

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

REPORT TO: RIGHTS OF WAY COMMITTEE

Date of meeting: 1 March 2010
Report of: Greenspaces Manager
Title: Prioritisation System for Different Categories of Maintenance and Enforcement Issues on Public Rights of Way

1.0 Report Summary

- 1.1 This report proposes a new prioritisation system (**Appendix 1**) for responding to different categories of complaints on the public rights of way network. Such systems are used by many Local Authorities to help maintenance and enforcement officers better manage their workloads and to inform the public of how quickly different sorts of issues are investigated.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 That Members approve the proposed prioritisation system.

3.0 Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1 The decision to adopt this system will help the maintenance and enforcement officers prioritise the investigation of different categories of problem reports. This is particularly useful in the current budget situation, in which there are insufficient staff resources to investigate all reports received immediately. It will also provide the public with a transparent and realistic explanation of how quickly they may expect their complaints to be investigated.
- 3.2 It should be noted that the system provides standard response times for investigating a complaint, not for issuing the work to fix the problem; this depends on contractor availability and resources available.

4.0 Wards Affected

- 4.1 All

5.0 Local Ward Members

- 5.1 All Members

**6.0 Policy Implications including - Climate Change
- Health**

6.1 None arising

7.0 Financial Implications for Transition Costs (Authorised by the Borough Treasurer)

7.1 None arising

8.0 Financial Implications 2009/10 and Beyond (Authorised by the Borough Treasurer)

8.1 None arising

9.0 Legal Implications (Authorised by the Borough Solicitor)

9.1 The Council has statutory obligations under various sections of the Highways Act 1980 to deal with obstructions and other types of problem on the public rights of way network. The proposed prioritisation system reflects these.

10.0 Risk Management

10.1 The proposed prioritisation system takes into account the likelihood of claims for personal injury arising from certain types of complaint (e.g. collapsed bridges) and this is reflected in the response times proposed.

11.0 Background and Options

11.1 The maintenance and enforcement team are currently managing around 100km of additional path each within their areas compared with 2008/9, an increase of around 15%. This has had the effect of stretching officers to the limit and means that some problems reported are not investigated for several weeks, and others (usually minor, non-statutory complaints) not at all.

11.2 Officers are prioritising their own workload on a largely 'common sense' basis; complaints with a possible impact on public safety are prioritised first, (e.g. collapsed bridges, dangerous animals); obstructions come soon after (e.g. a fence or wall erected across the line of a path); and minor non-statutory matters (e.g. suggestions for additional waymarking) come last of all.

11.3 Whilst in an ideal world every matter that was reported to the team would be investigated within a few working days, this is not realistic given current staffing levels. The budget shortfall facing the Council makes it unlikely that staffing levels will increase. Therefore a system by which officers can prioritise different types of complaint is proposed (**Appendix 1**), which aims to be both transparent and realistic.

- 11.4 It is proposed to publicise this system on the Council's website to make the public aware of the sorts of timescales problems will be investigated against. User groups will be made aware of it through our regular liaison meetings and (when established) the Cheshire East Rights of Way Forum.

12.0 Consultations

- 12.1 N/A

13.0 Overview of Year One and Term One Issues

- 13.1 None arising

14.0 Access to Information

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting the report writer:

Name: Amy Rushton

Designation: PROW Manager

Tel No: 01606 271827 Email: amy.rushton@cheshireeast.gov.uk