

**LOCAL HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENT (LHI) INITIATIVE PROCESS REFINEMENT**

**To:** Highways & Community Infrastructure Committee

**Meeting Date:** 21 May 2019

**From:** Graham Hughes - Executive Director Place & Economy

**Electoral division(s):** All

**Forward Plan ref:** N/A **Key decision:** No

**Purpose:** Following discussions at the March Highways & Community Infrastructure Committee regarding the LHI process, this report presents a list of suggested refinements for approval.

**Recommendation:** To approve the proposed amendments to the LHI process described in section 2 of the report.

<b><i>Officer contact:</i></b>	<b><i>Member contacts:</i></b>
Name: Matt Staton Post: Highway Projects & Road Safety Manager Email: <a href="mailto:Matt.staton@cambridgeshire.gov.uk">Matt.staton@cambridgeshire.gov.uk</a> Tel: (01223) 699652	Name: Cllr Mathew Shuter/Cllr Bill Hunt Post: Chairman/Vice Chairman, Highways & Community Infrastructure Committee Email: <a href="mailto:mshuter@btinternet.com">mshuter@btinternet.com</a> <a href="mailto:William-hunt@hotmail.co.uk">William-hunt@hotmail.co.uk</a> Tel: (01223) 706398

## 1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The LHI initiative invites community groups to submit an application for funding of up to £10,000, subject to them providing at least 10% of the total cost of the scheme. The schemes are community driven, giving local people a real influence over bringing forward highway improvements in their community that would not normally be prioritised by the Council.
- 1.2 The process consists of the following stages:
- a) *Application* – communities outline the issue(s) to be addressed and their available budget. Outside of Cambridge City, one bid is permitted per Parish Council, and for Town Councils this is increased to one per County Council Member, i.e. areas with 2 elected members may have 2 bids. Cambridge City currently has no such restriction and may submit as many applications as they wish.
  - b) *Feasibility* – County Council Officers assess the feasibility of providing appropriate solutions within the indicative budgets and put forward Red Amber Green (RAG) rated comments relating to the key areas of: road safety; risks to delivery; effectiveness; and maintenance considerations.
  - c) *Assessment* – each district area has a member panel which scores each bid against the following criteria: persistent problem; road safety; community impact; and, added value. Each bidder is offered the opportunity to present their issue(s) to the panel.
  - d) *Approval* – scored bids are ranked and the funding allocated in order of overall ranking for each district area. This list is then approved by Highways & Community Infrastructure committee.
  - e) *Delivery* – approved schemes are put into the Annual Plan for delivery the following financial year.
- 1.3 Through the course of the 2019/20 assessment and approval stages, including discussion at H&CI committee in March, councillors and officers have fed back that parts of the process could benefit from refinement to improve the experience for all involved, in particular with regard to managing expectations and timely delivery of schemes.
- 1.4 This has been supplemented with questionnaires sent to all councillors (City and County) involved in the panels as well as Highways and Community Infrastructure Committee members, seeking further comments and suggestions.

## 2. MAIN ISSUES

- 2.1 General feedback was wide-ranging with some Councillors suggesting the process required a full review and was no longer fit for purpose. However, a full review of the process was undertaken two years ago, involving a Member working group and the majority of feedback has been very positive about the scheme overall. Therefore it was agreed that refinement of the existing process rather than a full scale review was the preferred approach.
- 2.2 Collated feedback from Councillors and officers, along with suggested refinements is included below, under each stage of the process.
- 2.3 *Application stage:*

- a) Feedback from officers and Councillors suggests that the maximum Council contribution of £10k should be raised to reflect that inflation has increased prices over the years that the LHI process has been on offer and that staff costs are also included within the total scheme costs. This particularly affects parishes with a small or no precept as they cannot contribute additional funds if the total scheme cost goes above £11k. This often leads to schemes being reduced in scope and subsequently less effective in addressing the issues raised.

*It is suggested the maximum County Council contribution is raised to £15k.*

- b) Feedback reflects that in some cases a large number of bids are put forward in some areas of Cambridge City, sometimes without the knowledge of the local City or County Council Members.

*It is suggested that in order to support local members in prioritising schemes for their area prior to application, the number of applications in each City ward area is restricted to the combined number of City and County Council Members in that ward. For example; Arbury Ward has one County Councillor and three City Councillors, therefore under this proposal, Arbury Ward would be permitted to submit four applications*

- c) Feedback from councillors reflected that on the whole, engagement with councillors was good, but having a clearer indication on the application whether the local Councillor has been engaged and what response has been received would be helpful. Also, it was highlighted that the criteria on the application form do not directly match the scored criteria at the assessment stage, which created some confusion.

*It is suggested that the application form be updated to reflect the scoring criteria and include a section indicating that engagement with the local Councillor (as a minimum) has taken place.*

#### 2.4 Feasibility stage:

- a) As with 2.3(b) above, feedback reflects that in some cases bids are put forward without the knowledge of the local Member or without support of many members of the local community.

*It is suggested that under this stage of the process an additional section is added to the feasibility assessment to RAG rate the level of community support for the proposal, reflecting the addition of this to the application form and the expectation that proper evidence of this has been provided.*

- b) Feedback from Councillors and applicants reflects that in some cases feasibility reports were not fed back to the applicants or were not provided to councillors and applicants in a timely manner prior to the assessment stage.

