

20 November 2019

<b>Report of</b>	<b>Assistant Director of Environment</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Richard Block</b> ☎ 506825
<b>Title</b>	<b>Highway Ranger Service</b>		
<b>Wards affected</b>	All		

## 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Essex County Council have proposed that the Highway Ranger Service and associated budget could be delegated to Colchester Borough Council. This report explains the proposal and requests Cabinet to consider whether the proposal should be accepted.

## 2. Recommended Decision

- 2.1 To resolve that Colchester Borough Council operates the Highway Ranger Service on behalf of Essex County Council for as long as they continue to provide current levels of funding for the Service as detailed in this report.

## 3. Reason for Recommended Decision

- 3.1 This would demonstrate progress against the Alliance Action Plan Priority of taking on services and budgets from Essex County Council.
- 3.2 By having greater control of the service it could be better integrated with other activities undertaken by our Neighbourhood Services team.

## 4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 To not take on the service. This would make it more difficult to demonstrate progress against the Alliance Action Plan Priority of taking on services and budgets from Essex County Council. It would also be difficult to integrate the Highway Ranger Service with other activities in Neighbourhood Services.

## **5. Background Information**

- 5.1 The Highway Ranger Service is a service currently delivered by Ringway Jacobs on behalf of Essex County Council. It comprises of two operatives utilising one van and hand tools to deliver basic repairs and maintenance on highway land.
- 5.2 Highway Rangers take tasks via a task list which is managed and prioritised by the Local Highways Panel. The public and Members can report jobs for the Service via Essex County Council or the Borough Council.
- 5.3 Essex County Council have proposed that we take on this service and have confirmed that a budget of £80K per annum would be provided. They would not inflate this annually and cannot guarantee the funding year on year. This means we would take on risks associated with redundancy costs if Essex County Council decide to cease funding for the service. No van, tools, equipment or training would be provided so these would also need to be purchased.
- 5.4 Currently there are two operatives employed by Ringway Jacobs who could opt to transfer to us under TUPE legislation and the total associated employment costs would be £85K. We would also need to identify a further £10K to provide vans, fuel, training and equipment which means we could have a net annual cost of £15K if we take the service on.
- 5.5 Neither operatives would have to transfer, and if they didn't, the budget could be used to expand operational staff and vehicles in Neighbourhood Services. £80K would cover all costs associated with employing additional Neighbourhood Services staff, vehicles, fuel, training and tools to provide the service.
- 5.6 The most recent task list for the service is shown at appendix 1 and this demonstrates there is a considerable backlog. Essex County Council have confirmed that this task list could be reviewed and prioritised in conjunction with the Local Highways Panel if we take the service on. Through effective management, in future these tasks could be completed more quickly to prevent such backlogs and provide a better service to residents of Colchester.
- 5.7 If the service was transferred, the most efficient way of delivering it would be by absorbing the extra staff resource and responsibilities of Highway Rangers into Neighbourhood Services. This would require careful management of the task list to ensure that additional work does not exceed the additional capacity provided by the two additional members of staff to ensure other work in Neighbourhood Services does not suffer.

## **6. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications**

- 6.1 There are no direct equality, diversity and human rights implications.

## **7. Strategic Plan References**

- 7.1 Having an effective Highway Ranger Service contributes to the Growth theme of the Strategic Plan as it will help make sure Colchester is a welcoming place for all residents and visitors.

## **8. Consultation**

- 8.1 If we do decide to take on the service all staff likely to be affected will be consulted with to make sure the transition is effective. Members of the Local Highways Panel will also be consulted with, as they currently maintain oversight of the Highway Ranger task list.

## **9. Publicity Considerations**

- 9.1 The service is already publicised by Essex County Council so any additional publicity would need to be considered carefully. Initially, it is proposed that no additional publicity is undertaken until any backlog of works is cleared and we have a better understanding of the ongoing demands into the service.

## **10. Financial implications**

- 10.1 As set out previously, the financial implications of taking on the service depend on whether the two members of staff employed by Ringway Jacobs currently providing the service opt to transfer to the Council. If they do, then an ongoing annual budget pressure would be created of £15K.
- 10.2 If neither member of staff opts to transfer, there would be no initial ongoing annual cost associated with taking on the service.
- 10.3 If we agree to take on the service and Essex County Council were to withdraw funding in the future, we would be liable to pay any associated one-off redundancy costs.

## **11. Health, Wellbeing and Community Safety Implications**

- 11.1 There are no health, wellbeing or community safety implications.

## **12. Health and Safety Implications**

- 12.1 If we were to take on the service, risk assessments and safe systems of work would be developed for any associated tasks carried out.

## **13. Risk Management Implications**

- 13.1 There are potential reputational risks associated with taking on the Highway Ranger Service if the current backlog of tasks is not cleared or allowed to develop again.
- 13.2 There are also financial and reputational risks associated with the fact that Essex County Council are only prepared to guarantee funding for the service from year to year. If they withdraw the funding and the service is ceased as a result, we may receive adverse publicity. We would also be liable for any associated redundancy costs, and ongoing liability for vehicles and equipment to provide the service.

## **Appendices**

Appendix A – Most recent task list for Colchester Highway Ranger Service

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