

**Report of Highways Maintenance Manager**

**Report to the Chief Officer (Highways and Transportation)**

**Date: 24 May 2016**

**Subject: Trial of Forensic Marking of Yorkstone Flags**

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s): Beeston and Holbeck, Headingley, Hyde Park and Woodhouse	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

**Summary of main issues**

1. The theft of stone products is a nationwide issue, with yorkstone flagged paving often the target.
2. Leeds has experienced a significant increase in incidents of theft over the last few years and the service is looking at ways to protect the asset.
3. Discussions have taken place with a supplier which provides a forensic marking service, with a view to undertaking a trial in three Wards.
4. This report seeks approval to accept a tender from a single supplier to facilitate the trial.

**Recommendations**

- 5 The Chief Officer (Highways and Transportation) is requested to approve the awarding of a contract to a sole supplier, in accordance with Contract Procedure Rule 7 (Low Value Procurement, contracts with an estimated value of below £10,000), to allow the service to undertake a trial involving the forensic marking of yorkstone flags.

## **1 Background information**

- 1.1 Until relatively recently, local authorities and other agencies experienced a considerable amount of scrap metal theft which, in the case of Leeds, saw many hundreds of gully and manhole lids being stolen.
- 1.2 When the thefts started to impact on electricity supplies and rail travel the Government introduced measures to make disposing of stolen metal more difficult and introduced greater controls under the Scrap Metal Dealer's Act 2013. Since then Leeds has seen a massive reduction in metal theft to the point where instances are now relatively rare.
- 1.3 However, since the introduction of the scrap metal legislation, criminal activity has focussed more on stone products, for which there is a thriving market, without the difficulties with disposal now associated with metal.
- 1.4 The problem of stone theft is recognised nationally and there have been many media reports from across the country about this issue.
- 1.5 Thefts in Leeds are now at the point where they are averaging around 10 per week, with noticeable hot-spots in certain Wards.
- 1.6 Discussions have taken place with a company which specialises in the forensic marking of property. They work with local authorities, police forces and private businesses across the country in protecting property and their system has contributed to securing hundreds of convictions.
- 1.7 Although there are other providers of similar marking systems, the company proposed is seen as the major player in the industry and currently has contracts with Network Rail and the Metropolitan Police, amongst others.
- 1.8 Although flag thefts are reported to the police and logged, conviction rates are low, often because the police find it difficult to tie-up seized flags with specific locations. The solution proposed for use in the trial would carry a unique chemical fingerprint, meaning stolen flags can be directly linked to a Ward, area or street.

## **2.0 Main issues**

- 2.1 The theft of stone flags in Leeds is a major issue, with over 500 reported instances in the last 12 months.
- 2.2 Aside from the criminal aspect, the loss of the flags and the cost of reinstatement, the problem is having an impact in local communities, both in the way they look and how residents feel about their neighbourhood.
- 2.3 Three Wards which are regularly targeted are Beeston and Holbeck, Headingley and Hyde Park and Woodhouse. The proposal is to trial the forensic marking of flags in these Wards to deter criminal activity and see what impact this has on the number of thefts.

- 2.4 The liquid itself is colourless and invisible to the naked eye, but carries a chemical finger print, which means the location from which stolen flags have been taken can be positively identified. Being able to prove where flags originated is key in the police being able to secure convictions when thieves are caught in possession.
- 2.5 As well as providing the liquid solution to mark the flags, the supplier will place deterrent signage in the Wards and undertake a 3 month covert operation, with surveillance of known hotspots.
- 2.6 To reinforce what is done on site, the supplier also engages with local residents' groups and crime prevention officers to get their 'buy-in' and help get the message out in to the community.
- 2.7 In addition, to raise awareness of the trial and the activity taking place in protecting areas of stone flagging, communications will be sent out via local media.
- 2.8 This system operates under licence. The price for a 1 year licence, set-up costs and action as outlined above is £9985, which would be funded from the Highways Maintenance revenue budget.

