

## HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

### Decision Report

<b>Decision Maker:</b>	Executive Member for Environment and Transport
<b>Date:</b>	5 March 2013
<b>Title:</b>	Parish Lengthsman
<b>Reference:</b>	4693
<b>Report From:</b>	Director of Economy, Transport and Environment

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### 1. Executive Summary

1.1. The purpose of this paper is to obtain approval for a continuation and expansion of the Parish Lengthsman Initiative for 2013-2014 and for the reissue of a revised factsheet.

1.2. This paper seeks to:

- report on the successes and lessons learned from the trials and the reasoning for the recommendation to continue with an expanded project;
- consider the finance implications for continuing the project;
- highlight the benefit to Hampshire County Council and the improved perception of the County Council and the highway maintenance service;
- consider the future management and appraisal of the project;
- consider the potential for the project's expansion to encompass the majority of town councils and parishes.

### 2. Contextual information

2.1 Parish Lengthsman were deployed in Hampshire until the late 1960s, carrying out routine maintenance works across their parishes. Lengthsman were given lengths of highway to maintain and were expected to undertake all necessary works to keep 'their' sections of highway in a good condition. They generally worked alone, using hand tools. They tended to live in or near their parishes and took great pride in their areas. They would have a close relationship with the parishes and be very aware of local needs. Unfortunately mechanisation and reducing budgets sent the service into decline and proved the downfall of this labour intensive service.

- 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 improve the environment within local communities by the re-introduction of Parish Lengthsman, but in a way that reflects more modern ways of working.
- 2.3 The pilots have now been running for two years. The original two pilots in Meon Valley and Test Valley were followed by similar trials in the Winchester Downlands area and also in the New Forest, centred around Fordingbridge. There was one other trial involving a single town council at Fleet; this was joined shortly afterwards by a single parish trial at Minstead, in the New Forest. Minstead Parish Council already employed its own lengthsman and it was felt funding would encourage it to become a lead parish for a future group. Forty three parishes were involved this year.
- 2.4 A number of lessons were learnt from the original pilots. Difficulties with signing of the legal agreements, particularly between the lead and participating parishes, and problems of obtaining the required level of Public Liability Insurance at a reasonable cost were overcome. 'Basic Personal Safety Training' is given to the lengthsman by Highway Managers.
- 2.5 Based on the four larger pilots, Lead Parishes have tended to take different approaches to the scheme. Some used existing resource with the Parish Councils, others employed a part-time administrator. There were differing views on expanding the existing pilots. Meon Valley has indicated it would accept new parishes. However, Test Valley has expressed a view that ten parishes was probably the maximum that could be effectively managed.
- 2.6 Financial records submitted by the lead parishes indicate a good level of governance and control. Lead Parishes have been monitoring the planned and completed works to ensure, as far as practicable, each parish has received its full allotment of the lengthsman time.
- 2.7 The types of works undertaken have generally been recorded. As expected, a proportion of the works that were undertaken would be within the remit or responsibility of the District Councils and the Parish. A detailed analysis has not been undertaken, but over 50% of the work was highway related. This is enhanced by the positive benefits felt by the Parish, particularly through the improved street scene. The Meon Valley trial is using a precept to fund additional complementary street scene works.
- 2.8 The skills and capacity of the lengthsman employed by the Lead Parishes varied. Fordingbridge, Winchester and Test Valley engaged a self-employed handy man with a vehicle and basic tools. The Meon Valley and Fleet engaged the services of their existing ground maintenance contractors, which were well equipped and could do a far greater range of works, particularly routine arboricultural works. In all cases Lengthsman were employed following a simple procurement process undertaken by the lead parishes, and generally each trial is pleased with their choice.

### **3. Finance**

- 3.1 To continue with the current project at the same funding levels with a 10% administration fee would cost £48,000. Continuing with the existing pilots plus all 45 Parishes that have expressed an interest, with new Parishes funded at £1,000 per parish plus 10% admin fee, would cost £95,000. There is sufficient funding available within the overall Highway Maintenance budget to accommodate this level of activity in 2013-14.
- 3.2 If the scheme expanded such that all Town Councils, Parishes and Parish Meetings joined the scheme at some point, again at a funding level of £1,000 per parish plus 10% admin fee, the cost would be approaching £300,000. Further breakdowns are appended to the report.
- 3.3 Parishes should be positively encouraged to look for other sources of funding to add value to the project. The National Park gave £500 to the Fordingbridge trial and it is believed it will continue to contribute should the scheme be extended, and it may also contribute to other new clusters within the National Park.
- 3.4 The Meon Valley pilot is using parish precepts to pay for additional 'street scene works' and it has been noted by some trials that they need to coordinate better with District Councils on this type of work. This may lead to more involvement by the Districts and give the opportunity for additional funding.
- 3.5 Stockbridge Parish Council, the lead for the Test Valley, is encouraging its parishes to develop three-year programmes, and is looking for other sources of funding to complement the project. The desire to obtain additional top-up sources of funding is an area which needs to be developed.
- 3.6 The rates paid to the lengthsman in individual trials vary as they all went through individual procurement processes. They are all paying hourly rates above the minimum wage and in all cases the rates obtained represent good value for money.
- 3.7 Funding of the project will become a pressure as more parishes join and Government funding to the County Council continues to be reduced. Therefore the Parish Lengthsman Information Sheets and Legal Agreements need to be rewritten to include a specific clause that Hampshire County Council can withdraw funding by giving a minimum of six months notice.

