

Local Community Network Parish Pilot – Highways (Exmoor)

Introduction

The [One Somerset Business Case](#) sets an ambition to set up between 15 and 20 Local Community Networks (LCNs) during the implementation of the new authority.

There is a target for 2-4 LCN pilots to be live by the end of 2021. One of these pilots will be carried out in the Exmoor area with a focus on Highway service delivery and will trial proposals including a Highway Steward and a Community Highways Group. If successful, it is hoped this model could then be replicated across the County.

Feedback themes and proposals for pilot

Members of the Somerset Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) Programme Team spent three days visiting parishes in the Exmoor County electoral division in order to better understand the opportunities for improvement expressed by residents in this area.

Summarised below are the main themes identified through analysis of parish feedback as well as proposals for how this pilot can test new ways of working. This will serve to develop the LCN's objectives and work programme from a defined evidential base and known local priorities.

Communication

A common theme of feedback received was communication between parishes and highway services, with many believing that simply engaging earlier and more often with communities would make a huge difference.

Proposals for pilot study and testing: -

- Create a meeting between local parishes, highway engineers, streetworks (public utility) coordinators and other community representatives to create a regular dialogue. Governance structure to be discussed and agreed.
- Develop relationships between communities and highways service that will enable information and pertinent knowledge to travel in both directions.
- Create a central point of contact (or 'broker'). This could be a new / specific role.
- Create of an LCN communication strategy (integrated role between Highway Authority and the LCN)

Outcomes: -

- To strengthen relationships with LCNs, to facilitate community engagement, leadership, and understanding of local and corporate service objectives and to facilitate the acceptance by the highway service of pertinent local knowledge and experience.
- To positively influence public perception and improve highway service delivery.
- To develop an informed and responsive relationship between scheme promoters and communities.

Timescale: -

- Q1 2022/23

Programme of planned and reactive works

Parishes expressed a desire to have more visibility, involvement in the process of planning works, and being consulted earlier on any planned programmes of work. Particularly in instances where works require road closures and diversions to be set up.

Proposals for pilot study and testing: -

- LCN to review the annual programme of Highway Authority and all known Public Utility planned works for area. Suggest quarterly meeting to review.
- Allows local knowledge to be applied to works and for LCN to influence some of the works according to its own priorities and method of working including diversions and road closures.

Outcomes: -

- Local input, influence and agreement of works programmes, including timing of works and diversions and road closures.
- Local accountability for decisions.
- To understand and apply available budgets.
- To monitor and improve the quality of works by contractors.

Timescale: -

- Q4 2021/22 - Panel meeting to discuss 2022/23 programme
- Q2 (Summer) - Programme review meeting
- Q3 (Autumn) - Programme review meeting
- Q4 (Winter) - Programme review meeting

Discretionary local highway works

Many Parishes expressed an interest in being able to commission (or carry out) minor maintenance works in their areas using local supply chains or service providers.

Some parishes in Exmoor are already making use of a local parish lengthsman scheme. It should be noted these existing arrangements will be quite separate to the Highway Steward proposal but, critically, the pilot will seek to complement the existing arrangements rather than replacing them.

Proposal for pilot study and testing: -

- Implementation of Highway Steward Scheme funded by Unitary so that minor highway works can be promoted locally. The Steward scheme would supplement existing arrangements that parishes have rather than duplicate work or replace them. (Timescale – Q1/Q2 2022/23)
- The ability for the LCN or possibly individual parishes to procure and deliver works locally using their own supply chain. (Timescale – Q1/Q2 2022-23)

Discretionary budget

Parishes want to be able to have more control in setting their own priorities for highway works.

Proposal for pilot study and testing: -

- LCN to have a discretionary budget available to spend as they see fit on additional highway services i.e. road safety education; additional gully cleansing; drain jetting, grass cutting; ploughing, new speed indicator device etc.

Outcomes: -

- LCN have control over a proportion of capital and revenue expenditure for agreed local priorities.
- More rapid early resolution of small problems before they become larger and more expensive
- Responsive service provision and risk management (particularly in the case of gully cleansing and drain jetting which will avoid large areas of winter ice on untreated roads)

Budget to be agreed.

Timescale: -

- Q1 2022/23

Asset Information

Parishes wanted to have better knowledge of who owns assets in their areas.

Proposal for pilot study and testing: -

- Provide IT solutions to share the highway asset data that are currently the responsibility of the Highway Authority

- Provide solutions to enable highway asset data to be updated on the basis of local knowledge, for example of exactly where drain runs actually are.

Outcome:-

- Provide contemporary map-based information showing highway assets

Timescale: -

- Q2 2022/23
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Highway Steward Scheme – draft specification

The proposed Highway Steward scheme is intended to provide a trained operative to deliver small scale discretionary highway works to town and parishes in the Exmoor Division.

The proposed Highway Steward Pilot specification is:

- The Highway Steward is a skilled highway operative, in a branded vehicle, who visits parishes and towns to a defined works programme (as requested by parishes) but is also empowered to undertake ad hoc works when identified and agreed.
- The Highway Steward only undertakes work on or adjacent to the publicly maintainable highway that benefits the safety of the travelling public.
- The Highway Steward scheme delivers minor works within the capability of a single operative.
- The parish or town council has a nominated highway representative who decides the local priorities for the Highway Steward.
- The identifying and issuing of works is undertaken by the parish or town council representative, in collaboration with the teams based at the Area Highway Offices to avoid the risk of works duplication. Whilst it may be possible to explore direct engagement by the parish with the Highway Steward this presents a possible risk around work force health and safety legislation and contemporary record keeping so will be kept under review and not implemented in the initial stages of the pilot.
- The Highway Steward will feedback to the parish or town council as requested. The Highway Steward Scheme is only for discretionary parish works. Any statutory or safety-related work (potholes, damaged regulatory signs, etc.) should be reported in the usual way for the Highway Authority inspect and assess the appropriate response. However, it makes good sense to empower the Highway Steward to deal with ad hoc works but with Area Office agreement to ensure appropriate records are kept and workforce health ad safety is upheld.

The scope of the Highway Steward works could include (but not restricted to);

- Verge maintenance – grass cutting, mechanical hedge cutting, flower beds, general amenity areas, etc.

- General service improvements – Additional grass cutting / strimming, sweeping, litter collection, weed removal, weed control, encroachment of vegetation over footways, removal of fly posting, street name plates cleaning and repair, fence repairs.
- Drainage maintenance - cleaning existing grips and outfalls, localised ditching, hand cleaning gullies/channels, rodding of pipes.
- Signs (including reflector posts) - cleaning / painting and minor repairs.
- And finally, acting as 'eyes and ears' for the community having regard to vulnerable people and anti-social behaviour.

Highway Steward Skills and Capabilities

- Safe working in the highway
- Repair of a wide range of minor defects
- Underground apparatus detection
- Use of light plant and tools including hand compactors, strimmer/brush cutter, chain saw
- A wide variety of other duties of value to the community

Next steps

- The team will return to the Exmoor Area Panel on the 13th January 2022 to deliver an update on these proposals.
- We will aim to bring an updated specification for the Highway Steward for discussion and further refinement.
- We will set out our intentions to share a programme of highway works in March 2022.
- We will demo a tool to allow Parish Councils to access Highway Asset Information.
- And we will share some best practice from other authorities' Area Highway Panels.