

MINOR IMPROVEMENT BUDGET PROCESS 2012/13

To: **Cabinet**

Date: **25th October 2011**

From: **Executive Director: Environment Services**

Electoral division(s): **All**

Forward Plan ref: **Not applicable** *Key Decision:* **No**

Purpose: **To consider how Local Transport Plan (LTP) funds for should be allocated for highways minor improvements for 2012/13, subject to budget setting later this financial year.**

Recommendation: **Cabinet is recommended to:**

- a) support the allocation of funds for locally led minor improvements from the Market Town and Cambridge Access Strategies budgets, as detailed in paragraph 2.3 the report;**
- b) support the allocation of funds for locally led minor improvements in areas not covered by the Market Town and Cambridge Access strategies, as detailed in paragraph 2.6 of the report;**
- c) approve the bidding and assessment process set out in section 2 of the report; and**
- d) delegate responsibility for the approval of project budget allocations for the 2012/13 programme to the Executive Director: Environment Services, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Community Infrastructure;**

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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 For many years, the County Council has contributed towards a jointly funded minor improvements programme with district and parish councils. Traditionally parish councils have bid for funds and we have expected them to provide a contribution. The level of interest from district councils has reduced and therefore the opportunity has been taken to reflect on how the funds available through the Local Transport Plan (LTP) could be allocated in the future to respond to local needs and priorities. The approach set out in this report is consistent with the Council's aims of delegating responsibility to the most appropriate level. It is envisaged that local communities would be able to put forward suggestions for projects, which would be prioritised by local groups of County Council members.
- 1.2 In recent times, around £200,000 has been made available from the LTP each year and it is anticipated that a similar budget could be provided next year for minor improvements.

2. ACCESS TO FUNDING

- 2.1 Through Local Transport Plan (LTP) capital budgets, funding is allocated each year towards the Cambridge Access and Market Towns strategies, which along with Section 106 developer contributions, means that these communities see regular investment in highway and transport related schemes. In these areas, LTP budgets are usually allocated to a range of schemes that are considered to best support these strategies or to link in with development opportunities where S106 funds can be utilised. It is necessary to demonstrate that LTP budgets are delivering our LTP objectives. However, as we seek to move forwards more localised decision making, this approach does not create sufficient flexibility to support local communities in delivering their priorities and objectives, for example those of a very local nature or those of local importance but not directly related to LTP priorities.
- 2.2 It is expected that around £1.1 million will be allocated to the Market Town Strategies next year and about £200,000 to the Cambridge Access Strategy (note: additional funding is available through Section 106 monies). It is proposed to allocate £50,000 from the Market Town Strategy Budget for minor improvements in the market towns and £25,000 for similar work from the smaller Cambridge Access Strategy Budget. Bids would be invited from local communities (up to a maximum of £10,000 per bid) with an expectation that the bidder provides some level of contribution towards the project, e.g. at least 10% of the estimated cost.
- 2.3 However, for rural communities outside the scope of these strategies, there is currently very limited opportunity for local highway and transport initiatives to be delivered, even though their communities often wish to put forward proposals for funding and build a funding contribution into their budget plans. This is especially important for parish councils in preparing their precepts for next year. We need therefore to move quickly in providing guidance on how these communities can bid into the minor improvement fund.
- 2.4 To address this and given the funding set out above for Market Towns and the Cambridge Access Strategy, it is proposed to allocate all or some of the LTP funds that are earmarked for minor improvements next year for minor improvements in rural areas.

- 2.5 It is proposed that funds made available next year be allocated between the four rural district areas, potential providing up to £50,000 in each area.
- 2.6 Projects could involve any highway measure or improvement that is considered to offer benefit to the local community. Proposals could come from district, town and parish councils, community and residents groups and charities.
- 2.7 Governance arrangements for local highways decisions are being reviewed. However, given the urgency of addressing the minor improvements programme, it is necessary to put in place an interim arrangement for prioritisation bids.
- 2.8 It is proposed that bids from within a district area are assessed by Member Advisory Panels of 4-6 members, made up of County Council members appointed by Group Leaders on a proportionate representative basis for that district. It would be up to the member panel to determine how it wishes to consider and prioritise proposals, although it would be expected that the relevant district and parish councillors would be consulted. Officers would be available to advise on issues such as cost, safety implications and deliverability.
- 2.9 Member panels would then make a recommendation for approval by Cabinet. It is suggested that, given the relatively low cost nature of these schemes and the focus on local member prioritisation, Cabinet delegates this decision to the Executive Director: Environment Services, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Community Infrastructure, to speed up the process.
- 2.10 As the majority of funding would come from the County Council, bidders would not be expected to meet the cost of long term maintenance where the measure is built to County Council standards. If bidders want to adopt a higher standard of design they would also need to take responsibility for the additional maintenance liability; the Member panel would need to reflect on the need to adopt a higher design standards. There would also be a need for any on-going operating costs such as power supplies or regular routine safety maintenance inspections for any highway equipment such as zebra crossings to be met by bidders.

3. TIMETABLE

- 3.1 Bids would be invited in November, with Member panels sitting in early January. Parish councils or other bidders could set their precept/budget to reflect their contribution to the successful bid. The opportunity to borrow funds from the council and repay over a period of time could also be highlighted at this time.

4. ALIGNMENT WITH PRIORITIES AND WAYS OF WORKING

- 4.1 The following bullet points set out details of implications identified by officers:

Supporting and protecting vulnerable people when they need it most
Helping people live healthy and independent lives in their communities
Developing the local economy for the benefit of all

- The bid process has the potential to deliver local schemes to enhance local environments, to support local business and to facilitate accessibility improvements for those with mobility problems

Ways of Working

- Local Member panels to set priorities would be consistent with Localism / subsidiarity. The Council is currently reviewing its approach to local governance for highways scheme and therefore the proposals set out in this report are subject to the findings of this review.

5. SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS

Resources & performance

Finance

- 5.1 The minor improvement programme would be funded from the LTP capital budget.

Performance

- 5.2 No significant implications identified.

Statutory, Legal and Risk Implications

Statutory

- 5.3 No significant implications identified.

Key Risks

- 5.4 Providing funding for highway measures that are not consistent with council priorities could damage the council's reputation. Cabinet retaining the final decision on approval of the work programme will mitigate this risk.

Legal

- 5.5 No significant implications identified.

Equality and Diversity Implications

- 5.6 Bids could be submitted from all sectors of the community, including parish councils, residents groups, campaign groups and charities.

Engagement and consultation

- 5.7 The process will actively involve local Members and will facilitate priority setting at a local level.

Source Documents

Local Transport Plan

Location

<http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/transport/strategies/currenttransportplans/local+transport+plan.htm>