

CABINET RESPONSE TO ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT SELECT COMMITTEE

HIGHWAY TREE MAINTENANCE

RECOMMENDATIONS

- i) That the devolvement of tree maintenance to Districts and Boroughs, and where appropriate, Town and Parish Councils, be encouraged and explored further.
- ii) That officers examine in detail the financial and operational benefits that could be achieved through devolvement of tree maintenance, and report back in detail to the Environment and Transport Select Committee in September 2012.
- iii) That Local Committees should hold the budgets for pollarding and tree maintenance, until any decision is made with regards to devolvement.
- iv) That proactive pollarding of trees be encouraged, whereby their ongoing maintenance could be devolved (as in recommendation i).
- v) That an accurate tree survey on Surrey's highways be completed prior to negotiations regarding the devolvement of tree maintenance to Districts and Boroughs.

RESPONSE

I welcome the recommendation that the devolvement of tree maintenance is explored further. A detailed examination of the benefits of doing this is the next step and officers should report back ensuring clarity on how this may be achieved whilst continuing to ensure that the safety risk from highway trees is managed as the first priority. To ensure this is achieved adequately I would advise a later return to select committee in 2012 in reflection of the other directorate priorities that are ongoing over the next quarter.

As tree maintenance activities, including pollarding, are annually defined and reflect the management of identified safety risks my view on the recommendation is that the budgets should remain with the service. There is scope within the current arrangements to respond to customer requests and on this basis I would encourage councillors to make requests for tree maintenance work via their local office representatives.

The proactive pollarding of trees was reintroduced by the service in 2011. It is recognised as an important tree maintenance activity and I would support the recommendation for officers to continue this work and improve the programme where possible. A progress update on the 2011 and 2012 pollarding programme should be included within the follow up select committee report.

In support of the progress of any devolvement, it is accepted that officers should review the existing tree survey data and its compatibility with the requirements of the Districts & Boroughs etc. Subsequently officers should then identify the options to fill any potential gaps within reasonable time and cost constraints. An outline plan on how this will be achieved should also be included in the follow up select committee report.

Mr John Furey
Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment
19 June 2012