### **4. Performance**

- 4.1 Engagement with the projects by Highway Managers and frontline engineers is inconsistent. In order to realise the maximum benefits from the project there will need to be greater engagement and liaison between Highway Managers and the Lead Parish, and between the lengthsman and the Local Highway Engineer. This approach is working well in the Fordingbridge trial. There should also be an annual review of each scheme undertaken by the

relevant Highway Manager. The Project Manager should meet with the Lead Parishes in groups of 2 or 3 pilots to encourage discussion and consistency between them, and to draw out best practice. In future, funding will be dependant on this kind of engagement.

## **5. Other key issues**

- 5.1 By giving funding direct to Parishes it gives more local control over public finances and diversifies the supply of the highways service in line with the aims of the 'Big Society'. The Localism Act 2011 aims to create community involvement and give people more control over local priorities.
- 5.2 There is also an expectation from other Parishes that the pilots will be expanded, with 41 new parishes expressing an interest, A map showing the location of the existing projects and the new parishes and a list of the new parishes and potential clusters are appended to the report.
- 5.3 There is also interest in the Fordingbridge Pilot from Alderholt Parish Council, which is in Dorset. It was unable to join the Dorset County Council Scheme as it was oversubscribed. It is in the process of signing the legal agreements with Fordingbridge and will bring with it £1,000 of funding from Dorset County Council.
- 5.4 Due to the popularity of the scheme it can be argued it is in the County's interest to continue to encourage participation. However, due to the expectations of new parishes it is not considered an option just to continue with the current pilots.
- 5.5 For the current trial a set up time of six months was envisaged. Feedback from pilots, particularly where they were advertising and appointing a new lengthsman, suggest this was challenging. Although this means that new clusters may not be in a position to start any work until September 2013, this is preferable to delaying any expansion until the 2014-2015 financial year.
- 5.6 Some larger parishes and town councils already employ a ground maintenance contractor. Minstead was funded this year as it had its own contractor, and West Meon employed Shedfield's ground maintenance contractor as its lengthsman. It is suggested from the pilots that the most benefit is to the smaller parishes who do not have the financial resources to employ their own contractors, and one option that was considered was to restrict the project to the smaller parishes. However this would potentially alienate the larger parishes and town councils and restrict the project to rural areas.
- 5.7 There are two stand alone pilots in Fleet Town and Minstead. Fleet has indicated that it would give positive consideration to leading in an expanded project. However, it is expected that Minstead is unwilling to act as a lead parish. One option considered was to withdraw funding from these pilots unless they agree to be part of a larger cluster.

## **6. Health & Safety**

- 6.1 A standard personal safety training package needs to be developed to ensure consistency across the County. This should also ensure that the lengthsman vehicle conforms to Chapter 8. Furthermore, it can be used as an opportunity to advertise the project. The Fordingbridge lengthsman is using magnetic signs on his truck to conform to Chapter 8. Additional signs to fit on the doors of the vehicle are being made so that the public are aware that this is a Town/Parish/County project.

## **7. Future direction**

- 7.1 The project benefits the County Council and improves the perception of the highway maintenance service. By empowering local communities in this way, this project fits well with the concept of the 'Big Society' and the aims of the Localism Act 2011. There is an expectation from other parishes that the scheme will be expanded. It is expected that as clusters develop this will encourage other neighbouring parishes to join. In future years, if the scheme's popularity with parishes continues, then it is likely the project will continue to expand until the majority of Hampshire parishes and town councils are involved.

## **8. Recommendations**

- 8.1 That the Parish Lengthsman initiative be extended into 2013-2014 for the parishes currently involved in the project.
- 8.2 That approval be give for the initiative to be widened in 2013-2014 to cover additional viable clusters which can be formed from the parishes who have expressed an interest in joining the project, at an approximate cost of £95,000.

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

<b>Hampshire safer and more secure for all:</b>	no
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	
<b>Maximising well-being:</b>	no
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	
<b>Enhancing our quality of place:</b>	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 Equalities Impact Assessment:**

- 1.1 The proposals in this report have been developed with due regard to the requirements of the Equality Act 2010, including the Public Sector Equality Duty and the Council's equality objectives. An assessment of the impacts in this service area can be found at [our EqlA web page](#) under "Keeping Hampshire Moving".

It is considered that the issues covered by this report will not have impacts requiring further specific actions by the Council above those already established in its existing policies and working procedures.

- 1.2 The parish can direct the Lengthsmen to undertake works which can aid vulnerable groups such as the elderly or disabled, for example keeping paths clear and keeping public seating in good order.

### **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?

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

- a) The project encourages local delivery of services which should reduce the County Council's carbon footprint / energy consumption.
- b) The proposed expansion of the project should lead to greater reductions in the future.
- c) The scheme encourages greater community involvement and interest in the delivery of local services, and this can ultimately play a part in making communities more adaptable to future change.