

PENDLE 3 TIER FORUM: 16TH SEPTEMBER, 2014

PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY AGENCY AGREEMENT WITH PENDLE BOROUGH COUNCIL

Historically there had been several agency agreements in place with districts but last year the only substantial ones remaining were with Ribble Valley (covering the non-AONB parishes) and Pendle (covering the whole Borough). There were previously front-line officers to cover the remaining districts; a few years ago it was approximately 1 officer per district. The payments to those Boroughs for the work under the agreements was broadly proportional to that spent on districts without such agreements.

Over the last 5+ years the number of officers has been reduced and the works budget has also reduced whilst a corresponding decrease in back-office support has meant that the remaining officers have been under increasing workload. However, the agency agreements with Pendle and Ribble Valley have not been reduced. This has meant that there was an increasingly disproportionate amount of resources with the remaining agreements in Pendle and Ribble Valley. Last year the ratio of front-line officers to public rights of way was approx:

- Ribble Valley non-AONB 550km per person,
- Pendle 300km per person,
- Remainder of Lancashire 1000km per person.

The situation with the works budget (disregarding the additional money put in by Pendle Borough Council) was also skewed towards those agency areas although to a lesser extent. However these areas did effectively have ring-fenced works budget regardless of need whereas in the remainder of the County the work that was actually prioritised was according to need regardless of which district it lay in. Work on lower priority defects is carried out through the Local Delivery Scheme via parishes which opt to be partners in it, and this is also paid for through the Public Rights of Way budget. The uptake of this is not evenly spread, with very few participants in one or two districts and only 1 in Rossendale which is unparished but significantly more than average in Ribble Valley and Pendle.

The service is managed on a countywide basis and it is not possible to give either a quantitative comparison or accurate district-by-district breakdown except for what is spent on the agency agreements. The annual payment to Pendle is about £38.2k (staff element) and £21.4k (works element) and in 2013-14 there was a further amount via local delivery across the Borough and an additional £2.5k for a specific capital project – a total of over £62k, equating to approx. £102 per km, plus an additional £53k from Pendle Borough Council equating to £189 per km. The equivalent figure for the majority non-agency network was approx. £64 per km in 2013-14 and is expected to reduce further.

In summary, the resources for the public rights of way network across the County as a whole had been reducing whilst those for Pendle had not. Pendle Borough Council have been providing an excellent service and in recognition of this it is only after having made cuts to all other areas of Public Rights of Way spending and still needing to find significant reductions there was nowhere else to trim except the agency agreement. As such the agreement with Ribble Valley ended 31-Mar-2014 and that with Pendle is due to end 31-Mar-2015.

There is concern that the standard of management of public rights of way in Pendle will go down following the end of the agency agreement. We cannot guarantee that this will not happen although we will try to mitigate the effects of reduced resources with smarter and more efficient working but there is limited scope for this. It is inevitably the case that Pendle will no longer be sheltered from the reduction in resources affecting the rest of the County.

However, there are 3 favourable factors:

- Pendle will continue to benefit for some years from the excellent work done with the additional resources it has enjoyed over the past few years. The high standard of public rights of way in Pendle will not deteriorate overnight at the ending of the agency agreement and this favourable starting point will allow Pendle to withstand the period of reduced resources better than other parts of the County.
- Pendle has a number of parishes in the Local Delivery Scheme and has the potential for this to increase. This partnership allows cost effective minor maintenance which would not be able to be carried out otherwise and allows local prioritisation of such work.
- Pendle Borough Council's contribution in recent years equates to approx. £87 per km and hence even without Lancashire County Council's agency agreement money the Borough Council could continue to fund the service at that level and it would be better than the County average of £64 per km. Furthermore if the Borough Council did this the Public Rights of Way team would provide assistance and support wherever possible so that the greatest benefit could be achieved with that investment.