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Strategic Theme #3A:

# Effective Community Engagement

Community Commissioned, Community Resourced,  
Community Delivered and / or Community Funded Schemes

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## Option definition (description and scope)

Under the Highways Act<sup>1</sup>, Highway Authorities have a duty to maintain highways that are maintainable at public expense and in particular, a highway authority has a duty to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that safe passage along a highway is not endangered by snow or ice. Historically, this second element often determined the number of people an authority employed.

Although there are national guidance documents and national codes of practice, it is up to each highway authority to determine and have in place a range of policies, in particular an Asset Management Plan, as to how they will discharge these duties. It is against these policies that each Highway Authority will be judged, should a claim be made against them.

As budgets have decreased, this has placed an increasing pressure on highway authorities in delivering this duty. Simply reassessing the level and standard of service delivered, including incorporating economies of scale and efficiencies is no longer sufficient, and as such, many authorities have had to explore ways of supplementing their workforce. There are a range of potential ways that councils can achieve this, and this research theme seeks to explore the benefits, costs and risks of each method.

This research theme excludes empowering Local Parish and Town Councils which is included in the Downward Devolution & Services Democratisation Theme, however engaging with the Parish and Town Councils is an element covered within this theme.

### Schedule 1: Scope of Effective Community Engagement Strategic Theme

#### 1. Utilisation of public sector employees.

Many authorities have explored how they can better utilise their workforce, particularly in Unitary Authorities, where looking at seasonal work patterns allows them to reallocate staff to particular service areas as appropriate. The advantage is that overall this does not usually add significantly to the cost for the authority.

#### 2. Employment of local farmers or local contractors.

This is most usually done via a service type of agreement or in some cases a formal contract. Particularly in rural areas, this can often be of benefit to the authority in the provision of additional labour, not to mention plant and equipment, but can also be of benefit to the local farmer in bringing in additional income at a time when they may be unable to carry out other works. Although there is a cost to the authority, it is most usually far less than they would have to incur if carrying out the work by more conventional methods. In addition, invariably the farmer is usually locally based, so has local knowledge and can respond quickly to changing conditions.

#### 3. Engagement with Parish and Town Councils.

As stated above this element is more fully included in Downward Devolution, however, having strong and good engagement and communication with the Parish and Town councils is an essential element, if this is to be effective. By seeking the views of the local community and engaging them in the decision-making process including what they consider to be their local priorities, is often key to getting them to be on-side.

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<sup>1</sup> Highways Act 1980, see <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1980/66/contents>.

**4. Use of special interest groups (SIGs), including voluntary groups and organisations.**

The use of special interest groups such as walkers, ramblers, cyclists etc is another area where, good dialogue at an early stage combined with seeking their views on what is important to them can be key to getting their buy in to any potential initiative.

**5. Use of people carrying out Community Service (via the UK Probation Service<sup>2</sup>).**

This is an area a few authorities have explored, but with varying degrees of success. There are challenges in this area, but again good early dialogues and communication can go a long way to easing these challenges.

**6. Use of or encouragement of the public volunteers.**

General self-help initiatives. The general public are often keen to carry out some self-help but are often unsure of what they can and can't do. They are also often put off by sometimes overly bureaucratic authorities. Again, early communication and dialogues can assist in overcoming this.

**7. Privately funded works.**

There are a range of works that can be funded privately via local businesses, community groups or organisations and in some cases private individuals. Some councils have difficulty in taking up these offers, mainly political, because of potentially differentiating standards of service being applied to different areas of the network.

There are a range of activities that the above groups can be involved in, with some better suited to certain activities than others. Equally some activities require far less input from the authority and correspondingly make them far easier to be introduced<sup>3</sup>. An overview and sample list is included below.

