



## BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

# Report

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**Date:** 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2010

**Title:** Council Budget Cuts and Service Reductions: Impacts on the Rights of Way Service.

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Joanne Taylor will outline the current impact of the budget cuts, the freeze on recruitment and how this is affecting the Rights of Way teams and delivery of the service.

### A. Rights of Way Structure and Staff Resource

1. As a result of two recent resignations it has been necessary to re-organise both the Definitive Map Team, working out of Hampden Hall and the Rights of Way Operations Teams, working out of Wycombe and Winslow Area Offices. **See Appendix 1 – New Rights of Way Group Structure.**
2. Sue Burchell, Definitive Map Team Leader left the County Council's employment at the end of September 2010, to take up an appointment in the Oxford Diocese. Due to the current economic conditions it is not possible to recruit to this post and the duties and responsibilities are to be shared between the officers remaining in the Definitive Map Team, with Helen Beevers taking a more senior role as Definitive Map Officer.
3. James Mawson, Area Rights of Way Officer (Wycombe District Area) left the Council on the 8<sup>th</sup> October 2010. Again we are unable to recruit to fill this post and it has been necessary to re-organise and reallocate the 4 current divisions of the county to 3 divisions. **See Appendix 2 showing the redrawn Area Officer Map.**
4. The cut in staff numbers also means that some of the group's targets and aspirations will have to be realigned. Certainly it will be necessary to review the priorities we have set ourselves; particularly in aiming to reduce the number of issues outstanding on the network by 8% annually and also in managing the public expectations in terms of target times to resolve each particular type of problem, which may not be met to the extent they currently are. We expect to resolve a percentage of issues received within a certain time frame which could be up to one year for the lowest priority issues.

5. The reduction in personnel numbers is likely to lead to an increasing backlog of maintenance issues, something that we have tried very hard to reduce in the last few years by being more pro-active in terms of targeting, particularly with summer clearance and structure improvements. Inevitably we will become totally reactive by only carrying out certain types of work after receiving a problem report.
6. The same is true for the work of the Definitive Map Team. A backlog of Definitive Map Modification Orders (public 'claims' for rights of way), Village Green applications and Diversion Orders has already built up.
7. Due to further cuts in the maintenance budget the Council will also need to review its current practice of offering 'free of charge' assistance to landowners when structures are repaired. For many years the County Council has carried out some maintenance to structures (such as stile or gate repairs) which should be the duty of the landowner. We have been particularly active with landowners when there are opportunities to improve accessibility, for example, by removing stiles and installing gates, and this has brought greater access to the network for less mobile users. However, we are fast approaching a point when this will no longer be affordable and, where a task is seen as being wholly the responsibility of the landowner, the Council will require the owner to do it or will carry out the repair and recover reasonable costs.
8. It will also be necessary to reduce the number of contractor teams for this financial year. We would normally have a requirement for 2 gangs (one each in the north and south). Budget shortfalls may mean that only very urgent works, where a risk is identified, will be carried out over the winter months.
9. Whilst we hope to continue to work with The Chiltern Society on the Donate-a-Gate Scheme and with individual Parishes who are part funding improvement works, projects with no alternative funding are unlikely to be achievable.

**Recommendation:** Members to consider comments.