

Highways

Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Group



1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

In March 2009 the Overview and Scrutiny Committee undertook a “review of the year event”, part of which was suggestions for topics to scrutinise the following municipal year. The topic of Highways was selected as one of the top two issues and the Task and Finish Group was set up in June 2009.

The desired outcomes of the inquiry were to improve the delivery of the highways service delivered by Lancashire County Council and Chorley Council for the residents of Chorley. This could be achieved through delivering the service more efficiently and the enhancement of communication and performance monitoring between Lancashire County Council, Chorley Council, Lancashire Locals and utility companies.

The basis of the relationship between Chorley Council and Lancashire County Council is set out in the Streetscene Services Agreement. This may shortly be superseded by a Public Realm Agreement.

There was a lot to consider within a short space of time and there was overlap between this inquiry and the ongoing Town Centre inquiry.

Objectives

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| 1. Provision of information | 2. Communication cycles |
| 3. Consulting and influencing | 4. Anomalies |

Group Membership

Councillor Michael Devaney (Chair)	Councillor Alan Cullens (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Ken Ball	Councillor Nora Ball
Councillor Doreen Dickinson	Councillor Roy Lees
Councillor Adrian Lowe	Councillor Marion Lowe
Councillor June Molyneaux	

Officer Support

Martin Walls (Head of Streetscene Services)
Ruth Rimmington (Democratic and Member Services Officer)

Meetings

The meeting papers of the Group can be found on the Council’s website:
www.chorley.gov.uk/scrutiny

Contribution of Evidence

The Group would like to thank all those who have provided evidence and contributed to the Inquiry.

Recommendations	Financial Implications
<u>Objective 1: Provision of information</u>	
<u>Lancashire County Council:</u>	
1. To set in place a formal information sharing system between Councillors and officers on a strategic level, for example, changes to gritting routes and policy changes, utilising email and other communication tools.	Officer time.
2. To use “intheknow” to notify Members of practical information, such as, roadworks, highways and neighbourhoods information.	Officer time.
3. To identify and introduce meaningful performance indicators to enable both County and District officers and Members to scrutinise the performance of the Streetscene Services Agreement. This is subject to the development of the Public Realm Strategy that could supersede the Streetscene Services Agreement.	Officer time.
4. To present an update report to the relevant County Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee every six months on the inquiry recommendations to ensure robust performance monitoring.	Officer time.
5. That key information relating to inspections frequencies, highway intervention levels and key performance indicators are extracted from the Highway Maintenance Plan and provided in a simpler format to Members and Key Officers.	Officer time.
<u>Chorley:</u>	
6. To make available to Members current street cleaning schedules and the maintenance schedule for the car parks.	Officer time.
7. To utilise intheknow to cascade highways and Neighbourhoods information to Members.	Officer time.
<u>Objective 2: Communication cycles</u>	
<u>Lancashire County Council:</u>	
8. To provide a separate reporting mechanism for officers and Councillors rather than the current single telephone number.	To be confirmed.
9. To communicate with the public more, for example, by improving information on the Lancashire County Council website with the detail of the highways maintenance plan.	Officer time.
10. To reduce avoidable contact with the contact centre (NI14) by keeping customers updated, with text messaging, email alerts or use of postcards for “work in progress” or “work completed”.	To be confirmed.
11. To implement an information sticker to be used on grit bins, street lights and generally which displays contact telephone numbers and location information to enable easier fault reporting.	To be confirmed.
<u>United Utilities</u>	
12. To reduce avoidable contact (NI14) by keeping customers updated, with text messaging, email alerts or use of postcards for “work in progress” or “work completed”.	To be confirmed.