**Schedule 2: Potential Roles for Community-Sourced Resources**

- **Carrying out inspections, actively reporting defects and issues in a structured way, e.g. local highway wardens.** This has been used by a number of authorities and been relatively successful. Predominantly special interest groups and Parish and Town councils have been the groups most involved in this type of works.
- **Carrying out routine maintenance works, off highway, not requiring any specific expertise or materials,** for example; cutting of vegetation, cleaning of signs, general tidying and litter picking, snow clearing, etc. In varying degrees, there are examples of most of the above groups being involved in these types of activities. Some, under service level agreements and contractual arrangements, have been used for years within some authorities.
- **Carrying out light repairs off highway, for example; repairing of styles and gates on footpaths, replacement, repair and maintenance of street furniture and signs,** etc. Special interest groups along with Parish and Town Councils are the groups most commonly involved, however engaging and

<sup>2</sup> At any one time there are circa 200,000 people carrying out community service and, in most cases, they are looking for community projects, where they can be visibly seen to be contributing to the community.

<sup>3</sup> Works that are off highway and adjacent to the highway, typically require traffic management arrangements that highway authorities and their service providers can provide, together with some basic working practices and H&S instruction. Generally, the types of work undertaken usually result in the area being cordoned off, thus minimising the risk of injury and disruptions on the network.

using Community Service resources has also been tried, with varying degrees of success<sup>4</sup>.

- **Carrying out routine maintenance works but on or adjacent to the Highway.** Similar to the example above but more limited because of the issue surrounding live traffic flows and health and safety (H&S).
- **Assisting in carrying out more structural repairs,** better suited to some groups, in particular local contractors working in partnership with Parish and Town Councils.
- **Litter picking, sign cleaning and public realm work can all be better integrated within a unified work force and then supplemented by external parties** whose workload may also be seasonally dependant, e.g. farmers and local contractors. Equally these types of works are also well suited to community service resources as well as the local community, Parish and Town Councils.
- **Provision of works or public services, ranging from the provision of New footpaths and small pieces of infrastructure to the provision of School Crossing Patrollers and the provision of some community transport.** There are many examples where local communities, businesses or private individuals pay for the provision of a service provided by the local authority and where voluntary groups or organisations have provided community transport to enable people to get to shops, hospitals etc even transporting children to school.

## Strategic and political rationale

{How does the option align and contribute to the standard FHRC strategic drivers?}

**Table 1: FHRC Strategic Drivers: Option Alignment & Contribution**

FHRC Standard Factors	Weighting	Alignment & Contribution
<b>Ensure Network Availability</b>	100	L
<b>Deliver Affordable &amp; Sustainable Services</b>	100	H
<b>Attract Inward Investment &amp; Economic Stimulation</b>	80	L
<b>Provide Comprehensive Value for Money Assurance</b>	90	H
<b>Implement Tangible Service Improvements</b>	100	M
<b>Services &amp; Asset Plan Aligned with Customer Needs &amp; Political Priorities</b>	80	L
<b>Deliver Environment Protection Polices</b>	70	L
<b>Ensure Public Security &amp; Safety</b>	100	L

<sup>4</sup> While off-highway works can be catered for on most occasions without too many problems, with even works adjacent to the highway not overly complicated, any works that involve working in live traffic situations are far more problematic. In live traffic, where work is being undertaken, the risk of injury to any third party, or to the general public, is far greater. In addition, the types of works carried out on the highway are usually more of a structural nature requiring specialised plant, training and skills. Therefore, to date, other than where local farmers and local contractors have been used, authorities have generally shied away from on highway works.

While the range of the above options can assist in mitigating some of the workforce shortages, some can equally create issues. Whilst utilisation of public sector employees and employment of local farmers does not create many political problems, others, especially the use of Community Service and privately-funded works, can create potential conflicts politically.

Some politicians are unhappy to receive monies for enhanced services from communities, as it can create a two-tier model of service delivery; where those that can afford it will have a better service than those who cannot. Equally the use of resources attained via the Probation Service can also create political and public tensions.

Politicians also perceive a potential loss of support from some communities when the community is asked to help, as they believe that they have already paid for services through local taxes.

Each option, together with the type and location of service being delivered has to be assessed by the authority, prior to implementation, to best understand these issues.

## Structural changes and enablers

There are no major structural nor contract changes required with only an occasional service level agreement or small contract agreement needed when using local farmers or local contractors. Some minor amendments may be required, depending on the type of contract that the authorities service provider is employed under, but this is unlikely in most cases.

