



## **Community, Environment and Partnerships Committee Neighbourhood Management Working Group Update (Draft for Consultation)**

**Cllr Rob Golding**

**Chair of the Community, Environment and Partnerships  
Committee**

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<b>Report to</b>	<b>Community, Environment and Partnerships Committee</b>
<b>Ward(s):</b>	All
<b>Key Decision:</b>	No
<b>Appendix 1:</b>	<b>Current “Report It” screen</b>
<b>Appendix 2:</b>	<b>Neighbourhood Management – Guide to roles and responsibilities</b>

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**Recommendation to Committee:**

- **This report is presented for information, and its contents for noting and discussion.**

### **Background, corporate objectives and priorities**

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the tasks for the Neighbourhood Management Working Group (NMWG) over the past 18 months, and to provide a response to a Motion to Council relating to utility company highway repairs. The working group was originally tasked with:

- Looking at ways in which the Council could better engage with partner agencies involved in neighbourhood management.
- Considering options for the establishment of ‘neighbourhood managers’ or an active website as a single point of contact.
- Considering solutions to poorly maintained footpaths and garage areas.
- Reviewing ways to establish land ownership and responsibility in the borough.

This report has strong links to the Council Plan priority Improving Residents' Quality of Life.

## Glossary of terms

Term	Definition
NMWG	Neighbourhood Management Working Group
HCC	Hampshire County Council
FTE	Full Time Equivalent
Highway Authority	Organisation responsible for the public highway
SHA	Sovereign Housing Association

## Main considerations

### 1 Executive Summary

1.1 This report sets out the issues considered by the (NMWG) over the past 18 months and updates on actions that have been undertaken or are planned relating to these issues. The report is set out under the following headings:

- Reporting Defects and the Ward Tracker
- Partnership Working
- Increased Operational Resources

1.2 The report also provides a response to the Motion to Council referred from Cabinet on 15 December 2016 regarding utility company highways repairs.

### 2. Background

#### Reporting Defects and the Ward Tracker

2.1 Following an update on 'Report It' from Katy Sallis, Customer Services Manager at the Community, Environment and Partnerships (CEP) Committee meeting on 14 September 2016, Councillor Westbrook raised an issue relating to the lack of a specific section in 'Report It' to report damaged signs. The NMWG requested a dedicated section to be added to 'Report It'. Appendix 1 shows the current Report It screen on the council's website with a dedicated tab for signs in the bottom right hand corner.

2.2 The Operations team has introduced a pilot scheme to manage specific issues in the Norden ward. Reports received from ward members are now included on a Ward Tracker and regular updates are provided to the ward members giving details of what actions have been taken and when. Issues reported are not closed on the tracker until ward members agree that the issue has been resolved. The tracker also includes issues that are the responsibility of other agencies such as HCC and housing associations. Clear lines of communication have been established with partner organisations to

ensure issues reported through the tracker system are resolved swiftly and effectively by the relevant responsible agency.

- 2.3 The NMWG agreed that the Norden ward was an appropriate area for such tracking to be undertaken as there were regularly a high number of reports in this urban ward, the group also agreed that a similar tracker should be created for a rural area so as to understand what issues were being reported in this context. The group agreed that the Pamber and Silchester ward should be used as a pilot. The tracker system in this ward will be implemented in early 2018.
- 2.4 Ward members and residents in all areas of the borough are now encouraged to make use of the council's report it system in order to quickly resolve issues.

### **Partnership Working Arrangements**

- 2.5 The council works closely with partner agencies to maintain the borough's streetscene and green spaces. The NMWG was tasked with developing a way to more clearly identify the roles and responsibilities of the main partners: BDBC, HCC and the two main housing associations. Appendix 2 shows the roles and responsibilities of these organisations. The following provides an update on various initiatives and working arrangements with the council's main partners during 2017.

