

Hampshire County Council review of Agency Agreements - Traffic Management, Highways Development Control and Environmental works

Introduction

- This paper provides an update on changes to the County Agency Agreements, which will include a reduction in some functions and funding and seeks approval for the Council to continue to deliver the service in line with available resources.

Background

- Since 2010 the Economy, Transport and Environment Department at County have saved £26m with an additional £15m against a net budget of £104m required by 2017. Savings already identified include dimming streetlights and retendering the traffic signal maintenance contract.

Traffic Management

- Savings will also be made by reducing work on traffic management schemes, which are not led by safety or legal requirements. The traffic management service will be reduced but still include on street parking controls, parking related correspondence, permanent traffic regulation orders including those for developers / capital schemes and disabled parking bays.
- This will no longer include minor signs and lining, temporary traffic regulation orders (roadworks and local events), tourist and amenity signing, speed limit reminder signs, involvement in the casualty reduction partnership and traffic management advice to County Councillors.
- Speed limits will only be changed if justified as part of a casualty reduction scheme. A moratorium on the investigation of heavy commercial vehicle restrictions and width restrictions on environmental grounds is also proposed. The County will develop a communication strategy to ensure residents and community representatives are aware of the changes.
- The Council's traffic management team also cover residents parking schemes, signs and lines and traffic regulation orders to support the parking enforcement team.
- A number of issues are being discussed with County on the traffic management agency including countywide charging for disabled parking bays, the Council to deliver signs, lines and temporary traffic regulation orders if we can recover costs and the Council to retain speed limit reminder signs.

- The traffic management service funded by the County is provided by a full time Senior Engineer and a Technical Officer.

Highway Development Control

- The highway development control agency will no longer provide bespoke advice for applications of five dwellings or less. This standard advice will be available online.
- The agencies will continue to provide advice for applications over five and below 100 with the County developing a clear set of highway design standards. The design standards will be circulated to local councils for consultation and local councils are being encouraged to adopt highways pre application charging as successfully introduced at county level. This could provide local councils with an income stream to supplement their resources in this area.
- The Transportation Strategy Officer (0.6 FTE) provides the highways development control funded by the County.

Environmental Works

- The Council currently look after the highway trees including their inspection, and maintenance with some new planting. The County are taking this responsibility back from April 2017. The Council employ a part time person (1 day a week) who assists with this work and this will form part of further discussions with the County.
- The County look after weed control on the highway, which includes roads, pavements and alleyways. They currently provide two weed sprays a year, which due to environmental restrictions on the type of weed killer used is not always effective. They will be reducing this to one spray a year from April 2017.
- The County are also reviewing the cost of maintaining their highway verge grass, shrubs and hedges. They currently fund around 6 highway verge grass cuts each year with this Council funding a further 8 cuts through a performance specification. This ensures a good standard of grass verge maintenance and helps alleviate residents concerns from the arising's left after each cut.
- The County are seeking to reduce the funds they allocate to grass verge cutting and have tendered the service to establish a benchmark which will be known later this calendar year. This benchmark will be used to advise Councils on the savings they require which may result in the number of grass cuts being reduced. Once we know the level of funds being provided by the County we will be able to compare this to the outcome of the retendering of our own grass cutting which sits within the waste, recycling, street cleansing and grounds maintenance contract. The retendering of our contract will be known early next year at which time we will be able to advise members on the possible implications for our grass cutting and consider options.

Proposals

- Traffic management is a high priority for this Council and as such, we will be expected to respond to both members and residents enquiries, which are likely to continue to be around traffic management issues such as residents parking schemes, traffic calming, and enforcement. To fulfil this expectation and retain our influence with highway development control and capital schemes it is proposed that we continue to deliver the agency agreement linked to the level of funds being provided and where possible charge work to the CPE account.
- With significantly improved performance from the Civil Enforcement Officers and on street parking maintaining its income stream the Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE) account is likely to continue to remain in surplus and enable the delivery of some highway related projects, which will require input from both the Highway Maintenance and Capital projects teams.
- The Council is completing a number of outstanding highway maintenance schemes utilising the Senior Engineer. There are no new schemes planned or funding allocated due to the County's new funding policy. The level of staffing will therefore be adjusted to reflect the reduced work and payment from the County.
- At present, the funding from Hampshire County Council for the Development Control part of the agency arrangement, giving advice and guidance on planning applications and pre-application enquiries, more than covers the cost a part-time Transportation Strategy Officer for three days a week. The post also has input into planning appeals and enforcement cases, and assists with the preparation of new policy to feed into the Local Plan preparation. The remainder of the County funding offsets the service salary budget.
- The level of staffing will be adjusted to reflect the reduced work and payment from the County and we would focus solely on commenting on planning applications and pre-application discussions. The remainder of the current funding will be found in a range of savings and efficiencies initiatives, which will be brought to Cabinet for consideration shortly.
- The Council will agree a procedure for forwarding all highway tree enquiries to the County as it is envisaged that Rushmoor residents will still contact us with enquiries relating to County owned trees.
- The poor control of weeds is already having a detrimental impact on the appearance of the borough and the ability of our contractor to cleanse the roads. It is proposed that the Council discuss our concerns with the County and explore options to improve the situation, for consideration by members in due course.
- The impact of any cost reductions by the County for environmental works to be considered by members early in the new year.

Financial Implications

- Rushmoor received £74k for its traffic management and £67k for its highways development control this year from the county. This will reduce to £29k and £33k respectively in 2017/18, leaving a shortfall of £79k pa which is being met from the actions shown in the proposals section of this paper. They will also only provide minor works funding for schemes that meet their new criteria, previously £14k pa was provided for small traffic management works.
- The loss of the traffic management service would affect our ability to provide any new residents parking schemes and highway enforcement across the borough, particularly if we do not keep up with replacing signs and lines. This will affect traffic movement and ease of parking for residents and could reduce the level of funds in the CPE account.
- The council would lose £26k pa income it currently receives from temporary traffic regulation schemes. £8k pa is used for delivery of the works with the remaining £18k pa being credited as income to the Council.

Recommendations

- It is recommended that given the high priority for traffic management, environmental works and highways development control that the council continue to deliver the agency agreement in order to influence and deliver improvements.
- That the income and expenditure budgets for 2017/18 reflect the proposals in this paper.

Peter Amies
Head of Community & Environmental Services