What is required is a change of culture and approach in developing the programme of works along with far more energies spent on engaging and communicating with the local communities, town and parish councils, special interest groups, etc and this is explained in more detail below. In essence, good communication comprising:

### Schedule 3: Effective Community Engagement Prerequisites

- **Early engagement, being open and transparent with what it is about,** accepting that it is being driven by budget reductions etc but also what the benefits can be, is crucial in achieving most of the above.
- **In addition, this communication has to be ongoing, taking the community on the journey. Too often these initiatives start but then simply peter out because of lack of commitment and perseverance.** For these to be successful they require ongoing commitment and resources, not just for the day to day management, but to be able to assess and communicate the benefits that are being achieved. Thereafter, there is a requirement to reassess with the community that what is being delivered is meeting their needs.
- **Offering something in exchange, is also a good way of getting buy in.** Seeking the view of the community as to what they would like to see improved, attended to or improved can be really powerful in getting the community and public to buy into and engage meaningfully. e.g. Offering to carry out the communities' priorities as part of the initiative, so that they experience a direct benefit.
- **The local authority is also required to provide guidance, site supervision, personal protection equipment (PPE) and equipment,** including H&S and

traffic management as appropriate and in some cases service level agreements (or similar) may need to be entered into.

The stages that need to be followed for this to be successful vary, dependant on the activity, the resources used and the scale and scope of works. In addition, some activities are better suited to one particular group, while some activities are easier to facilitate. Notwithstanding early and ongoing communication is key in achieving success.

## People, processes and systems changes

To facilitate any of these initiatives requires a change in approach by the authority. Traditionally, to a large extent, the programme of works is determined by professionals, based predominantly on assessment of condition, priority of need, economies of scale etc, although other factors such as availability of funding streams and political influences can also affect the final programme. Thereafter the programme of works is carried out, with varying degrees of communication. In some cases, it is simply presented as a fait accompli, often only giving advance warning to the public and communities of when works will take place.

While the basis of the programme can still be pulled together in this way, the authority has to engage at a very early stage with the various bodies, in particular the Parish and Town Councils and the special interest groups to gain an understanding of what they see as important. In short, the following basic steps need to be introduced into the determination of the programme.

### Schedule 4: Key Stages

1. **The authority engages meaningfully with the various parties**, Town and Parish councils, special interest groups, etc. giving the communities an understanding of what works are most likely to happen in their area together with reasons and explanations of why these are being selected. During this early engagement is where the authority seeks the views of the various communities and groups of what they see as being the important and most demanding issues in their respective area. Gaining an understanding of the types of activities and issues that the community believe are important is key.
2. **Feedback as to why certain things can't be included, together with making appropriate changes to incorporate others that can be included** is hugely important. For example, undoubtedly, there will be a number of projects that are all equally demanding of attention, but through budgetary restrictions only a few will be able to be undertaken. By seeking the views of the local community as to which of these are the most desirable, and then including these as the priority, will be hugely powerful in gaining their trust and understanding.
3. **A dialogue with representatives of special interest groups and in some cases local business in industrial estates**, in explaining how resources are limited etc, but again gaining information from them as to which areas of the network they see as most critical. For example, it may be that some rights of ways are more heavily used and more desirable to be maintained to a better level than others. Similarly, with cyclists, there may be routes

that they predominantly use, or on industrial areas changes have taken place which alter how the estate is used.

4. **A dialogue of how, with the authorities support and help, other works and issues that they have identified could be undertaken**, with the help of other organisations e.g. Community Services resources. An explanation of how this can aid additional works to be carried out at little extra expense is useful.
5. **A dialogue of how some of the issues that they have raised could potentially be addressed with help and assistance from them**. This is not always an easy conversation, but building on what has been discussed earlier, together with some positive responses to incorporate some of the communities or special interest groups priorities can assist. In addition to this, it helps to explain what works individuals can carry out and how this can be best undertaken, as often they claim they have tried to do certain things in the past only to be advised that they can't for various reasons.
6. **Following any meetings, a list of identified and agreed works should be drawn up and shared with the respective communities and/or organisations and which will form part of the overall programme.**
7. **A follow up meeting and supporting documentation will be required to outline the detail of how, what and when works are going to take place** including any community or third party input.
8. **Regular updates of when works and initiatives are taking place**, together with seeking their feedback is essential, together with giving them the opportunity to raise any issues.
9. **Messages reinforcing what and how people can carry out self-help should be included.**

In tandem with the above, a further set of conversations and dialogues need to be held with other local authority and publicly-funded departments, local farmers and contractors and the Probation Service.