### **3.0 Corporate Considerations**

#### **3.1 Consultation and Engagement**

- 3.1.1 Ward members and community groups in the Headingley, Hyde Park and Woodhouse areas have taken a keen interest in the flag theft issue and are eager to explore ways in which thefts can be deterred or prevented.
- 3.1.2 The service has attended meetings at their request and there would be further engagement through both the service and the supplier throughout the duration of the trial.

#### **3.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration**

- 3.2.1 In the last 12 months, stone flags have been stolen from 21 different Council Wards. The Wards selected for this trial have been chosen due to the high frequency of thefts from those areas.
- 3.2.2 At the end of the 12 months, the trial will be evaluated to determine whether it is something that should be replicated across other Wards with similar problems.

#### **3.3 Council Policies and the Best Council Plan**

- 3.3.1 The trial aims to reduce the instances of criminal activity and reduce the theft of stone flags, which erodes the character of conservation areas and other areas where the retention of stone products is in keeping with the local environment. This links with the Vision for Leeds ambition of creating and maintaining communities where people feel safe and contributing to an environment where Leeds is seen as the Best City to Live.

#### **3.4 Resources and value for money**

- 3.4.1 Contract Procedure Rule 7 permits the relevant Chief Officer to make a direct appointment without the need for competition if they believe that it represents Best Value for the Council, providing that a written record of the decision, along with reasons, is kept.

- 3.4.2 This is a low value trial, under £10,000, with the leading company for this type of work. If the trial shows positive results, consideration will be given to extending this work in to other areas of the city, which may necessitate a competitive procurement exercise

### **3.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In**

- 3.5.1 The report is not subject to Call In and there is nothing within this report that requires treating as confidential under the Council's Access to Information Rules.

### **3.6 Risk Management**

- 3.6.1 There are no significant risks with this procurement.

### **4.0 Conclusions**

- 4.1 The theft of stone flags in Leeds has increased massively in recent years; something which is reflected throughout the country.
- 4.2 Along with the financial cost of making safe and reinstating stolen sections of footway, the thefts are having an impact in the appearance of conservation area and areas of character across the city.
- 4.3 In an attempt to reduce the instances of stone flag theft, a trial is proposed using a solution to forensically mark flags, together with associated actions to deter criminal activity.
- 4.4 For the purposes of the trial, it is proposed to accept a tender from a single supplier, who is at the forefront of this type of work, with a track record of positive results.

### **5.0 Recommendations**

- 5.1 The Chief Officer (Highway and Transportation) is requested to approve the acceptance of a tender from a single supplier for a trial of forensic marking of stone flags in three Wards, in accordance with Contract Procedure Rule 7, (Low Value Procurement with an estimated value below £10,000).

### **6.0 Background document<sup>1</sup>**

- 6.1 None

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<sup>1</sup> The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.

# Appendix A

## Equality, Diversity, Cohesion and Integration Screening



As a public authority we need to ensure that all our strategies, policies, service and functions, both current and proposed have given proper consideration to equality, diversity, cohesion and integration.

A **screening** process can help judge relevance and provides a record of both the **process** and **decision**. Screening should be a short, sharp exercise that determines relevance for all new and revised strategies, policies, services and functions. Completed at the earliest opportunity it will help to determine:

- the relevance of proposals and decisions to equality, diversity, cohesion and integration.
- whether or not equality, diversity, cohesion and integration is being/has already been considered, and
- whether or not it is necessary to carry out an impact assessment.

