

Report of the Residents' & Environmental Services Policy Overview Committee 2014/15

The Cleaning and Maintenance Schedule for Hillingdon's Footpaths and Bridleways



Members of the Committee

Cllr Michael White (Chairman)
Cllr David Yarrow (Vice Chairman)
Cllr Lynne Allen
Cllr Teji Barnes
Cllr Mohinder Birah
Cllr Peter Davis
Cllr Patricia Jackson
Cllr Kuldeep Lakhmana
Cllr Carol Melvin

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CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD

Footpaths and Bridleways in Hillingdon are often ancient, having been used by successive generations of residents over hundreds of years. The Borough has a responsibility to ensure that many of these routes are cleaned and maintained in a way which allows current residents to continue to do so. However, the Committee was conscious that it had not considered footpaths and bridleways over recent years, and so wanted to ensure that they are still of the highest quality. The review offered the opportunity to identify where improvements can be made and where different ways of working, including volunteering, might be utilised effectively.

A large amount of information about the service was provided by Council officers in advance of the witness session, which covered the organisation of the service and current ways of working. The witness session itself focussed on users' perceptions of the Borough's routes, and on their experience of reporting issues. It was pleasing to note that witnesses were very positive about the service, and about the officers who provided it. However, a few improvements were suggested, by both residents and officers, and these have been incorporated into the recommendations of this report.

I would like to thank, on behalf of the Committee, all of the witnesses who gave us their time and expertise; this generosity has enabled us to produce a practical report, which I am pleased to commend to Cabinet.

Councillor Michael White

Chairman of the Residents' & Environmental Services Policy Overview Committee

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Residents' & Environmental Services Policy Overview Committee recommends that Cabinet:

- 1) Endorse the positive witness feedback about the quality of the Borough's footpaths and bridleways, compared to other areas, along with how well the service is being delivered.
- 2) Asks officers to formalise the monthly cleaning schedules of adopted footways.
- 3) Agrees to the addition of a new category to the Onyx Customer Relations Management system for the recording of problems with rights of way, and permissive routes.
- 4) Notes that a representative of the Hillingdon Equestrian Advisory Committee will be invited to attend the Yeading Valley Working Party, and that officers will provide meeting rooms to HEAC as and when they consider it to be appropriate.

OVERVIEW

The London Borough of Hillingdon has an extensive network of footpaths and bridleways. There are 69 miles of statutory rights of way in the Borough, the vast majority of which are footpaths, as well as 25 miles of permitted bridleway. There are also promoted leisure routes, which have a combined length of over 120 miles. It would take over a week and a half to walk the whole footpath network, assuming that you were able to walk 20 miles a day. Responsibility for the cleaning and maintenance of footpaths and bridleways in the Borough is split between the Council and Landowners, depending on the type of route. Over the last few years the profile of cleaning and maintaining the Borough's footpaths and bridleways has reduced. As such the Committee was keen to review the effectiveness of the Council's current approach to cleaning and maintenance.

Whilst the Council's responsibilities for footpaths and bridleways are split between sections in the Residents Services directorate it is thought that they are managed effectively, and strong internal communication has led to a good service being delivered. This was borne out by witnesses who praised the condition of Hillingdon's footpaths and bridleways, noting that the Borough outperforms its near neighbours. However, although positive comments were received about the service and the responsiveness of officers, areas for improvement were identified and have been set out in this report.

FINDINGS

The Organisation of the Service

The Committee began its review by gaining an understanding of the service. A desktop study was conducted by Democratic Services, which was shared with Members in the Scoping Report. The Council responsibility for cleaning and maintaining footpaths, bridleways, and other rights of way is split between various teams within Residents Services:

- The Green Spaces team manage Bridleways and the Borough's Permissive Routes Network (The Celandine Walks, The Hillingdon Trail, The Willow Tree Wander, and Trails in the Ruislip Woods National Nature Reserve).
- The Street Environment and Traffic Management team manage other rights of way, and maintain the Definitive Map and Statement, which records all of the Borough's rights of way. They are also responsible for the maintenance of adopted local access footpaths such as urban alleyways, which are not formal rights of way.
- The Waste Division deals with litter on paved footpaths and most fly-tipping. Litter picking on more rural routes is undertaken by the other teams and by volunteers, on an occasional basis.

Although a small number of responsibilities are met by co-operation between sections good communication about individual issues means that this works well. Good use was also made of Blue Sky Development and Regeneration, a contractor working exclusively with ex-offenders, who are employed for twelve weeks a year to carry out practical work across the network.