#### **Schedule 5: Coordination with Other Stakeholders & Communities**

1. **Approach the various potential stakeholders and set up meetings or contact them as appropriate**, to explain what is being explored and how they could possibly be of assistance. This will vary, depending on who the conversation is with. For example, with local farmers it may simply be exploring if they are interested in undertaking some of the activities, e.g. snow clearing, hedge or vegetation cutting etc. With the Probation Service it will be about what projects or works that the community service resources could get involved in.
2. **With local farmers and, potentially, local contractors the next stage will be to create a service level agreement or more a formal contract.**
3. **With the Probation Service, more detailed discussions are required, including the levels of supervision and the provision of any equipment, materials and / or PPE.** The works that are best suited are ones that can be organised and programmed in advance, as the level of resources they have available, vary from day to day. This resulted in a trial in using them for potentially snow clearing on days of heavy snow being difficult to manage and organise because of the short notice period, however carrying out



repairs and clearance work on rights of ways for example was far better suited.

4. **A letter of agreement between the authority and the Probation Service will be required**, together with ongoing dialogues in regard to the work stream, although this may vary in different areas.
5. **Regular review meetings will be required, to obtain and give feedback on how the projects have gone**, address any issues, and most importantly, discuss and agree further works as appropriate. In the case of the Probation Service, the authority must take the lead on this, as the Probation Service will typically assume a passive role.
6. **Thereafter a follow up dialogue with the local community to review the efficacy of community-delivered works**. This can help to allay any concerns that the community may have.

In many cases local politicians will want to be involved in these conversations and meetings, in particular those involving the local communities and potentially the special interest groups. However, even if they are not, it is imperative that they are kept up to date and are fully aware of what is being discussed.

#### Examples of the of works performed by communities.

The following examples are not exhaustive but merely a range of initiatives that have been carried out to date.

#### Schedule 6: Examples of Community-Driven / Delivered Schemes

1. **Engaging representatives from the community or from special interest groups to act as Highway Wardens**, in effect on the ground eyes and ears who report issues and can be used as a conduit to feed information back to the community.
2. **Promoting the community to carry out self-help, for example clearing of snow in the winter and carrying out maintenance to verges**.
3. **Engaging with the Business Estate and obtaining not just help but also finance to carry out a range of works**. Additional coverage of the network for winter maintenance treatments, supply of new signage, altering the traffic calming arrangements, contributions to extend the bus service, taking in the maintenance of the public realm areas including the roundabouts as well as additional maintenance works on the carriageway. Total contribution was in excess of £500k.
4. **Working with the Probation Service in using community service resources for additional snow clearing outside sheltered housing, hospitals and shopping areas**. As mentioned previously, although it proved popular with the communities, it proved to be very difficult to manage and organise and subsequently did not continue.
5. **Working with the Probation Service in using community service resources for planned works**, e.g. repairs and maintenance to rights of ways, cycle paths and footpaths, as well as general tidying up and cleaning and maintenance of street furniture.
6. **Working with the local community and a local contractor in delivering a new footpath**, with the authority providing traffic management, but with

the majority of labour being provided by the community themselves with supervision by the local contractor.

7. **Local tidy ups with the local community providing the majority of labour and the authority providing traffic management and supervision.**
8. **Employing local farmers to carry out snow clearing and gritting works on the local network**, in some cases utilising their own plant and machinery, with the authority providing any winter salt.
9. **Working with voluntary organisations and groups in providing community transport** to supplement any public bus services, both in urban and rural areas.

## External partner(s) engagement

This entire theme relies on third party involvement. This involvement varies from group to group.

