

PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
– 5 FEBRUARY 2025

Review of Street Lighting and Illuminated Assets policy framework proposals for part night lighting
Report by the Director of Environment & Highways

RECOMMENDATION

The Committee is RECOMMENDED to

- a) Note the work being undertaken to review the council's Street Lighting and Illuminated Assets policy.
- b) Review and feedback on the approach to developing proposals for part-night lighting in Oxfordshire, specifically with regards to the approach to engagement and consultation.

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to:
 - Provide a high-level overview of the council's revised approach to developing proposals for part-night street lighting in Oxfordshire to support the council's beyond net zero ambitions and improve the natural environment from a carbon and biodiversity perspective.
 - Demonstrate how the council will work closely with stakeholders and communities to develop these proposals into a framework.

Executive Summary

2. Following the decision in November 2024 to defer the previous part-night lighting proposals, this report outlines a proposed revised approach, which includes a commitment to review the associated street lighting policy.
3. The proposal includes extensive stakeholder and community group engagement to review the adopted policy and develop a part-night lighting framework, including a formal consultation and approval process for those communities who wish to have part-night lighting considered.
4. This revised approach to part-night lighting within an updated policy will be the focus of the paper for Cabinet in July 2025.

Background & Context

5. Oxfordshire County Council, in its capacity as the highway authority, operates approximately 60,000 streetlights across the county.
6. The council's current Street Lighting and Illuminated Assets policy was agreed by Cabinet on 18 October 2022 and is due for review. This policy contains statements with regards to part-night lighting, namely under policy SLP 2:

Policy: SLP2

Oxfordshire County Council will provide or ensure provision of adequate and appropriate levels of lighting to ensure safe passage to all users of the highway network. This will include dimming of equipment during low traffic periods and enables the reduction in running hours due to the instant switch on of LED equipment. Dynamic (real-time demand/usage) control of the lighting can also be implemented and retrofitted where required. We will review and, where appropriate, de-illuminate or provide off-grid solutions for signage where possible and practical.

7. On 14 November 2024, "Proposed highway street lighting profiles, specifically with regard to operational hours and illumination levels (part-night lighting)", were presented for decision at Cabinet Member Decisions (CMD). These were standalone proposals, outside of a wider review of the council's Street Lighting and Illuminated Assets policy.
8. Specifically, these proposals were designed to enact the provisions made in the existing policy for part-night lighting, to support the council's net zero ambitions and reduce the negative impacts of light pollution on the natural environment from a carbon and biodiversity perspective.
9. Prior to the CMD meeting it became clear from the many written representations from councillors, community groups, stakeholders that the council should pause implementation of their proposals to reconsider the approach. Specifically, it was identified that a revised approach working closely with a wider range of stakeholders needed to be undertaken. It was also accepted by officers that the Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) accompanying the proposal did not truly represent the views and concerns of the wider community and diverse groups within Oxfordshire, nor did it reflect the existing EIA already associated with the council's Street Lighting and Illuminated Assets policy. Whilst the meeting went ahead, the decision was deferred.
10. Since the November 2024 CMD meeting, the council have taken the opportunity to review, to take stock of the wide range of views expressed and to map out next steps considering lessons learnt.
11. This paper sets out how the council plan to move forward with refining proposals for a part-night street lighting framework for the county and review the wider Street Lighting and Illuminated Assets policy, engaging with stakeholders and communities.

12. New proposals are expected to be presented for decision by Cabinet in July 2025, alongside any wider changes to the council's existing Street Lighting and Illuminated Assets policy.

Policy Review

13. A decision has been made to review the council's overall Street Lighting and Illuminated Assets policy. This is a business-as-usual activity and is standard practice for council policies. This work will take place alongside the development of new proposals for part-night lighting.
14. As part of the council's reset, the term "dark skies" has been changed to "part-night lighting" to better reflect the reality of the proposals. The primary aim of these proposals is to improve the natural environment from a carbon and biodiversity perspective but with personal and community safety being a priority consideration.

Part-night lighting proposals

15. The council's aim is to set a new framework for part-night lighting for Oxfordshire that supports the council's net zero ambitions and reduces the negative impacts of light pollution on the natural environment from a carbon and biodiversity perspective.
16. Central to the development of the council's proposals is giving communities the choice to introduce part-night lighting in their local area and recognising that one size does not fit all. Different operating hours, levels of light intensity and exemptions will all form part of the council's proposals to match the diversity of the county's geography and communities. Importantly, the council are proposing that part night-lighting will be a community choice requested through the parish/town council and the county councillor/s for that area (*for areas of Oxford that are not parished, this would only be through the county councillors*). Following such a request, the revised street lighting scheme for that community will be consulted upon, with a final decision being made at the relevant Cabinet Member Decision meeting (similar to the principle and approach to 20mph schemes).
17. As part of the work to develop these proposals officers will focus on four key strands:
 - a) Data and insights
 - b) Engagement and consultation
 - c) Understanding impact and risk
 - d) Implementation, if proposals are agreed

Data and insights

18. Good progress is being made to analyse relevant accident data, crime data and safety data from across the county. Successful relationships have been formed with stakeholders and council service areas to support this work.
19. Insights are being drawn from the council's data hub and stakeholder engagement management system to inform the planning of engagement and consultation activities, and to update the supporting Street Lighting and Illuminated Assets policy equalities impact assessment.

