

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

meeting date: 18 OCTOBER 2022
title: PUBLIC REALM
submitted by: JOHN HEAP, DIRECTOR COMMUNITY SERVICES
principal author: MARK BEVERIDGE, HEAD OF CULTURAL SERVICES

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To outline the work the Council does for LCC and seek Committees' view on a proposal for some of this work.
- 1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities
 - Community Objectives - To help make people's lives healthier and safer.
 - Corporate Priorities - To sustain a strong and prosperous Ribble Valley.
 - Other Considerations – LCC is the highway authority with statutory responsibility for pavements and roads which are adopted.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 LCC have for many years asked District Councils to undertake some of their work, such as weed spraying, verge cutting and road sweeping on their public realm areas.
- 2.2 Committee is aware that at a previous meeting the Director of Community Services was delegated to negotiate with LCC to achieve a higher financial contribution for RVBC than is currently received, to enable RVBC to be able to carry out the work being requested without having local taxpayers having to subsidise the work. LCC have made an offer to provide an additional £16,141 contribution for road sweeping in the current financial year. The additional costs for weed spraying are still being discussed and LCC have proposed an additional sum of £39,433 to fund this year, that second application could be carried out before the end of the financial year.
- 2.3 Currently the Council receives £31,900 (2022/23), before any additional sums that might be received, for the work the Council carries out on behalf of LCC. However as outlined in the Committee report in March 22, this falls somewhat below the figures which other Districts in Lancashire receive and significantly below the sum which this work would cost the Council to do if we were to do the work in total as requested.

3 ISSUES

- 3.1 The Council would if it had carried out the work asked of it by LCC in 2022, have spent over £91k, instead the Council informed LCC that it would not be applying a second application of weed spray to pavements and road channels, the LCC verges have been cut on a 5 weekly rotation compared to the 10 day one which RVBC open spaces are cut. At the present the Council is seeking tenders for additional sweepers for additional amenity sweeping during the autumn. Although, LCC is the Highway Authority they are responsible for the maintenance of the roads including ensuring they are safe to use, hence why they grit them in the winter and leaf clearance is part of their responsibility.

However, this Council has done some road sweeping as part of its' amenity cleansing function to ensure the Borough is kept to a respectable standard and in areas prone to flooding, we have tried to ensure that the road channels are kept clear to avoid detritus entering the road gullies which can contribute to surface flooding issues.

- 3.2 RVBC cannot subsidise the County Council and despite requests the County are not planning to permanently increase the sum paid the Borough for the work they wish us to carry out on their behalf. For example, the cost of weed spray has more than doubled this year, plus the additional cost of fuel. Although they have made an increased offer to help with the costs of road sweeping and a second application of weed spray for this financial year.
- 3.3 LCC are pressing all Districts to sign a Public Realm Agreement which would place a further financial burden on this Council to carry LCC functions, with no increase in payments proposed.
- 3.4 Some Districts because they receive substantially more than RVBC are prepared to sign the Agreement, others are not, and some have simply handed back all the LCC functions back to LCC to carry out. It is not proposed that RVBC will sign the agreement, because of the implications it has for our work. The agreement would place far more responsibility for many aspects of public realm work that we currently do not do, nor have the resources or equipment to carry out.
- 3.5 It is proposed the Council inform LCC we will carry out the weed spraying work based on an improved offer of funding and because the costs have risen for the other elements of the work we do as much work on road sweeping and verge cutting as the budget we receive allows for.
- 3.6 The Council has a team of 6 staff to carry out amenity cleaning work across the Borough, this includes litter picking, dealing with fly tips on public land, weed spraying and picking up dead animals from the highway. The Council has seen this cleansing work as important for improving the environment both for residents and visitors alike, it ensures this work is done every day of the year, including Bank Holidays, Christmas, and New Years' Day.

4 RISK ASSESSMENT

- 4.1 The approval of this report may have the following implications.
 - Resources – The Council currently receives £31,900 for the work which we undertake for the County. This will be increased this year by £16,181 as a LCC contribution to road sweeping and potentially an extra £39,433 may be provided for weed spraying this year.
 - Technical, Environmental and Legal – The Council has no legal responsibility for the LCC public realm. The work which we carry out is to ensure that the Borough is maintained to the highest amenity standard possible, with the resources that we have available. This is seen as important for residents and visitors alike. Any contribution from LCC is to help them maintain their infrastructure in a more cost-effective manner than would be the case if they had to contract out the work to others.
 - Political – The relationship between LCC and districts is often strained, and this is an area some other districts are reviewing their position: LCC regularly advise

complaints that public realm is the responsibility of RVBC, so some conflict is already evident.

- Reputation – The LCC contact centre already erroneously directs residents to RVBC for work which we currently have no responsibility for, RVBC would continue to maintain the areas which it owns. The issue of weeds is already being raised as an issue by individuals and some Parish Councils, although there is growing minority of people who think that weeds are a natural haven for insects and pollinators and therefore weed spraying them is reducing their habitat.
- Equality & Diversity – There are already implications on some footpaths, because LCC have not cut back vegetation growth, for example along the road from Longridge to Hurst Green. If the weeds were not sprayed, the consequences would be in some areas be that the footways will over time become clogged and potentially break up, because weeds and self-seeded shrubs will eventually over a couple of seasons have an impact on the tarmac and paved surfaces.

5 **RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE**

- 5.1 Approve that the Council accepts the additional County Council funding offered this year for road sweeping and weed spraying.
- 5.2 That the funding received from LCC is used for verge cutting and road sweeping up to the value of the budget given to RVBC.
- 5.3 Approve that the Council does not sign the Public Realm Agreement.

Mark Beveridge
Head of Cultural and Leisure Services

John Heap
Director of Community Services

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

For further information please ask for Mark Beveridge 01200 425111