### Schedule 7: Potential Stakeholders

- **Other publicly employed personal.**
- **Local contractors and farmers**
- **Parish and Town Councils.**
- **Probation Service.**
- **Special-interest groups, including voluntary groups and organisations.**
- **Local and national businesses.**
  - Especially where access to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) funds are sought.
- **The general public.**
- **The authorities service provider.**

Not least, it requires commitment from the authority and support from their service providers as well as support from politicians. While many initiatives may and do get implemented, very few, if any, will be sustainable if there is not continual commitment and support from the authority.

The role of the service provider is also key, as in many cases it will be them that are supervising and coordinating the works, and as such they need to be satisfied that the works can be carried out safely.

## Whole life costs

In most cases, up-front costs are minimal, with the main cost being staff time in carrying out the additional engagement and communication with the communities, although, in essence, this is good practice in any case. The other cost is time spent in giving instruction and supervision to the various third parties engaged in the works.

However, not only do the potential rewards outweigh this investment in time, but public satisfaction is usually far higher and there is also usually a reduction in both public complaints and enquiries, through their better understanding of why and what is going on; which can go some way to offset the extra staff involvement earlier.

## Cashable business benefits

There are clear cashable benefits that can be achieved, and they can be assessed option by option.

### Schedule 8: Cashable Business Benefits

- **Economic benefits in terms of works being carried out at lower costs.**
- **Reinvestment back into the local economy, e.g. supporting local farmers and local contractors.**
- **Improved quality and condition of the network will result in a safer network and consequently a reduction in potential claims for damage and injury.**
- **Early intervention and maintenance work invariably result in better and cheaper outcomes than having to carry out more expensive measures down the line.** It is accepted that preventative works cost less and are more cost effective.

## Non-cashable business benefits

There are a number of non-cashable benefits associated with this theme (including, *inter alia*, social, reputational, political and environmental benefits). In some cases, there may be cashable savings linked to these, e.g. in the case of reduction in personal injury, there would be a reduction in cost to the NHS, which may not necessarily result in any cashable savings to the authority, although there are cases where the NHS has made contributions towards enhanced or extra services delivered.

### Schedule 9: Non-Cashable Business Benefits

- **Improved quality and condition of the network, resulting in a safer and better network.**
- **Improved environment.**
- **Social and local community enhancement, better community spirit, feel good factor.**
  - The state of local roads is an established key determinant of local wellbeing<sup>5</sup>.
- **Potential benefits to health and community cohesion.**
- **Potential costs saving on NHS care**, e.g. winter activities like snow clearing, especially outside residential homes, hospitals, areas of lots of potential elderly movements. A broken limb to an elderly patient costs a lot of time, money and disruption to the family and the health service not to mention the individual.
- **Enables resources to be redirected to carry out or enhance other service areas.**
- **When using the community service personnel, there is a real tangible and noticeable payback from the offenders back in to the community.**

## Dis-benefits and operational implications

Operationally there are no obvious dis-benefits, however there can be downsides where by it can be used for political mischief. Some communities can also take

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<sup>5</sup> AA Survey, May 2018.

umbrage at being asked to contribute in any way, as they believe that they have paid their taxes and should be entitled to these services in any case.

