

## Impacts of cuts on Rights of way management

Aims of the workshop

- To identify any problems that LAFs are experiencing
- To identify the impact
- To develop an action plan for LAFs to respond to these challenges in their areas, drawing on the experience of other LAFs

Chair Charles Ecroyd (Cumbria LAF)

Facilitator : Salle Dare (North West Regional Coordinator)

### Background

Funding cuts are affecting every forum. Routine maintenance has been left behind. Flooding has damaged networks. There are not the funds to do the bigger works such as flood work. A few stiles are put in, a few potholes repaired. Most items get put on an ever growing list of works to do. LAFs need to be run efficiently and have the support of their appointing bodies. Highways are there to help improve and maintain PROW.

In Cumbria there were no ROWIPS when CROW came in. All was working well before the budgetary cuts. Now the County Council budget has dropped from £850,000 to £600,000 and is dropping further. 2 staff left instead of 6. 2 rangers instead of 4. As an access forum how can we work alongside our County Council colleagues when they cannot give their support? Highways and transport are being asked to do more of non Countryside work. How do we see ourselves at the moment? Are we reactive?

Charles stated, 'We are all volunteers, we get travel expenses but we no longer have any training as there is no budget. Do we let it drop or do we move into a self supporting mechanism?

West Sussex – The County Council have divided the County into Parishes and asked for volunteers to adopt a Parish and work that area. The County Council provide all the maps. It reduces their involvement. The repair team will take on a project. Volunteers can and will mend a bridge or a stile. The County Council are shifting the support from paid workers to volunteers.

LAFs do not get credit. Need more funding from Defra. No one knows that LAFs exist. New members are not coming forward. How many of the local authorities give their support? Numbers of meetings are cut.

Bedfordshire Have an independent secretary. This represents good value. The local authority are able to develop the improvements that the LAF suggests.

### North Somerset

A small unitary authority. It is reactive. Making more use of volunteers now. The ones left are protecting their backs now.

Mid Berkshire – All LAFs need to be re structured and to have financial control. LAFs at the moment are not legally able to manage money.

South Lincs – Very few people find out about LAF's in libraries. Too many also do not see County Council reps.

Peterborough LAF – Lost their ROW officer last year. The Highways and ROW are going to be outsourced. The power of volunteers must not be forgotten to move projects forward though they need professional instruction. Has anyone used the payback community scheme?

Herefordshire LAF ROW has been outsourced. A vast improvement.

How many authorities inspect paths? Can we ask ramblers to survey paths? We could ask them to get evidence and research.

There have been cutbacks in the Legal Department.

Cumbria LAF - they have lost their secretary and have to organise meetings themselves, agenda's etc To be effective, has to be self help. It is not sustainable though for the Chair to be Chair, secretary and bottle washer!

Surrey LAF – Workload very heavy. Some have realised they have cut back staff too much.

Relationship between LAF and Highways authorities are vital.

Avon LAF- ROW cuts by 30%. Cotswold Way cut by 50%. The LAF decided to maintain the paths. Raised £8000 - £9000. Three Ramblers working groups were set up and agreed to have just £35 per job. £1000 on training, £5000 on tools. They have trained 24 volunteers. In 8 Months done 90 jobs, making enough money to replenish tools. Have excellent relationship with ROW officers. Repairs mostly to kissing gates. The Ramblers agreed to cover the cost of the insurance for the volunteers.

Are LAFs losing their statutory role? Every single authority operates differently

Nottingham LAF Fewer officers now, lower budgets. Are trying to get more volunteer groups going but there is no one to get the volunteers going.

P3 scheme - scheme cut.

Devon LAF P3 scheme well established.

## CONCLUSIONS

Mixed picture across the Country.

Overwhelming cutbacks, worryingly in all Departments including the Legal Departments.

Not good to promote rights of way and health benefits if you have not got the infrastructure to support it.

Lack of maintenance. Paths will only get repaired if there is an order to repair them.

What is the long term plan for LAFs?

No LAFs in urban fringe areas where they are most needed. (Bolton, Bury, Rochdale and Oldham

Not getting support from elected members