Recommendations	Financial Implications
Objective 3: Consulting and influencing	
<u>Lancashire County Council:</u>	
13. To introduce meetings between the county (Environment) and district (Neighbourhoods) portfolio holders at appropriate times, perhaps April and October, and to report back relevant information to Members via intheknow.	Officer time.
14. To introduce regular meetings between Lancashire County Council (Environment Directorate) and Chorley Council (People and Places Directorate) officers.	Officer time.
15. To streamline existing meeting arrangements (including co-ordination meetings with utility companies and highways schemes) to make them more effective and ensure the correct people are in attendance and the information from meetings is cascaded down.	Officer time.
16. Officers to enter into negotiations with respect to Chorley delivering some enforcement functions, such as advertising boards, highway encroachment and overhanging vegetation.	To be confirmed.
<u>Chorley Council</u>	
17. To include performance monitoring information on enforcement activities on the quarterly report presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee and forwarded to LCC as the Highway Authority.	Officer time.
18. To enter into negotiations with Lancashire County Council to provide certain enforcement services such as advertising boards, highway encroachment and overhanging vegetation and seek a level of devolved budget to support this function.	To be confirmed.
19. To further develop Chorley's Pavement Café Policy to ensure it is fit for purpose and serves the needs of the traders and other town centre users and has an element of clear regulation built into to prevent abuse.	Officer time.
Objective 4: Anomalies	
<u>Lancashire County Council:</u>	
20. To enter into an agreement whereby the County has responsibility for maintaining roads and pavements and Chorley Council has responsibility for grass verges, weed control, tree and shrub maintenance, leaf sweeping and enforcing overhanging vegetation.	To be confirmed.
21. The Lancashire County Council call out officer to notify, by the most appropriate means, Members and the Head of Streetscene Services when gritting wagons are dispatched.	Officer time.
22. To formalise arrangements and resources to enable Chorley Council to deliver gritting services in an agreed town centre area on behalf of Lancashire County Council.	To be confirmed.
23. To investigate and resolve the anomaly of gully cleaning just one side of the road rather than both sides.	Officer time.
<u>Chorley:</u>	
24. To enter into an agreement whereby the County has responsibility for maintaining roads and pavements and Chorley Council has responsibility for grass verges, weed control, tree and shrub maintenance, leaf sweeping and enforcing overhanging vegetation.	Within existing budgetary provision.
25. The Head of Streetscene Services to set in motion the gritting of Chorley car parks on receipt of the above notification.	Officer time.
26. To formalise arrangements and resources to enable Chorley Council to deliver gritting services in an agreed town centre area on behalf of Lancashire County Council.	To be confirmed.

2. METHOD OF INVESTIGATION

Evidence

The Group received and considered several reports and documents, these included:

1. Streetscene Services agreement.
2. Lancashire County Council and Chorley Council current responsibilities.
3. The remit of the Lancashire Local Chorley Committee.
4. Extract showing an overview of the work of the Environment Directorate from Lancashire County Council Sustainable Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee - 15 July 2009.
5. Customer Contact information from Lancashire County Council and Chorley Council.
6. Highways maintenance plan.
7. Public Realm Integration Project report considered by the Lancashire County Council Executive Cabinet on 8 October 2009.

During the course of the inquiry the Group considered highways scrutiny inquiries undertaken by other Lancashire Authorities.

1. Highways trees and verges undertaken by Lancashire County Council.
2. Making inroads: the way ahead - a scrutiny review into the condition of roads & pavements undertaken by South Ribble Borough Council.
3. Scrutiny review of value for money of the residual highways agreement with Lancashire County Council undertaken by Pendle Borough Council.
4. The issues that have arisen following the termination of the Lancashire Highways Partnership undertaken by Hyndburn Borough Council.
5. Highways undertaken by Rossendale Borough Council.

Witnesses

Jo Turton (Executive Director for the Environment, Lancashire County Council).

Rick Hayton (Traffic and Safety Network Manager, Lancashire County Council).

Sarah Palmer (District Partnership Officer, Lancashire County Council).

Councillor Eric Bell (Executive Member (Neighbourhoods), Chorley Council).

Ishbel Murray (Corporate Director (Neighbourhoods), Chorley Council).

3. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Objective 1: Provision of information

Members discussed the need for improved communication between Chorley and Lancashire County Council. On a practical level this included the notification of roadworks in the area and officer contacts and on a strategic level the highways maintenance plan, gritting routes and grit bins. A review had been undertaken of grit bins in Chorley to ensure they were in the ideal locations and were used. A key issue was when highway defects were noted the criterion for repair etc and the expected timelines for repair.

When considering the Streetscene Service Agreement the lack of performance indicators in respect of most of the functions made an assessment of performance difficult. In addition, the current split where Lancashire County Council and Chorley Council both attend to verges. These thoughts were echoed by an inquiry undertaken by Pendle Council. These points were discussed with Jo Turton.

The quality and timescales of Lancashire County Council in commenting on planning applications was raised as an issue. The Corporate Director (Business) has reviewed this with the Executive Director for the Environment at Lancashire County Council and a revised code has been introduced. Pendle Council expressed similar concerns.

Recommendations:

Lancashire County Council:

1. To set in place a formal information sharing system between Councillors and officers on a strategic level, for example, changes to gritting routes and policy changes, utilising email and other communication tools.
2. To use "intheknow" to notify Members of practical information, such as, roadworks, highways and neighbourhoods information.
3. To identify and introduce meaningful performance indicators to enable both County and District officers and Members to scrutinise the performance of the Streetscene Services Agreement. This is subject to the development of the Public Realm Strategy that could supersede the Streetscene Services Agreement.
4. To present an update report to the relevant County Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee every six months on the inquiry recommendations to ensure robust performance monitoring.
5. That key information relating to inspections frequencies, highway intervention levels and key performance indicators are extracted from the Highway Maintenance Plan and provided in a simpler format to Members and Key Officers.

Chorley:

6. To make available to Members current street cleaning schedules and the maintenance schedule for the car parks.
7. To utilise intheknow to cascade highways and Neighbourhoods information to Members.

Objective 2: Communication cycles

Members agreed that the perception and communication to the public is a key issue for consideration. South Ribble Council shared this view.

All Councillors and members of the public should be encouraged to use the Lancashire County Council contact centre to register highways faults to enable central collation of information and monitoring of performance.

When considering customer enquiries in July 2009 highways repeat calls are the second highest with the highest being flooding on the highways. Street lighting and potholes followed although it was noted that during the winter months 'gritting' joins the top ten. Year to date the most enquires Lancashire County Council have received were regarding 'street lighting'.

Members identified several issues with the current reporting arrangements in discussion with Jo Turton. There is no escalation available to Members or officers through the Lancashire County Council call centre. No feedback arrangements are offered routinely – this leaves the customer with no notification when the job has been completed or if the defect is not serious enough to warrant a repair. This results in avoidable contact and frustration as the customer has to call the contact centre for a progress report.

This is a particular problem where there is a street light problem. The key issue is that a standard repair may only take 72 hours, however when the (DNO) United Utilities are involved it may take considerably longer. South Ribble also highlighted this in their review, as there is no feedback loop to explain the delay that has a negative impact on reputation

Members had used the online fault reporting facility and found this fit for purpose.

Recommendations:

Lancashire County Council:

8. To provide a separate reporting mechanism for officers and Councillors rather than the current single telephone number.
9. To communicate with the public more, for example, by improving information on the Lancashire County Council website with the detail of the highways maintenance plan.
10. To reduce avoidable contact with the contact centre (NI14) by keeping customers updated, with text messaging, email alerts or use of postcards for “work in progress” or “work completed”.
11. To implement an information sticker to be used on grit bins, street lights and generally which displays contact telephone numbers and location information to enable easier fault reporting.

United Utilities

12. To reduce avoidable contact (NI14) by keeping customers updated, with text messaging, email alerts or use of postcards for “work in progress” or “work completed”.

Objective 3: Consulting and influencing

The introduction of quarterly meetings between the county and district portfolio holders and also between Lancashire County Council and Chorley Council officers will enhance two-tier working. This could include planned maintenance, emergency works and consultation on decisions about highways trees. This current arrangement exists in terms of the New Roads and Street Works Act consultation meetings so there is a model that could be used to cover other areas.