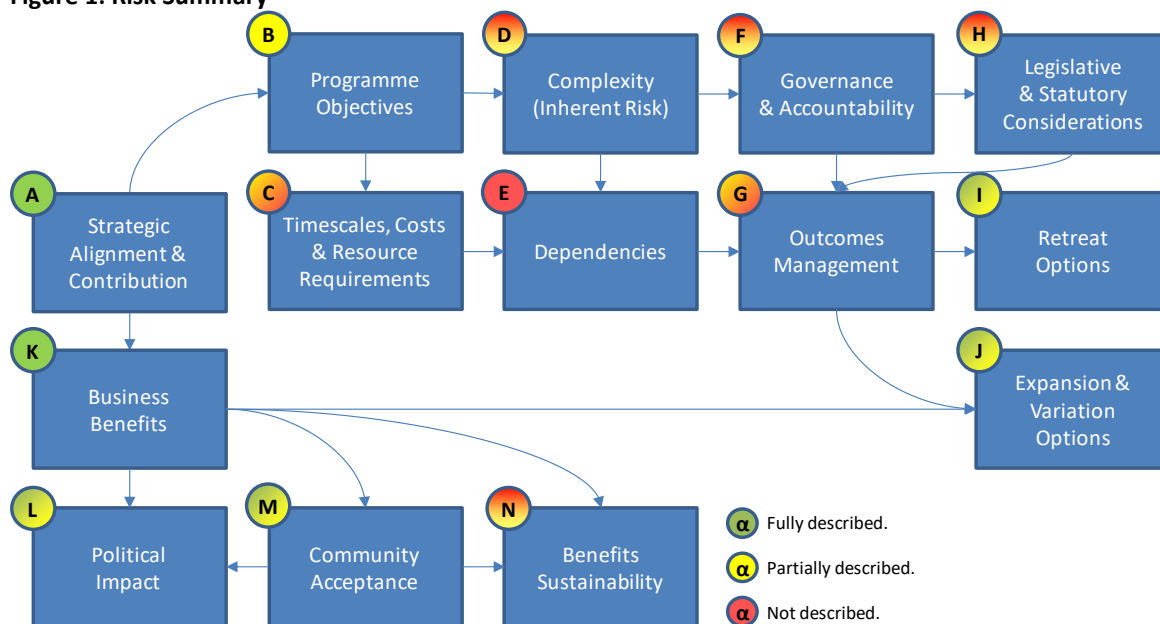
However, in the majority of cases, local communities and indeed special interest groups usually understand the issues around budgetary pressures and see benefit in assisting if it will enhance their community, environment and neighbourhood. Equally, additional income to supplement local farmers and contractors' incomes make them more viable and often make contributions back in kind as a result.

Local businesses likewise, see benefit is being seen to contribute to the local community and enhancing the local environment, in effect being a good neighbour. There may be some impacts in other service areas, during times when other public employees are reallocated and utilised on a more needs and seasonal basis, however these should be minimal and again can be offset, by boosting these service areas in return during times when weather permits. In essence this gives better utilisation of the workforce across the board.

## Implementation and operational risks

The principal project risks pivot around the number of dependencies, the complexity of the operating framework and the longevity of the relationships with individual volunteers.

Figure 1: Risk Summary



Initial Options Evaluation Framework v5.1 ©Proving 2017

## Impacts on stakeholders and communities

As the nature of this theme is predicated on wide-ranging engagements with diverse communities, the impact of stakeholders is significant. Careful consideration of the implications will need to be applied to each stakeholder group and each community prior to implementation.

Equally important is the potential impact on politicians, as these often form the "front line" interface with the public. Politicians will have to be briefed on the rationale and objectives and agree to support the initiatives prior to implementation.

## Readiness and barriers to success

While most authorities have carried out elements of this theme with varying degrees of success, very few have really grasped or explored the entire range of options open to them. In many cases this is not down to a lack of desire but more usually a combination of the below.

### Schedule 10: Perceived & Actual Barriers to Success

- **Often there is a misunderstanding of what people can and cannot do on the network.** e.g. Clearing of snow from public footpaths etc. No one in British law has been sued for clearing the footpath outside their property.
- **Unnecessary bureaucracy.** Often councils put obstacles in the way, being overly cautious.
- **Genuine legislative restrictions.** Health and Safety. Being aware of the legislation and responsibilities is a major stumbling block to people carrying out works.
- **Fear of liability issues.** Who carries the can if something happens either to the individual or a third party.
- Questioning why. E.g. I have paid my taxes and therefore why should we do this?
- **Lack of finance and resources to make it happen.**
- **Lack of effort by the authority.** This is not just about asking and expecting everyone to say “yes” and getting on with it, but about being totally engaged with the community and requiring ongoing commitment.
- **Probation Service provided resources may be unwelcome in some neighbourhoods,** in what they see as having convicted criminals working nearby. They have to wear jackets/vests which clearly identify them as Community Service workers, so it is obvious who they are.
- **Lack of know how.** What permissions are required for carrying out any works, even public utility permissions depending on the type of work.
- **Lack of physical resources and equipment.** Quite often traffic management and the correct equipment prevents people.

## Retreat options

In most cases the retreat position will simply be the status quo. The services delivered, and service standards, will most likely continue to be reduced in line with reductions in budget.