### **Sovereign Housing Association**

- 2.6 In common with other neighbourhoods in the town area, the responsibility for environmental maintenance in Buckskin & South Ham (BASH) is complex, due to the number of different organisations involved. This multiple ownership of land can lead to confusion and frustration for members and residents and often results in issues being passed around organisations.
- 2.7 The maintained areas consist of lots of small parcels of land, often adjacent to each other and maintained to a different standard and frequency. This can have the effect of freshly maintained areas making the other areas look poor by comparison even though respective standards are being met.
- 2.8 The council's Operations team undertakes routine grounds maintenance work in BASH which comprises regular grass cutting during the growing season and maintenance of shrubs and hedges taking place over the winter months. The street cleaning team undertakes regular mechanical sweeping, litter picking and fly-tip removal on the public highway and on land owned by the council. Prior to September of this year Sovereign Housing Association (SHA) employed a single contractor to undertake a grounds maintenance and litter picking service in the BASH area.
- 2.9 Both organisations recognised the problems associated with this situation and expressed a desire to meet member and resident aspirations and to work together to improve the maintenance of the local environment, with the aim of providing a more joined up approach to maintaining the BASH area. The outcome has resulted in the council's Operations team being contracted by

SHA to provide grounds maintenance and litter picking services in the BASH area on their behalf.

- 2.10 In addition, other services have been identified that contribute to an improvement in the overall delivery of services to the residents in BASH. These include mechanical sweeping of the garage forecourt areas at the same time as the adjacent public highway is cleaned, weed spraying extended to include SHA areas, garage gutter clearing over the winter months and gully cleaning. A number of these services were not previously undertaken by SHA and therefore add value to the initiative.
- 2.11 The benefits of this arrangement to the local community, residents and business are:
- More effective overall delivery of a high standard services
  - A more coordinated approach with a one stop shop for communication bringing in particular residents closer to the service provider
  - Greater financial and operational efficiency
  - Realisation of wider community benefits linked to a better' environment
- 2.13 The agreement commenced on 1 September 2017 and will be for an initial period of 12 months. Although the initial pilot will be based solely in the Buckskin and South Ham areas SHA has indicated that if, after a review at 12 months, the pilot is agreeable for both parties both financially and with service improvements, other areas could be offered to the council to maintain

#### Basing View

- 2.14 The maintenance of the high profile and showcase location of Basing View was previously undertaken by an external contractor. The council's Operations team were successful in securing the grounds maintenance and litter picking service which will deliver savings for the council and provide an improved and joined up service. Since September 2016 a dedicated team has been delivering the service at Basing View and has received positive feedback about the quality and responsiveness of the service.
- 2.15 Further opportunities exist to consider securing similar services using in-house teams subject to achieving financial or wider service benefits. The Operations and Property Services teams are currently exploring the opportunity to bring the environmental maintenance of the Leisure Park back in-house.
- 2.16 The council is keen to develop a more commercial based approach and explore opportunities to generate income and deliver improved services to residents. Consideration is currently being given to delivering more of the councils work currently provided under contract by external bodies where a reduction in cost or additional benefit can be demonstrated.
- 2.17 Securing public contracts within the borough falls within the legal definitions of public to public sector organisations and can be provided through the current service, albeit operating on a much more commercial basis. This could include

building on partnerships with local housing associations and businesses to deliver a wider range of operational type work externally and assessing the opportunities for services to be provided on a paid basis to other public bodies and residents.

#### Hampshire County Council

- 2.18 HCC introduced new arrangements for the highways agency agreement for the 2017/18 financial year coinciding with the new Highways Services Contract. HCC agreed to fix the previous level of funding for grass, shrubs and hedges for the financial year 2017/18, with a further indication that the funding is likely to continue at the same level in 2018/19.
- 2.19 The council has seen a reduction in its annual allocation of funding from HCC for weed killing by 25% for 2017/18 as the new agency agreement is based on one weed treatment only which has resulted in a reduction in funding of £14,000 in 2017/18, which has been covered by savings elsewhere in the overall budget.

#### Hart District Council Shared Services

- 2.20 The Council provides Hart District Council's grounds maintenance and street cleaning service under a shared service arrangement. The agreement for both services expires on 31 March 2019.

#### **Increased Operational Resources**

- 2.21 Due to the extensive and ongoing development of the borough, the area maintained by the Operations team will continue to expand. In order to meet existing standards during 2017/18, it was calculated that additional resources would be required to maintain an additional 5.64 hectares of land adopted by the council over the past 2 years.
- 2.22 Additional funding was included in the 2017/18 budget from developer funded commuted sums, to establish a new Landscape Team. The team will spend dedicated time in priority areas undertaking enhanced maintenance to improve the overall appearance of the area. This approach has been piloted in Rooksdown, Buckskin and Oakridge and has received a positive response from ward members, parish councils and residents.
- 2.23 The draft budget for 2018/19 also includes additional commuted sums funding to employ street cleaning operatives in order to meet the increased requirement to undertake street cleaning in additional roads that have been adopted by HCC as the Highway Authority.