<b>Directorate:</b> City Development	<b>Service area:</b> Highways & Transportation
<b>Lead person:</b> Chris Clarke	<b>Contact number:</b> 24 78434

**1. Title:** Trial of Forensic Marking of Yorkstone Flags

Is this a:

**Strategy / Policy**
 **Service / Function**
 **Other**

**If other, please specify**

**2. Please provide a brief description of what you are screening**

The screening focuses on the report seeking authorisation to engage with a specialist provider to run a trial of forensic marking of yorkstone flags

**3. Relevance to equality, diversity, cohesion and integration**

All the council's strategies/policies, services/functions affect service users, employees or the wider community – city wide or more local. These will also have a greater/lesser relevance to equality, diversity, cohesion and integration.

The following questions will help you to identify how relevant your proposals are.

When considering these questions think about age, carers, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation and any other relevant

characteristics (for example socio-economic status, social class, income, unemployment, residential location or family background and education or skills levels).		
Questions	Yes	No
Is there an existing or likely differential impact for the different equality characteristics?	X	
Have there been or likely to be any public concerns about the policy or proposal?		X
Could the proposal affect how our services, commissioning or procurement activities are organised, provided, located and by whom?		X
Could the proposal affect our workforce or employment practices?		X
Does the proposal involve or will it have an impact on <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eliminating unlawful discrimination, victimisation and harassment</li> <li>• Advancing equality of opportunity</li> <li>• Fostering good relations</li> </ul>		X

If you have answered **no** to the questions above please complete **sections 6 and 7**

If you have answered **yes** to any of the above and;

- Believe you have already considered the impact on equality, diversity; cohesion and integration within your proposal please go to **section 4**.
- Are not already considering the impact on equality, diversity, cohesion and integration within your proposal please go to **section 5**.
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<p><b>4. Considering the impact on equality, diversity, cohesion and integration</b></p>
<p>If you can demonstrate you have considered how your proposals impact on equality, diversity, cohesion and integration you have carried out an impact assessment.</p> <p>Please provide specific details for all three areas below (use the prompts for guidance).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>How have you considered equality, diversity, cohesion and integration?</b> (<b>think about</b> the scope of the proposal, who is likely to be affected, equality related information, gaps in information and plans to address, consultation and engagement activities (taken place or planned) with those likely to be affected)</li> </ul> <p>Ward members and community groups in the Headingley, Hyde Park and Woodhouse areas have taken a keen interest in the flag theft issue and are eager to explore ways in which thefts can be deterred or prevented.</p> <p>The service has attended meetings at their request and there would be further engagement through both the service and the supplier throughout the duration of the trial.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Key findings</b> (<b>think about</b> any potential positive and negative impact on different equality characteristics, potential to promote strong and positive relationships between groups,</li> </ul>

potential to bring groups/communities into increased contact with each other, perception that the proposal could benefit one group at the expense of another)

Reducing the amount of paving which is stolen will benefit all users in particular parents with young children, the elderly and people with restricted mobility or visibility

• **Actions**  
**(think about** how you will promote positive impact and remove/reduce negative impact)

**5. If you are not already considering the impact on equality, diversity, cohesion and integration you will need to carry out an impact assessment.**

Date to scope and plan your impact assessment:	N/A
Date to complete your impact assessment	N/A
Lead person for your impact assessment (Include name and job title)	N/A

**6. Governance, ownership and approval**  
Please state here who has approved the actions and outcomes of the screening

Name	Job title	Date

**7. Publishing**  
This screening document will act as evidence that due regard to equality and diversity has been given. If you are not carrying out an independent impact assessment the screening document will need to be published.

If this screening relates to a **Key Delegated Decision, Executive Board, full Council** or a **Significant Operational Decision** a copy should be emailed to Corporate Governance and will be published along with the relevant report.

A copy of **all other** screening's should be sent to [equalityteam@leeds.gov.uk](mailto:equalityteam@leeds.gov.uk). For record keeping purposes it will be kept on file (but not published).

<b>Date screening completed</b>	18 May 2016
If relates to a Key Decision - <b>date sent to Corporate Governance</b>	
Any other decision – <b>date sent to Equality Team (equalityteam@leeds.gov.uk)</b>	N/A