*This does not require a change to the process but a recognition that this needs to be monitored and managed for future years to ensure consistency and fairness. Schemes that are not feasible should be discussed with the applicants and either withdrawn or revised to a workable solution. As part of this, an officer recommendation box is to be*

*added to the feasibility report. This box will be used to clearly state if an application is unfeasible and that further discussions are required with the applicant.*

*Should an application remain unfeasible, despite further engagement between officers and applicants the application will not proceed to panel and will be withdrawn from the process for that application round. This decision will be clearly recorded on the feasibility form. The applicant, via their local member has the ability to appeal the decision to withdraw their application. The appeal is made in writing to the Chair of Highways & Infrastructure Committee in conjunction with the Executive Director of Place & Economy.*

## 2.5 Assessment stage:

- a) Feedback from the majority of panels was very positive regarding this part of the process. However, discussions with Members and officers point to the importance of having a clear panel chair.

*It is suggested that either the Highway Projects and Road Safety Manager or Project Manager for each area formally chairs the panel.*

- b) A number of requests were received by members of the public to attend the panel in Cambridge City. No requests were received for other panels although at some, a number of residents attended to support the presentation of the bid. Public attendance is feasible for the Cambridge City panel due to its being held at Shire Hall, and this has been accommodated on request. Unfortunately it is not feasible for panels held at the highway depots, due to size and logistical issues. Feedback on this was mixed, with comments reflecting that the development of the bids outside of Cambridge by Parish councils through their meetings provided ample opportunity for resident involvement, while this may not be the case for bids put forward in the City.

*It is suggested that the Cambridge City panel is advertised as open to public attendance, by request.*

- c) Feedback suggests it is important that where panels are held over more than one day there is a consistency in Member attendance to ensure fair scoring.

*It is suggested that this is highlighted to Members when they are invited to the panel, along with the scoring criteria and the importance of its consistent application. A written briefing for panel members on the application of the criteria will be issued and reinforced by the chair at the beginning of each panel.*

- d) Feedback has highlighted that some Parish/Town Councils have much larger precepts than others and this is not currently well reflected in terms of the level of contribution offered, neither is the level of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding available to each Parish/Town Council. Some feedback suggested the level of contribution should be directly related to the size of the precept/population.

*It is suggested that the panel chair has the precept and CIL information at hand during the panel meetings and this information is conveyed to the panel when requested, in order to assess the “added value” score for each bid.*

## 2.6 *Delivery stage:*

- a) Feedback from parishes and local members reflects that it is important to them to have a clear understanding of when they can expect their scheme to be delivered. Officers are trying to progress over 100 schemes each year, and it is not possible for all to be attended to immediately, with delivery programmed throughout the year. Feedback was almost unanimous in indicating that consistent, regular updates were essential to managing expectations.

*This year, 2019/20, officers are trialling batching similar schemes together to try and make the design, pricing and delivery elements more efficient. These will be inserted into an annual programme, which can be shared with the Local Member.*

*It is suggested that following this being trialled this year, a clear programme is issued at the start of the financial year indicating to parishes/local members when they can expect each aspect of their scheme to be progressed. The programme will then be monitored as part of the monthly updates presented to the Highways & Community Infrastructure committee within the Finance & Performance report.*

## **4. ALIGNMENT WITH CORPORATE PRIORITIES**

### **4.1 A good quality of life for everyone**

The Local Highway Improvement scheme provides communities with an opportunity to put forward schemes to improve safety and address local issues. Section 2 of the report outlines suggested improvements that will have positive impacts, in particular paragraphs 2.3 a) and paragraph 2.5 d).

### **4.2 Thriving places for people to live**

The Local Highway Improvement scheme places more choice into the hands of communities in relation to improving their highway environment. Section 2 of the report outlines suggested improvements that will have positive impacts, in particular paragraphs 2.3 a) and paragraph 2.5 d).

### **4.3 The best start for Cambridgeshire's children**

There are no significant implications for this priority.

## **5. SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS**

### **5.1 Resource Implications**

There are no significant implications within this category.

### **5.2 Procurement/Contractual/Council Contract Procedure Rules Implications**

There are no significant implications within this category.

### 5.3 Statutory, Legal and Risk Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

### 5.4 Equality and Diversity Implications

There are no significant implications for this priority. Section 2 of the report outlines suggested improvements that will have positive impacts in paragraph 2.3 a) and paragraph 2.5 d).

### 5.5 Engagement and Communications Implications

Section 2 of the report outlines suggested improvements that will positively impact this category.

### 5.6 Localism and Local Member Involvement

Members have been consulted as part of this refinement process.

### 5.7 Public Health Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

Implications	Officer Clearance
Have the resource implications been cleared by Finance?	Yes Name of Financial Officer: Sarah Heywood
Have the procurement/contractual/ Council Contract Procedure Rules implications been cleared by the LGSS Head of Procurement?	Yes Name of Officer: Paul White
Has the impact on statutory, legal and risk implications been cleared by LGSS Law?	Yes Name of Legal Officer: Fiona McMillan
Have the equality and diversity implications been cleared by your Service Contact?	Yes Name of Officer: Elsa Evans
Have any engagement and communication implications been cleared by Communications?	Yes Name of Officer: Eleanor Bell
Have any localism and Local Member involvement issues been cleared by your Service Contact?	Yes Name of Officer: Richard Lumley

<b>Have any Public Health implications been cleared by Public Health</b>	Yes Name of Officer: Stuart Keeble
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<b>Source Documents</b>	<b>Location</b>
None	