved process for returns for 2021/22.

27. The County Council will address quality of returns through supplying best practice examples of how these should be completed in future.
28. The County Council will continue to monitor returns throughout 2021/22 and will contact parishes where the frequency or quality of returns does not meet requirements, to reiterate the importance of receiving these.

Finance

29. Engaging with parish councils, Hampshire County Council will continue to investigate alternative ways of funding the Parish Lengthsman scheme in future, recognising that the current funding model is no longer sustainable given the financial pressures on the County Council. This review of the funding model already forms part of the ongoing Transformation savings programme. Discussions with Parish Councils have not yet identified a clear way forward, and these discussions have also been somewhat disrupted during the Covid pandemic. For this reason it is proposed that the County Council will continue to contribute to the Parish Lengthsman Scheme on the current formula over the next financial year (2021/22) to allow time for the review of alternative funding approaches, including more detailed discussions with Parish Councils, to be completed. The cash flow impact of deferring the proposed budget saving will be met from one off savings arising from contractual efficiencies and savings in the Highway Budget in 2020/21.

Performance

30. By increasing the scope of permitted works, the County Council seeks to further increase the performance of the Parish Lengthsman scheme, by enabling Lengthsmen to deliver greater value on a local basis.
31. By securing an enhanced view of return on spend, the County Council seeks to further understand the performance of the scheme by ensuring clear visibility of value for money in return for its financing of the scheme.

Conclusions

32. It is intended that the scheme will continue to add value to the wider Highways Maintenance activities undertaken by the County Council on a countywide basis, and it is recommended that the scheme is revised as outlined in this report to aid continuous improvement.

REQUIRED CORPORATE AND LEGAL INFORMATION:

Links to the Strategic Plan

Hampshire maintains strong and sustainable economic growth and prosperity:	no
People in Hampshire live safe, healthy and independent lives:	yes
People in Hampshire enjoy a rich and diverse environment:	yes
People in Hampshire enjoy being part of strong, inclusive communities:	yes

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

EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT:

1. Equality Duty

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 by or under the Act with regard to the protected characteristics as set out in section 4 of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation);
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation) and those who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (see above) and persons who do not share it.

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

- The need to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons sharing a relevant characteristic connected to that characteristic;
- Take steps to meet the needs of persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
- 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.

2. Equalities Impact Assessment:

This proposal to continue providing funding for the Parish Lengthsman Scheme for 2021/22 is not intended to result in any change to service provision, so is deemed to have a neutral impact on groups with protected characteristics.