Performance

The Committee assessed the performance of the service in a number of ways, from traditional statistics to web reviews, and of course the testimony of witnesses. Members found that, whilst there were some problems on the network, these were isolated, and generally dealt with quickly by officers, once reported. As an example of this very high quality, 98% of the Borough's statutory footpaths met the requirements of the former Best Value Performance Indicator 178 in 2014. The Committee therefore recommends that Cabinet:

1

Endorse the positive witness feedback about the quality of the Borough's footpaths and bridleways, compared to other areas, along with how well the service is being delivered.

In terms of monitoring reports by residents, the committee noted that the contact centre did not have specific categories for footpaths and bridleways. The Committee felt that recording this information would be useful to enable service managers to accurately track performance and therefore recommends:

2 That new categories be added to the Onyx Customer Relations Management (CRM) system for the recording of cleaning and maintenance problems with rights of way, and permissive routes.

Improvements

Considering the high performance levels achieved by the teams involved, the Committee did not wish to recommend significant changes to the method of delivery. Members noted that whilst more could always be spent on improving routes, the current level of investment was maintaining, and improving, an already good network. However, it was felt that there was scope for the improvement of the cleaning schedules for adopted footways as there is currently a large degree of flexibility in how this service is organised, which could lead to particular paths not being cleaned for a long while. It is anticipated that a formalised cleaning schedule would prevent this from happening, and the Committee therefore recommends:

3 That the monthly cleaning schedules of adopted footways be formalised by the Waste Service.

Reporting

The Committee heard that residents are happy with the existing reporting mechanisms, which were effective. Although there are occasional problems with issues being passed to the wrong team, these are rare and officers generally communicate effectively to ensure that those responsible for resolving an issue are aware of any reports. It is anticipated that the introduction of new categories to the Onyx CRM system could reduce the number of misdirected reports.

It is noted that regular users will often contact valued officers in service departments directly, by-passing the Contact Centre. However, these strong relationships are both appreciated by residents, and useful to officers, and it is noted that many people reporting in this way also volunteer for the Council. Therefore no recommendation to prevent regular users from contacting officers directly is proposed.

Volunteering

The Committee heard that volunteering activities take place once or twice a week in various locations across the Borough, carrying out tasks such as vegetation clearance, tree planting and litter picking. There were also occasional sessions with other organizations such as the Scouts. Officers supported these sessions and targeted their work. Members felt that the current volunteering scheme was good and did not feel that it would be appropriate to directly ask those who volunteered in other ways for the Council to also volunteer in this way. Members heard that there are many groups of volunteers spread across the Borough, and that the Yeading Valley Working Group looks at the work of many of these groups, identifying maintenance issues, including with Footpaths and Bridleways, as well as advising on conservation. The Hillingdon Equestrian Advisory Committee was keen to engage with the Council, and it is therefore recommended:

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That officers invite a representative of the Hillingdon Equestrian Advisory Committee to attend the Yeading Valley Working Party, and that officers will provide meeting rooms to HEAC as and when they consider it to be appropriate.

BACKGROUND READING

The following information is provided in order to signpost readers to useful contextual information to this review.

Rights of Way & Permissive Routes Improvement Plan for Hillingdon 2011 – 2021
<http://www.hillingdon.gov.uk/media.jsp?mediaid=29326&filetype=pdf>

The Hillingdon Definitive Map and Statement
<http://www.hillingdon.gov.uk/article/27284/Public-Rights-of-Way>

Hillingdon Council Walking Webpage
<http://www.hillingdon.gov.uk/walking>

Hillingdon Council Bridleways Webpage
<http://www.hillingdon.gov.uk/article/6385/Bridleways>

Hillingdon Council Volunteering Practical Webpage
<http://www.hillingdon.gov.uk/article/26256/Volunteering-activities>

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Rights of Way Circular 1/09
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rights-of-way-circular-1-09>

The scoping report, and more information on the witness session can be found in the papers for the meeting
<http://modgov.hillingdon.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=114&MIId=2093>

APPENDIX 1 - TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the arrangements currently in place with regard to the cleaning and maintenance of footpaths, bridleways, and alleyways in the Borough;
2. To gather evidence in order to gain an understanding of the effectiveness of the current cleaning and maintenance arrangements;
3. To identify any improvements that could be made to the current cleaning and maintenance arrangements whilst being mindful of resource restraints;
4. To review the reporting process available to residents who have identified areas to be cleaned or maintained; and
5. To identify alternative human resources that could be utilised on a routine basis to improve the cleanliness of footpaths (e.g. Street Champions, Neighbourhood Watch).

APPENDIX 2 - LIST OF WITNESSES

Malcolm Trudgeon & Colin Acreman	Hillingdon Ramblers
Andrew Riley	Northwood Hills Residents' Association & Bridleway User
Paul Richards	Green Spaces, Sports, and Leisure Manager
John Fern	Service Manager - Street Scene and Traffic
Colin Russell	Waste Division Manager