#### **Utility Company Repairs (Response to Council Motion)**

- 2.24 On 15 December 2016 in response to Notice of Motion 86/12 regarding utility company highway repairs, Cabinet requested that the CEP Committee undertake a review of existing service level agreements and develop policies and agreements to ensure damage to boxes is quickly rectified and tax payers

do not incur additional maintenance costs as a result of utility company activity.

The Motion stated:

1. Following work on highways and pavements, utility companies do not reinstate the tarmac properly leaving the taxpayer to pay for repair work.
2. Ownership of utility boxes is not clearly identified meaning repair work is often not carried out and utility companies do not always respond to emails.

- 2.25 Responsibility for inspecting the work undertaken on the highway by utility companies is the responsibility of Hampshire County Council as the Highway Authority Utility companies are entirely responsible for the quality of their work and must ensure that their work meets the national specifications.
- 2.26 The Highway Authority will try to co-ordinate major resurfacing works with utility repairs. The new surface is usually then protected using specific legislation to prevent further excavations for up to five years.
- 2.27 There are approximately 100,000 holes dug in Hampshire's roads each year. The national code of practice for inspections sets out a process whereby the County Council visually inspects a random 30% sample of utility works:
- 10% during the works
  - 10% immediately after works have completed, and
  - 10% at the end of the two year guarantee period
- 2.28 The utility companies pay HCC to undertake these inspections. If more than 10% of inspected sites fail to comply, the utility company responsible is usually required to put in place an improvement plan to try to prevent further problems occurring.
- 2.29 In addition, HCC undertakes extra inspections when reports are received from the public regarding defective work undertaken by utility companies. The public can report such defects to HCC via [www.hants.gov.uk/roads](http://www.hants.gov.uk/roads)
- 2.30 Where work by a utility company is found to be non-compliant, the utility company is required to repair the defect at their own cost. They are also required to reimburse HCC for the costs incurred in detecting the defect.
- 2.31 HCC has developed a voluntary code of practice with utility companies with the aim of improving the quality of works and further minimising disruption.
- 2.32 The NMWG also raised concerns about the lack of action from Virgin Media in respect of damaged boxes. The group agreed that the legal position of strongly encouraging utility companies to take appropriate action should be considered. A member of the group explained that despite completing a request for a Section 81 notice (dangerous apparatus on footpath), posting photos of offending boxes on Twitter and other actions to bring the matter to Virgin Media's attention had not resolved the matter. HCC has confirmed that

it will take up such problems with the utility companies as the Highway Authority. Defects should be reported directly to HCC via [www.hants.gov.uk/roads](http://www.hants.gov.uk/roads)

## **Corporate implications**

### **3. Legal Implications**

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

### **4. Financial implications**

The 17/18 base Operations team budget was increased by £100,000 funded by commuted sums to enable the addition of 4 fte's. A further sum of £50,000 from commuted sums is being proposed as part of the 2018/19 budget setting process which would fund an additional 2 fte's.

### **5. Risk management**

A risk assessment has been completed in accordance with the council's risk management process and has identified no significant (Red or Amber) residual risks that cannot be fully minimised by existing or planned controls or additional procedures.

### **6. Equalities implications**

The work carried out to date has been given due regard in relation to the Public Sector Equality Duty and the impact on the protected characteristics groups has been considered. It can be concluded that the improvements made are positive for all residents in areas where work has been carried out. The overall higher standard of service, a more coordinated approach to communication and overall enhancements to the local environment in areas that are most in need of improvements will go towards improving the quality of life for local communities in the borough.

### **7. Consultation and communication**

Key milestones and achievements on this projects have been shared through the media and social media to raise awareness of the work taking place. The team has also supported the Love Basingstoke message by branding vehicles and flower beds with the Love Basingstoke logo.

### **8. HR implications**

There are no direct HR implications arising from this report.

## **Conclusion**

There have been a number of developments over the past 18 months that have led to a more joined up approach to neighbourhood management and a greater understanding of the roles & responsibilities of the various organisations who have a role to play in the management of the boroughs

neighbourhoods. Opportunities exist to develop the work done to date in other areas of the borough and involve more partners.

**Date: 17 January 2018**

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<b>Confidentiality</b>	It is considered that information contained within <i>this report (and appendices)</i> do not contain exempt information under the meaning of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, and therefore can be made public.