This issue of information being cascaded with Police, in particular between meetings was considered, between PACT, road safety and other meetings. There was liaison with the Police, with regular road safety liaison meetings, although feedback could be improved. A further discussion would be needed on how PACT and Lancashire Locals could work together, for example, a regular bulletin could be produced.

Members would like a formal consultation mechanism with Borough Council Ward Members as well as County Councillors on proposed schemes to be undertaken and feedback on completion. Rossendale supported this proposal.

A major source of complaints to Members has been vegetation that encroaches onto footpaths, street lights and signage and advertising boards on pavements. It was felt that a more robust approach was required to enforcement. In particular, health and safety issues arising from vegetation that encroaches onto footpaths, street lights and signage and advertising boards on pavements. This could be incorporated into the duties of Neighbourhood Officers, enabling them to provide a wrap around service to the residents of Chorley. The group felt strongly that discussions take place to ensure that enforcement is consistent, positive and effective. Currently, the responsibility for some enforcement matters rests with Lancashire County Council. It would be better served if this was delivered by Chorley officers.

Of major concern is the issue of market stalls and pavement cafés encroaching. As this is currently a District function there is no reason for this and a more robust approach needs to be taken.

Discussions were undertaken as to whether Chorley Council should or could undertake minor repairs on roads and pavements and it was agreed this would not be appropriate at this time.

Recommendations:

Lancashire County Council:

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15. To streamline existing meeting arrangements (including co-ordination meetings with utility companies and highways schemes) to make them more effective and ensure the correct people are in attendance and the information from meetings is cascaded down.
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Chorley Council

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18. To enter into negotiations with Lancashire County Council to provide certain enforcement services such as advertising boards, highway encroachment and overhanging vegetation and seek a level of devolved budget to support this function.
19. To further develop Chorley's Pavement Café Policy to ensure it is fit for purpose and serves the needs of the traders and other town centre users and has an element of clear regulation built into to prevent abuse.

Objective 4: Anomalies

Currently Lancashire County Council, Districts and Parish Councils cut grass in certain areas. Many districts, including Pendle Council and South Ribble Council, believe that urban grass cutting standards should be set locally. In fact, a pilot project between Lancashire County Council and South Ribble Council is underway to enhance public service delivery of streetscene related functions. This involves the County having responsibility for maintaining roads and pavements and the District Council having responsibility for the grass cutting.

Chorley would like to undertake a similar pilot. This would ensure that tasks be carried out in a logical order, for example, litter picking before grass cutting.

Gritting

The Priority Road Network of 2350 km (34% of the Lancashire total highway network) is treated from 11 depots using 48 front line gritters with over 150 trained drivers & 40 supervisors spreading, on average, 18,000 tonnes of salt per season. During the inclement weather experience over Christmas 2009 Lancashire County Council were spending £100,000 a day to run the winter maintenance programme. *

Other anomalies do need to be considered by Lancashire County Council, for example, gully cleaning both sides of the same road rather than just one.

Recommendations:

Lancashire County Council:

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21. The Lancashire County Council call out officer to notify, by the most appropriate means, Members and the Head of Streetscene Services when gritting wagons are dispatched.
22. To formalise arrangements and resources to enable Chorley Council to deliver gritting services in an agreed town centre area on behalf of Lancashire County Council. *
23. To investigate and resolve the anomaly of gully cleaning just one side of the road rather than both sides.

Chorley:

24. To enter into an agreement whereby the County has responsibility for maintaining roads and pavements and Chorley Council has responsibility for grass verges, weed control, tree and shrub maintenance, leaf sweeping and enforcing overhanging vegetation.
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26. To formalise arrangements and resources to enable Chorley Council to deliver gritting services in an agreed town centre area on behalf of Lancashire County Council. *

* The points in italic text have been added following a meeting with the Chair and officers and are subject to agreement by the other members of the task and finish group.

Chorley Council



2008-2009
*Transforming Services:
Citizen Engagement
and Empowerment*



2009-2010
Cohesive and resilient communities



2009-2010
Better outcomes for people and places