

Appendix 1 - Summary of the Parish Council Responses to Scrutiny Review Survey

The survey was conducted between **28 May and 30 June 2026** and received **24 responses** from representatives of **14 Parish and Town Councils**. Respondents were mainly Clerks (54%), with additional responses from Chairs/Vice-Chairs and Councillors.

Current Use of Lighting Columns

Parish and Town Councils make extensive use of lighting columns for community initiatives:

- **Hanging baskets** – 92% of respondents
- **Remembrance poppies** – 79%
- **Festive decorations** – 63%
- **CCTV equipment** – 33%
- Smaller numbers reported event signage and flags.

Most of these uses are **seasonal and longstanding**, particularly hanging baskets, Christmas decorations and remembrance displays. Several councils indicated they intended to continue these activities in future years.

Awareness of Permission and Testing Requirements

Two-thirds (67%) believed that permission and/or structural assessments were required, but a significant minority were either unsure (21%) or believed they were not required (13%).

When asked how easy the process was:

- 54% found it difficult or very difficult.
- Only 13% described it as easy.
- One-third felt it was neither easy nor difficult

Key Concerns Raised

A strong and consistent theme throughout the responses was concern about the **timing and communication** of the new structural testing requirements. Many councils stated they were informed only after:

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- Budgets for 2026/27 had been set.
- Hanging basket contracts had been agreed.
- Orders had been placed with suppliers.

Common challenges identified included:

- Lack of advance notice.
- Uncertainty about testing costs.
- Delays in obtaining information and approvals.
- Lack of clarity about the process and requirements.
- Administrative burden of identifying columns and completing applications.
- Concerns about the impact on community displays and local suppliers.

Impact on Parish Activities

Half of respondents reported that initiatives had already been **delayed or cancelled** because of the new requirements or associated costs.

Many councils reported having hanging baskets, festive displays or contractor arrangements ready to proceed but being unable to progress until testing arrangements were confirmed.

Views on Proportionality

There was a clear view that the requirements were excessive for lightweight and temporary attachments:

- 83% considered the requirements either **somewhat disproportionate** or **very disproportionate**.
- No respondents considered them proportionate.

Several respondents questioned the evidence base for mandatory testing, noting the apparent lack of incidents involving hanging baskets or festive decorations, while others felt the approach should be more proportionate according to the type, age and weight of attachments.

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Suggestions for Improvement

The most frequently suggested improvements were:

1. **Earlier communication and consultation** with parish councils before introducing new requirements.
2. **Clear written guidance** explaining requirements, approved columns, costs, timescales and responsibilities.
3. **Greater cost transparency**, including indicative testing costs.
4. **RMBC coordinating testing centrally**, using a borough-wide contractor to reduce costs and administrative burdens.
5. **Financial support or cost sharing**, particularly given that budgets had already been set.
6. **A transitional period** to allow existing contracts and displays to proceed while testing arrangements are implemented.

Overall Conclusion

The survey demonstrates broad support among parish councils for maintaining community initiatives such as hanging baskets, festive decorations and remembrance displays. While most respondents accepted the need for safety requirements, there was widespread concern about the way the structural testing requirements were introduced. The strongest messages from the survey were the need for better communication, earlier engagement, clearer guidance, proportionate requirements and reduced financial and administrative burdens on parish councils.