

**CABINET – 22 JUNE 2021****MEMBERS HIGHWAY FUND - PROPOSALS****REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT****PART A****Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to seek the Cabinet's approval for the creation of a Members Highway Fund that will provide each County Councillor with a budget to spend on highway and environmental improvement works in their own division.

Recommendations

2. It is recommended:
 - a) That £1.4m be allocated from the additional Highways funding identified within the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2021/22 for the creation of a Member Highway Fund;
 - b) That the creation of Member Highway Fund as set out in paragraphs 13 to 26 of the report be approved;
 - c) That each Member [County Councillor] be authorised to agree the use of the £25,000 allocated to them from the Member Highway Fund for spending in their electoral division subject to this being in accordance with the principles for the Fund;
 - d) That it be noted that the aim is to continue the initiative in 2022/23 subject to the necessary funding being identified.

Reasons for Recommendation

3. The fund and associated programme of works will allow Members to address specific community concerns within their locality which would not normally be funded via the highway maintenance budget or to bring planned works forward.

Timetable for Decisions (including Scrutiny)

4. Subject to approval, work will commence to establish the fund in order for schemes to be developed and delivered in the current financial year. It is

intended that a review of the operation of this Fund be taken to Scrutiny and Cabinet if required in Spring 2022.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

5. The programme is an evolution of the successful Parish and Communities Fund that was implemented during 2020/21 as part of the Council's Covid recovery measures. This fund has now ceased.
6. The programme will be funded from £5m additional highways funding that has been identified within the Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2021/22 and the aim is to continue this initiative in 2022/23 subject to funding being identified.

Resource Implications

7. An amount of £1.4m has been allocated for spend in in 2021/22 to provide Members with £25,000 each along with a small contingency fund. The intention is to continue this in 2022/23 however this will be subject to funding being identified.
8. An additional amount is also being made available for 2021/22 to provide the temporary resource necessary to work with Members to develop and deliver the interventions requested. This will involve the appointment of officers as well as an allocation for consultancy support if needed.
9. Funding will also be made available for community support to enable engagement on potential schemes if required out of the money available for consultancy.
10. The Director of Corporate Resources has been consulted on these proposals.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

11. This report will be circulated to all Members of the County Council.

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PART B

Background

12. As part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy an additional £5m highways funding has been identified to be spent in the financial year 2021/22. The majority of this funding will be spent on highway maintenance activities including signing, lining, drainage, vegetation management as well as initiatives to address community highway concerns such as speeding.

Proposals

13. It is proposed that each Member is allocated £25,000 within the financial year 2021/22 and provisionally for 2022/23, to spend on small scale highways improvements within their division. Each Member will receive the same level of funding. This will enable them to address highway and environmental issues in their local areas that, while important to local communities, would not meet the usual criteria for implementation. In some instances the funding could also be used to bring works forward if they have been identified as part of a long term programme.
14. The principles for the Fund are as follows -
 - a) The funding will be spent within that Member's area unless there is a clear business case for the money to be moved to another area.
 - b) The improvements should be focused on improving the local highway network and its environment.
 - c) Any consultation with local communities should be led by the Local Member with support from Environment and Transport officers if required to ensure that residents are in agreement with the proposals.
 - d) All proposals to be agreed with the Local Member by the end of November wherever possible, to enable spend within the financial year.
 - e) Any improvement on the highway network must adhere to and align with both national legislation and guidelines, including contract procedure rules.
15. In addition to the more traditional highway interventions such as vegetation removal, drainage and highways work and speed measures, the funding could be allocated to non-highways specific items that will improve the overall physical environment of the community e.g. benches/planters to be placed on non- County Council land.
16. The £25,000 should not be simply passported to third parties – although arrangements can be made for Member-approved schemes to be delivered by communities if appropriate, for example, cutting back of vegetation or installation of improvements on non-County Council land, via a grant.

17. In certain circumstances communities may be expected to take on maintenance responsibility of the improvement. An example of this would be carrying out data collection from Vehicle Activated Signs (VAS).
18. Whilst every effort will be made to be flexible with Members and communities, if a proposal goes against national guidelines and regulations, such as repeater 30mph signs within a lit area, they will not be accepted. Safety must continue to be a priority.
19. Schemes where possible should avoid the need for a legal change to the Highway such as the introduction of a Traffic Regulation Order. Unfortunately, it is often difficult to secure public agreement for TROs and they are expensive (£7,500 minimum for the required consultation). Officers will make every effort to support Members to find solutions to issues which would avoid such an approach.
20. All proposals to be agreed with the Local Member by the end of November wherever possible, to enable spend within the financial year.

Potential Projects

21. Potential projects that Members could utilise the funding for include:
 - a) Street furniture on or off the highway – subject to a road safety assessment.
 - b) Culvert repairs/clearing of ditches on private lands, subject to the necessary permissions.
 - c) Vegetation works that would not normally be undertaken.
 - d) Vehicle activated signs in locations not included within the Community Speed Initiative.
 - e) Schemes that will support people with protected characteristics for example dropped kerbs to support people with mobility difficulties.
 - f) Improvements to the environment – flower beds, verge protection barriers etc.
 - g) Minor repairs to the roads and footways that would not normally be part of the normal intervention programme.
 - h) Refreshing of highways owned green areas (re-planting of existing landscapes).
 - i) Financial support to parishes to allow them to undertake structural testing in their area (lamp column testing for hanging baskets / Christmas decorations etc).
 - j) Refreshing of lining and sign cleaning.

22. As part of the Member Highway Fund process, officers will advise Members of whether their request is part of an alternative programme of works, and if so, the expected timescales for completion. This will allow for an informed decision on whether they would wish to see the works accelerated or, if applicable, wait for the programmed works to commence.

Accessing and Management of the Fund

23. Subject to approval of the scheme, officers will contact Members from mid-July to discuss initial thoughts as to how the fund could be used in their area. In addition, a dedicated email address will be established to support Members and allow contact with the Department on this initiative.
24. Each Member will have a designated officer who will work with them to explore the options available to them and provide them with monthly updates on levels of spend and progress on projects.
25. Members who require community engagement support to enable non-parished areas to develop proposals for the highway environment in their area will be assisted with this, however this should be led and instigated by the relevant Member.

Delivering the Fund

Action	When
Briefing to be held for Members.	July
“Shopping list” of potential improvements to be made available to Members.	8 July
Process for enabling funds to be “granted to communities” should they wish to undertake works/improvements themselves to be advised to Members.	31 July
Develop proposals with Members.	July - Nov
Implement improvements/schemes in localities	July - April
Review progress and agree scheme for 2022/23.	December

26. Quarterly reports will be sent to Members on the progress of the fund.

Equality and Human Rights Implications

27. There are no equality or human rights implications arising from the report.
28. An Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment is not required as the fund will operate within the scope of existing discretionary services which are already provided.

29. The opportunity to access these discretionary services will be countywide regardless of local governance arrangements or other factors such as local demographics.

Background Papers

None.