

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

11 October 2022

Subject: Parish Stewards – Increased Funding

Cabinet Member: Cllr Dr Mark McClelland, Cabinet Member for Transport, Waste, Street Scene and Flooding

Key Decision: Key

Executive Summary

The Council has been operating the Parish Steward Scheme successfully for many years, and it is a service that is greatly appreciated by the local communities. It provides a regular visit by an operative with a truck equipped with a full range of hand tools and materials to address a wide variety of minor highway defects and needs.

There are currently 18 Parish Stewards operating in the county. They can repair a wide range of minor defects using light plant and tools, including strimmers, brush cutters and chain saws. Visits are programmed to take place Monday to Thursday. Friday is used as a float day to enable catch up for any outages such as leave, training or incident response. The schedule is reviewed annually, and the programmes for visits are adjusted as necessary.

The scheme has been immensely successful in its current form. However, it does have the potential to be expanded to offer significant service improvements. Some of the tasks that the Parish Stewards can be requested to undertake by parishes can be beyond the capabilities of a single person to carry them out safely. Whilst there is some scope for Stewards to work together on Fridays when works are generally not programmed, there are limitations with the resources available.

In order to increase the capability of the Parish Stewards it is proposed to add a two-person support team with additional equipment. The Parish Steward Support Team would be shared between the stewards and deployed as required, with care taken to ensure that they are programmed to be fully utilised.

The Parish Stewards are trained to be multi-skilled, with sufficient ability to identify and undertake works that align with the aspirations of the community, and to be able to identify where the additional resources could be safely and efficiently deployed. Additional support in managing and organising the support team's work would be available from the Council's local highway team.

Proposals

It is recommended that:

- (i) A budget of £233,000 is included for each of the years 2022/23, 2023/24 and 2024/5 to provide a Parish Steward Support Service.
- (ii) Arrangements should be made with the highways term maintenance contractor for the supply of a suitable two-person team and associated equipment to support the Parish Steward scheme.

Reason for Proposals

The Parish Steward scheme is important to the town and parish councils and the local communities, and their work contributes to improving the safety and appearance of Wiltshire's highway network. The increased budget will enable the Parish Stewards to undertake additional work on the network.

Terence Herbert
Chief Executive

Wiltshire Council

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Purpose of Report

1. To consider increasing the budget for the Parish Steward Scheme to increase the capacity and capability of the service.

Relevance to the Council's Business Plan

2. The Council Business Plan acknowledges Wiltshire's natural beauty, the importance of the environment and the need for well-connected communities.
3. It also emphasises the importance of working in partnership with local communities.

Background

4. The Council has been operating the Parish Steward Scheme successfully for many years, and it is a service that is greatly appreciated by the local communities. It provides a regular visit by an operative with a truck equipped with a full range of hand tools and materials to address a wide variety of minor highway defects and needs.
5. The tasks are identified by a nominated person from the town or parish council and reported in advance of the visit on a priority system. The scheme operates through a single point of contact appointed to represent the priority needs of the community to the Steward service.
6. There are currently 18 Parish Stewards operating in the county. They can repair a wide range of minor defects using light plant and tools, including strimmers, brush cutters and chain saws. They are trained to ensure safe working in the Highway, underground apparatus detection, and identification of invasive and noxious weeds. There is also a two-person team operating in Salisbury on masonry and similar repairs.
7. Visits are programmed to take place Monday to Thursday. Friday is used as a float day to enable catch up for any outages such as leave, training or incident response. The schedule is reviewed annually, and the programmes for visits are adjusted as necessary.

Main Considerations for the Council

8. The current scope of works undertaken by Parish Stewards, covers a wide range of small highway maintenance tasks that are important to the local community, such, cutting back of vegetation, clearing of detritus and minor carriageway repairs.
9. The scheme has been immensely successful in its current form. However, it does have the potential to be expanded to offer significant service improvements. Some of the tasks that the Parish Stewards can be requested to undertake by parishes can be beyond the capabilities of a single person to carry them out safely. Whilst there is some scope for Stewards to work together on Fridays, when works are generally not programmed, there are limitations with the resources available.
10. In order to increase the capability of the Parish Stewards it is proposed to add a two-person support team with additional equipment. This would be likely to comprise:
 - (i) 5.5t pick up vehicle
 - (ii) 900kg cage trailer
 - (iii) Pedestrian mechanical weed ripper
 - (iv) Pedestrian flail mower
 - (v) Small power tools
 - (vi) Materials as necessary.
11. The Parish Steward Support Team would be shared between the stewards and deployed as required, with care taken to ensure that they are programmed to be fully utilised. The resources provided may be varied in order to meet changing circumstances and requirements.
12. The Parish Stewards are trained to be multi-skilled, with sufficient ability to identify and undertake works that align with the aspirations of the community, and to be able to identify where the additional resources could be safely and efficiently deployed.
13. Additional support in managing and organising the support team's work would be available from the Council's local highway team.

