

OXFORDSHIRE WASTE PARTNERSHIP JOINT COMMITTEE

24 OCTOBER 2008

FAST ROAD CLEANING AND WEED SPRAYING

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To update on recent progress on improving communications and coordination between Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) Highways and District Councils Cleansing Teams (and their respective contractors) regarding the cleaning of OCC maintained fast roads and on the treatment of weed growth.

2 Background

- 2.1 Lanes on fast roads (such as dual carriageways) are routinely under traffic management for planned highway maintenance, more frequently carried out under a "rolling block". Some District Councils also have to close or restrict highway lanes to allow litter picking. Expensive Traffic Management is needed due to the health & safety requirements of working on high speed roads. Attempts to co-ordinate litter picking with highways maintenance have not always been possible due to poor communication between the relevant stakeholders and the relative speeds of grass cutting and litter picking. This has resulted in missed opportunities to clear litter when lane closures are taking place. This, in turn, can lead to unsatisfactory standards of cleanliness, especially where grass verges are cut without litter clearance, and also missed opportunities for more effective and efficient joint working.
- 2.2 A specific case has arisen around the Heyford Hill roundabout on the Oxford ring road, where a number of local authority administrative boundaries meet. Clarifying and assigning responsibilities and co-ordinating works at this location has been problematic.
- 2.3 OCCs budget for weed spraying was cut in 2006/7 from £150 000 per annum to a current £34 000 per annum. The revised budget allows only for the treatment of noxious weeds, meaning that there is no routine programme for weed treatment along Oxfordshire's roads. District Councils have reported problems with weed growth, which is believed to have knock-on effects for the clearance of litter and detritus. While the extent of this problem has not been quantified, there are concerns associated with negative public perception and possible implications for the current Local Area Agreement (LAA) target on levels of public satisfaction with street cleaning.
- 2.4 The OWP Officer Strategy Group (OSG) recently met with officers from OCC Highways and their contractors, Enterprise Mouchel Ltd, to attempt to resolve these issues. The following outcomes were agreed:

Fast road cleaning

It was agreed that Enterprise Mouchel Ltd would inform the District Councils wherever possible of planned road lane closures, although it was acknowledged that there were some practical difficulties with this. For example, grass verge cutting is weather dependant and subject to alteration at short notice. It is also a faster operation than litter picking.

It was also proposed that consideration be given to contracting Enterprise Mouchel Ltd to

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carry out all litter clearance along County Council maintained fast roads. District Council officers agreed to develop outline specifications that will enable Enterprise Mouchel Ltd to price this work. This proposal would include maintenance of the ring road in the vicinity of Heyford Hill roundabout, meaning that a single body would be responsible for the maintenance of this area. To enable the costs: benefits of this approach to be assessed, Enterprise Mouchel Ltd will also price for slowing down their existing rolling lane closures so as to allow District teams to litter pick at the same time. They will also explore the potential for corporate sponsorship of the Hinksey Hill roundabout.

OSG is keen to receive prices in time for a litter pick over this coming winter. Historically, levels of litter complaints increase when the roadside vegetation dies back.

Weed Spraying

OCC officers do not support the reintroduction of a weed spraying programme as this funding would have to be taken from other existing highways maintenance budgets. They would prefer to see this money spent on engineering maintenance works (such as repairing potholes etc). It was highlighted that from an engineering viewpoint, weed growth caused no evidential damage to the construction of the roads.

It was also noted that future environmental legislation banning the use of certain pesticides may make weed treatment prohibitively expensive. However, District Councils are in favour of continuing weed control due to impacts on street cleanliness and related perceptions of community safety.

In light of the different positions currently being taken on this issue, OSG recommends that OCC be asked to consider a one-off programme of weed treatment in 2009/10 in order to address current levels of complaints and negative public perception. District Councils will work with OCC Highways to identify priority areas for treatment. Further consideration will need to be given to the long term resolution of this issue.

3 Financial, Risk and Staff Implications

- 3.1 The current budget for weed spraying (set out in paragraph 2.3) allows for noxious weed spraying only. Any increase to this service provision will involve a potentially substantial budgetary increase for OCC.

4 Areas Affected

- 4.1 County-wide. Reported problematic areas within districts include cycle ways, footpaths and pavements within residential developments and villages. The A34 and M40 are maintained by the Highways Agency and are not included within the scope of this report. District Council representatives already hold a separate meeting with the Highways Agency to discuss the management of these roads.

5 Effect on Strategic Policies

- 5.1 Supports improvements to National Indicator 195 (Street cleanliness: litter, detritus, graffiti & fly posting) and related LAA1 and LAA2 targets.

6 Options or Alternatives

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6.1 That the current OCC approach to weed treatment continues.

7 Recommendations

- 7.1 That:
- i. an option for contracting out litter clearance along fast roads be brought back to a future meeting, together with an option for including District Council litter picking within planned lane closures;
 - ii. OCC be asked to consider a one-off weed control programme during 2009/10.

8 Reasons for Recommendations

8.1 To improve levels of street cleanliness and to increase public satisfaction with street cleanliness standards.

9 Contact Officer

9.1 Author: Wayne Lewis Tel: 01295 221903

Email: Wayne.lewis@cherwell-dc.gov.uk

Background Papers: