

PUBLIC SATISFACTION WITH ROAD CONDITION

Summary

1. The Head of Community and Environment, Highways Operations Manager, the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways and the Project Manager have been invited to discuss progress on how public satisfaction with the condition of roads might be improved.

Background

2. In autumn/winter 2013/14, the Directorate, investigated why public satisfaction had declined from 42% to around 31% even though road condition was being maintained or improved. The Panel was advised that the aim of the exercise was to gather objective evidence to understand the drivers of public satisfaction with road condition and identify how it might be improved either by highway service activity and/or communications campaigns.

3. On 27 March 2014, the Panel considered the report subsequently produced, 'Public Satisfaction with Roads in Worcestershire' (March 2014).

4. The research findings showed that the top reasons for reducing satisfaction with road condition were:

- potholes
- road signs
- road markings
- poor quality repair
- poor road surfaces
- parking

5. The report identified that satisfaction potentially might be improved if the Council chose to re-direct some spending to the top reasons for dissatisfaction. It suggested that spending could be targeted in areas where satisfaction was known to be poorest. The impact of improvements on satisfaction (compared to similar areas where no improvements have been made) could then be measured and evaluated.

6. Local satisfaction levels were reducing similar to other authorities across much of the country. It was not the case that Worcestershire's roads are of lower quality, or even that Worcestershire residents were less satisfied with the County's roads than in other areas. Members questioned whether improvements to increase satisfaction were affordable and whether other maintenance work might be compromised resulting in worse road conditions. They felt it was vital to maintain the

Update

quality of the road.

7. It was noted that as a part of the collation, qualitative information was secured from focus groups who had viewed video clips of roads in Worcestershire, to ascertain their views and perception of roads in the County. Signage had been removed in some photos to conceal the location and may have been a factor in lack of satisfaction with signage.

8. The Panel's view was that some spending should be targeted, as part of a trial, in areas where satisfaction was known to be poorest as outlined in the report. A number of initiatives such as clearer road markings and signage could be carried out, possibly by local highway response gangs over the next 12 months. The impact on public satisfaction should be monitored and decisions made on further investment when the results were known. However, the Council could not target spending in areas where satisfaction was known to be poorest as it did not have this information.

9. The Chairman asked about progress at Council in July 2014 and Members were advised that the Directorate was developing two pilot areas. This included the deployment of the new Highways Local Response Team (LRT) to deal with smaller scale Highways issues which, whilst not safety related, could affect the public's perception and satisfaction with roads. It was planned that the LRT would liaise closely with the relevant Parish Council and Community to identify and work on issues that matter to them. A review of the pilots would be carried out and a survey also completed to try and gauge any changes in levels of public satisfaction.

10. The Panel has subsequently asked for an update on progress.

11. To inform the report on 'Public Satisfaction with Highways in Worcestershire' a series of focus groups were held (by Oakham Research) across the County, where attendees observed and scored a variety of videos of road conditions. A review of all of the detailed comments of the focus groups has recently been carried out to determine the range of issues raised and common themes of concern. The aim is to identify specific areas on which to focus and potential key performance indicators to improve public satisfaction with road condition. This review is attached at Appendix 1.

12. An officer/member working group was also formed in November 2014 with the objective to review and implement cost effective ways to increase positive public perception and address the key issues identified from the Oakham Research. The group identified a number of key initiatives that could be achieved quickly

Purpose of the Meeting

to help improve satisfaction, including for example, parish makeovers, signage, and improving communication about highways with district, town and parish councils, as outlined in Appendix 2. The Group also agreed that the Council would join the national Highways and Transport Survey 2015 to enable comparison with similar authorities.

13. Ringway, the council's highway maintenance contractor, is committed to supporting the local communities, charities and good causes in the counties where it operates. Four parish makeovers and job fairs per year, form part of Ringway's corporate responsibility promise when it was re-awarded the highways contract in April 2014.

14. The Martley Parish Makeover was the first of four planned in 2014/15. Ringway operatives worked alongside volunteers from the village on issues that mattered to them. Together, they widened a footpath, realigned a safety barrier, renewed reflective bollards, renewed some of the signs, cut back overgrown hedges and verges, painted the bus shelter, as well as generally tidied up the area by cleaning benches, the grit bin and telephone box and sweeping the main road to the village. Ringway also held a job fair in the village hall to promote the various jobs and careers available in the company and in particular, the apprenticeship scheme in Worcestershire Highways.

15. Given this initiative, rather than go ahead with the two pilot studies with LRTs dealing with local highways issues (as previously planned) the Group felt it would be more efficient and effective to focus pilots on improving satisfaction by gathering qualitative data from the Martley and Cookley parish makeovers. A qualitative approach is currently favoured to understand the experiences and attitudes of the local community through face to face interviews and focus groups.

16. Members are asked to:

- a) consider the progress made and future plans on improving satisfaction with roads
- b) determine whether they wish to make any comments or recommendations to the Cabinet Member with Responsibility and if so agree those, and
- c) consider whether any further scrutiny work is needed

17. During the discussion, Members may wish to explore the following areas:

- next steps and progress.
- early thoughts on potential key performance indicators to help improve public satisfaction with road condition

Supporting Information

- Appendix 1 – Public Satisfaction of the condition of roads in Worcestershire
- Appendix 2 – Public Perception Working Group – Objectives and key initiatives.

Contact Points

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Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Head of Legal and Democratic Services) the following background papers relate to the subject matter of this report:

- Agenda and Minutes of the Economy, Environment and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 27 March 2014
- Council Agenda and Minutes of 9 July 2014

All of which are available on the Council's website at

<http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/cms/democratic-services/minutes-and-agendas.aspx>