

Summary of Key Points Raised During the Consultation Workshops

1. The consultation included an invitation to Parish Councils and all main highway Stakeholder groups and organisations to attend a series of workshops which explored in more detail the views held about the proposals and in particular the option to develop arrangements to increase community involvement in local highway maintenance delivery.
2. Three parish and town council workshops were attended by a total of 62 people while just one person from a cycling user group attended the general stakeholder workshop. In total, representatives from 40 parish and town councils were engaged through these workshops.
3. Each workshop commenced with a presentation that provided additional background to the economic challenge faced by the Council, the scale of the highway maintenance service and the specific proposals covered by the consultation. In general, delegates at the workshops expressed their understanding with the financial situation facing the County Council

Proposal 1 - To Refine the Approach to Prioritising Defects

4. There was broad support for the development of the risk-based approach and a focus on planned maintenance. However, there was some concern that cyclists and pedestrians would not be considered as part of this approach and that rural parts of the highway network would be overlooked in favour of the built-up parts.

Proposal 2 - To Rationalise the Number of Items that the Authority Maintains Directly

5. With regards to rationalising the number of items the County Council look after, there was broad agreement that there were items that were obsolete or no longer required, but some concerns that safety should always be considered in making decisions to rationalise items such as bollards or line markings. The draft Policy takes account of these concerns.
6. Particular concerns were raised about the impact the risk-based approach might have for the ageing population and those with mobility and sight issues if defects are left unrepaired for longer in minor residential estate roads. There was a general concern that cuts to maintenance could present particular problems for elderly and disabled people, particularly where defects are assessed as a lower risk and therefore treatment may not be prioritised. Further engagement is proposed with these groups and a full equalities impact assessment will be completed before taking the policy and strategy forward for approval.

7. The Council should be aware of the hazard that potholes and traffic calming features present to cyclists after dark and in the wet and should ensure that the asset management strategy supports other key council strategies, including encouraging people to walk and cycle noting the related public health benefits.

Proposal 3 - To Develop Opportunities for Involving Communities Directly in Some Areas of Local Maintenance (including the option to develop a Parish Council Highway Warden/Lengthsman scheme)

8. The workshops focused principally on the proposals to involve communities in aspects of highway maintenance and the questions to guide this discussion were posed as follows:
 - Are you interested in principle to work with the County Council in maintaining roads, pavements and verges?
 - What role could you see your council playing?
 - What activities would you be willing to do / consider?
 - How could we best support you to take on an enhanced role in looking after the streetscape and road-side environment?
 - What would we need to do differently to make this work?
9. Many parish councils were concerned that this proposal would lead to increased costs for them and therefore for local residents and this issue prompted the majority of concern.
10. There was a general view that the County Council should make some budget available to support parish councils taking on highway maintenance. If budgets were made available initially, there was some concern that these would then be reduced over time.
11. Getting involved would have to remain a matter of local choice, as not all communities would be willing to pay extra.
12. Smaller parish councils would find it more difficult to get involved than larger councils with more staff and greater budget. Although clustering of councils may be an option, such an approach would need to be centrally supported and co-ordinated.
13. Local councils were concerned about the capacity of their clerks to take on extra responsibilities.
14. Councils that indicated that they might want to get involved were considering different ways and for different reasons – some envisaged an ‘eyes and ears’ role only, others indicated an interest in taking on responsibility for delivering maintenance of certain items, particularly maintenance of trees, hedges and verge areas. There would therefore need to be flexibility in how local councils can get involved, with different levels of involvement possible.

15. Many felt that local councils could make a better job of maintaining certain items than the County Council and some considered that their local grass cutting arrangements were already an example of this capability..
16. It was highlighted that local councils were already involved in highway maintenance, whether through formal arrangements such as grass cutting service level agreements (SLAs), via tree wardens and snow wardens, or through informal local arrangements.
17. Core 'highway maintenance' such as pothole repairs etc were generally considered not something that the parish councils would want to be involved with due to the skills and safety issues associated with this type of work..
18. Some Parish Councils expressed a desire to have a bigger say in what happens on the highway, i.e. with regards to speed limits, weight limits, improvement schemes etc and suggested these opportunities should be offered in return for taking on maintenance responsibilities.
19. There was concern that different levels of take-up would lead to different standards and a patchy condition of the highway across the County.
20. There were a number of concerns raised around the matter of liability, with some parish councils seeing this as a major obstacle to their involvement. The County Council would need to provide relevant guidance with regards to risk management, insurance and dealing with litigation.
21. The County Council would be expected to provide a robust training package to enable local council staff and volunteers to take on their new tasks and responsibilities.
22. It was suggested that the Council could also help by providing model contracts / templates for policies and procedures etc.
23. Some parish councils felt that lessons should be learned from the development of the grass-cutting SLAs – both positive and negative and particularly around communication and clarity about the detail of any further SLA's
24. There were a number of comments about communication between the County Council and parish councils and although some reported improved experiences, there was a view that Parish Councils were not always given due consideration or notification before the County Council undertook works. Improving communication channels would be a prerequisite to enhancing the involvement of local councils.
25. Local councils would expect to be notified in time when works are due to take place on parts of the highway (i.e. verges) for which they have taken over responsibility. Currently this is not always the case.

26. It was suggested that there may be scope to engage other community groups in particular highway maintenance tasks. For example, the national sustainable transport charity Sustrans have a 'Ranger' group that cut back vegetation along cycling routes on a voluntary basis.
27. The comments were wide ranging and while some Parish Councils indicated that they would be unlikely to support the development of further local delivery, others were interested in taking on some tasks but wanted to see a more detailed proposal including clarification of any financial support, training and risk management.
28. There was no single consensus around a way forward but moderate support for the proposal to develop further opportunities for communities to become further involved in some local delivery of highway maintenance. For this reason it is proposed that a draft pilot scheme is developed, to further explore the issues raised and establish the viability of a full Countywide arrangement.