

WORCESTERSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM - SERVICE DELIVERY SUB-GROUP

10 am on 20th May 2021 – Virtual Meeting via MS Teams

Attendees: Bobbie Matulja = BM (LAF Chairman), Rowena Hayward = RH (WCC), Tony Kerbey AK (LAF Secretary), Mike Everitt = ME, Cllr Julian Grubb = JG, Peter Hughes = PH, John Cuthbertson = JC, SS = Sandra Starkey.

Apologies: Lyndon Bracewell, Lindsey Umfreville, Cllr Alan Amos, Cllr Linda Robinson, Gordon Bunker.

Preliminaries

BM – Thanked everyone for their attendance and covered apologies.

RH – said that there have been no changes to the status of the ROWIP since the last LAF meeting. RH agreed to support an extraordinary Sub-Group to review the ROWIP once the draft is published if needed. She also explained that there may be some movement in the implementation of the PRoW elements of the De-Regulation Act this year

Agenda Item 1 - Public Rights of Way Core data and Performance Indicators 2020/21

RH – Stepped through the figures which had been provided to members a few days prior. She gave particular attention to the unprecedented number of reports received over the last 12 months (obstruction reports were double that of some previous years) and the success in recruiting new staff; both permanent and temporary. RH then took questions on the following:

Staff posts

BM - asked about staffing, welcomed the news of extra posts and was particularly pleased with plans for a dedicated Enforcement Officer.

PH - pointed out that there was an incentive to create new paths under the Environmental Land Management Scheme (see link to the Gov.UK page at: [ELMS 21](#)). The concern being that additional paths could increase the workload of an already overburdened team.

RH - commented that formal PRoW could still only be created under existing legislation.

RH - answered a question about contractor provision (to bolster mapping manpower in the determination of DMMOs and PPOs). She explained that this could be considered in the future but would not be straightforward.

Political oversight of PRoW matters

JG – asked to be informed when the new WCC cabinet member covering PRoW is appointed.

Secretary's post-meeting note – Cllr Alan Amos was confirmed as the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, 20 May 21.

Defect and Obstruction Report Figures

ME – Asked if the definition of ‘Obstruction’ and ‘Defect’ could be clarified as there is some overlap. In discussion it was noted that there is crossover between the two. He offered congratulations on the number of defects cleared but pointed out that the backlog was growing year on year. ME provided a few examples of Rights of Way which have been obstructed for some time and questioned the ‘Maintenance Prioritisation System’. The longevity and frequency of reports do not seem to be considered during prioritisation.

BM – Asked that the prioritisation of reports be made an agenda point at the next LAF and that the Operations Manager, Phil Coulson, be asked to attend and explain the underlying rationale.

Volunteering

BM – Recognised that volunteer group, and supervised tasks, had ceased during the COVID restriction but was also concerned that the percentage of parishes with PPWs has reduced.

RH – Was able to confirm that individual volunteer tasks had continued, where and when permitted in line with COVID restrictions, and that group and supervised tasks would recommence from 17 May 21.

Long Term Closures

ME - expressed his concern about long-term closures that had no obvious solution. He recognised that some of the problems required action beyond the PRoW team's financial resources (eg. footpath KT-633 which crosses a dangerous viaduct at Knighton on Teme). However, with regard to some of the others, ME asked for more thought to be given to alternative approaches and offered examples in support. Some of the long-term closures involve disputes with landowners - eg. Closure Order C-122 which covers Abberley bridleways AY-570, 571 & 574 and Astley and Dunley AD-553, which has been in force since 19th January 2012.

ME and **BM** would like to see these reviewed when the new Enforcement Officer is in post and, if necessary, escalated to the Legal Department.

The meeting closed at 11.19 a.m.

Tony Kerbey
LAF Secretary
27 May 2021