Engagement and consultation

20. The council will take a two-phase approach to consultation and engagement. Phase one will focus on engaging stakeholders and communities to update the policy and develop a suitable part-night lighting framework. The groups officers propose to reach in this first phase are detailed in **Annex A** to this report.
21. This will include, but not be limited to:
 - sharing the council's emerging plans for a part-night lighting framework for Oxfordshire based on community choice, including operating hours, levels of light intensity and exemptions and how these might apply to different areas
 - hearing people's views and concerns on introducing part-night lighting in different circumstances, with a specific emphasis of understanding potential impacts on different groups of people who are perceived as being 'at risk' from crime or harm
 - sharing the council's early thoughts on the process for consideration of part-night lighting to ensure the choice to opt-in is community led
 - developing the formal consultation process for specific locations which will be taken through the CMD approval process for decision.
 - sharing the council's initial findings from the data analysis phase and exploring any gaps
 - listening to ideas and feedback on the council's plans
 - exploring the potential benefits and impacts on carbon and biodiversity of not introducing part-night lighting.
22. In this phase one engagement the council will also seek views as part of the wider review of the council's Street Lighting and Illuminated Assets policy.
23. Phase two will be a formal public consultation on the proposed framework and approach to part-night lighting in Oxfordshire, which has been developed by working closely with communities and stakeholders. Should any substantial changes be required to the overall Street Lighting and Illuminated Assets policy as a result of the review, these will also be formally consulted upon.

Understanding impact and risk

24. Understanding impact and risk is central to the development of council's part-night street lighting proposals. Views will be actively sought in the engagement and consultation phase and identified through data analysis.

Implementation

25. Part-night lighting will only be implemented if it has been locally requested and, following a formal consultation process, approved at the relevant Cabinet Member Decision meeting.

26. A communications and engagement plan will be developed to support the implementation of part-night street lighting proposals, and officers are already learning from best practice from authorities who have previously implemented schemes.

Timeline for engagement

27. An outline timeline for engagement and consultation on part-night street lighting proposals is listed below:

a) January and February 2025

Working between the various Engagement, Equalities, Communications Teams and Members to develop the scope, format and questions of the Stakeholder Engagement and Consultation.

Internal engagement of colleague inclusion networks.

b) March and April 2025

Targeted external stakeholder engagement, which will be designed to ensure pre-election period compliance.

c) April and May 2025

Development of consultation.

d) Middle of May to Middle of June 2025

Consultation period (post election commencement).

e) Middle of June to beginning July 2025

Consultation result report review and Street lighting Policy updated.

f) 17 July 2025

Cabinet Decision on updated policy and proposed part-night lighting process.

Financial Implications

28. There are no new budgetary implications arising from this report. The development of part-night proposals is being funded through existing service budgets.

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Legal Implications

29. There is no general requirement or obligation for the county council to light the highway. Oxfordshire has set its own policy based on the council's priorities and general guidance and good practice.

30. The legislation and guidance to which the council must have regard when exercising its power to light the highway includes:

- a. Section 97 of the *Highways Act 1980* gives the County Council the power to provide street lighting.
- b. Regulation 5 of *The Highways (Road Humps) Regulations 1999* requires that road humps are illuminated.
- c. Section 17 of the *Crime and Disorder Act 1998* places on the County Council the duty to consider crime and disorder implications of exercising its various functions.
- d. Section 39 of the *Road Traffic Act 1988* imposes upon the County Council a responsibility for taking measures to prevent road traffic accidents.
- e. The *Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 2016* require some traffic signs to be directly illuminated when within a system of street lighting. Traffic sign illumination will not be affected by this initiative.
- f. The design requirements in BS 5489 allow road lighting levels to be lowered during periods of low traffic volumes

31. The proposed changes to the operational provision of street lighting are within the powers of the County Council.

Staff Implications

32. There are no new staffing implications arising specifically from this report. The development of part-night street lighting proposals is being funded through existing service budgets.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

33. The council recognise the implications that these proposals may have on the physical and psychological safety of marginalised and vulnerable residents.