Overview and Scrutiny Engagement

14. No scrutiny engagement has taken place at this stage. Progress on the Parish Steward Scheme improvements will be reported to the Environment Select Committee in connection with the annual report made on the highways service.

Safeguarding Implications

15. There are no safeguarding implications.

Public Health Implications

16. The tasks performed by the Parish Stewards often contribute to improving road safety. The additional resources proposed will increase their capability and capacity for dealing with potentially hazardous issues on the highway network.

Procurement Implications

17. The Parish Steward Scheme is provided through the highways term maintenance contract which is currently the subject of a procurement exercise. The existing contract is with Ringway Infrastructure Services, and the new contract is the subject of a report to this meeting and will be awarded shortly and will start in April 2023. The new contract includes provision for the new supplier to provide the Parish Steward Service.

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

18. It is not anticipated that there will be any equalities impacts as a result of this enhanced service provision. Improved road maintenance is likely to be beneficial for pedestrians, cyclists and vulnerable road users.

Environmental and Climate Change Considerations

19. Enhanced routine highway maintenance by the Parish Stewards can have environmental benefits, especially in terms of reducing pollution and improving the environment and the appearance of the highway network for all road users, potentially increasing people's pride in the county and its environment.
20. From April 2023 the service would be provided under the new term maintenance contract. Bidders have included proposals to meet the Council's carbon target as part of their submissions which have been assessed as part of the award process.

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision and related work is not taken

21. Without the proposed investment there is a risk of increased public dissatisfaction with the condition of the highway network and with the existing limitations on the operation of the Parish Steward Scheme. The proposed enhancement would provide the opportunity to deal with some of the issues which are of importance to the town and parish councils, and to the public and road users.

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision is taken and actions that will be taken to manage these risks

22. There is a risk that the contractors will not have the capacity to deliver the increased service. However, initial indications from the existing contractor are that they will be able to meet this demand despite the increased demand on resources nationally. It should be noted that a new contract will be starting in April next year and arrangements will have to be made with supplier for the enhanced services.

23. There is a risk that the current inflation and skills shortages being experienced, especially in the construction industry, could make establishing the team difficult and this will be managed with relevant contractor.
24. Rising costs are becoming a problem in many areas and highway maintenance has been affected because of increased fuel and material costs. This could affect the future delivery of these increased programmes.

Financial Implications

25. It is estimated that a budget of £233,000 for three years would be sufficient to deliver the proposed Parish Steward Support Team, including materials and operating costs.
26. The type of work undertaken, and the material and other costs would be kept under review to ensure that the scheme remains within the allocated budgets and provides good value for money
27. The proposals have been discussed with existing service suppliers where relevant and the indications are that resources will be available to deliver the enhanced service levels.

Legal Implications

28. The highway authority has a duty to keep the highway network safe, but this duty does not usually prescribe specific levels of maintenance. The Parish Stewards help the Council to meet its responsibilities with regard to keeping the network safe, especially in connection with dealing with incidents on the network, including potholes and fallen trees.

Workforce Implications

29. The additional services will be provided by contractors, and their management will be by existing local highways officers, and additional staff will not be required.

Options Considered

30. As an alternative to a support team, it would be possible to increase the number of Parish Stewards, but this would not be as effective as increasing the scope of works the existing Parish Stewards can undertake by using a specialist support team.
31. Additional investment in other highway maintenance operations has recently taken place, including increased gully emptying, lining and road markings. It is considered that further investment in these services and other highway maintenance activities would be less effective than the current proposal to create a support team for the Parish Stewards.

Conclusions

32. The increased investment would result in better road markings, increased gully emptying and greater fly-tipping enforcement, which would lead to improved road safety and increased public satisfaction.
33. It is considered that the proposals are viable and can be delivered within a suitable timescale. Increasing the budget for three years will enable the backlog of work to be addressed and the condition and appearance of the highway network to be improved considerably.

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The following documents have been relied on in the preparation of this report:

None

Appendices

None