

Proposed Decision to be taken by the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Planning on or after 6 November 2019

Approval to Submit a Bid to the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) for its Air Quality Grant Scheme 2019/20

Recommendation

That the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Planning approves the submission of a bid to the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) for funding to support businesses and schools with information and advice to influence travel behaviours to help improve air quality.

1.0 Key Issues

- 1.1 It is a requirement of the County Council's Constitution that Portfolio Holders approve funding bids submitted on behalf of the County Council.
- 1.2 This report seeks such approval in relation to a bid for DEFRA funding under its Air Quality Grant Scheme 2019/20. DEFRA is inviting bids from local authorities for the delivery of projects designed to support local authorities to develop and/or implement measures to improve local air quality. Funding is expected to be directed to those local authority areas where DEFRA's national air quality assessment identified and/or predicted an exceedance, and/or that have one or more Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs).

2.0 Options and Proposal

- 2.1 Local authorities are invited to apply for funding from DEFRA. The total value of the fund is at least £2 million and the Department has indicated that individual projects should average between £50,000 and £250,000; applications outside these values will be considered, but the maximum acceptable value of bids are £450,000 for sole applications and £700,000 for joint applications.
- 2.2 Applicants are required to provide evidence that they have secured commitments to provide at least 10% match funding from other sources (either as a financial commitment or provision of significant additional resources to support delivery of the project).
- 2.3 Only applications which closely align with the fund priorities are likely to be successful. The guidance suggests particular consideration will be given to:
 - LAs who can demonstrate the project will benefit local areas where there are, or are projected to be, pollutant exceedances;

- An LA's compliance with the various Local Air Quality Monitoring (LAQM) reporting requirements and which have a Smoke Control Area;
- Projects delivering air quality benefits in the near future (one to two years);
- Projects which develop solutions over the longer term by increasing awareness to encourage behavioural changes.

2.4 It is proposed that a bid be formally submitted to DEFRA to enable a targeted package of school and business support, raising awareness of the health impacts of air pollution and highlighting alternative modes of travel to reduce congestion and reduce transport-based emissions.

2.5 Project proposals for schools will include a focused project manager to work with primary schools most at risk from air quality. Eligible primary schools will be those located within or close to Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAS) in Rugby Borough, Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough and Warwick District. Identification of eligible schools has been mapped by the County Council's Insight Team.

2.6 Project work will include the following initiatives:

- Evidence based active travel encouragement within identified schools to encourage pupil, parent and staff active travel, including ensuring schools are aware of grants that they are eligible for;
- Awareness raising about air pollution, and use of personal air quality monitors (latter owned by WCC), alongside supporting national/regional/local campaigns, e.g. national Clean Air Day and the Coventry and Warwickshire Choose How You Move campaign;
- Anti-idling initiatives to reduce idling within vicinity of school gates;
- Scoping out possibilities of physical measures to support parking away from school gates;
- Car free-days/street closures;
- Introduction of recognised active travel initiative programmes, such as Modeshift Stars (currently promoted through WCC Road Safety team), to ensure longevity of active travel work and incorporation of a sustained culture change.

Provisional figures (to be confirmed) from a recent similar scheme working in Coventry with 12 schools in an air pollution hotspot area, suggest up to 7.1% modal shift (from car to more active travel means) has been achieved through working intensively with the schools and parents.

2.7 The schools-based initiative will be complemented by a targeted travel scoping exercise with large businesses to understand the travel behaviours of their employees and identify opportunities to reduce single occupancy car use. Eligible businesses will be located either within AQMAS or on corridors that pass through AQMAS. A recent scoping exercise with a Warwick based company has resulted in 33% of staff regularly carsharing for their journeys to work.

3.0 Financial Implications

- 3.1 Work on finalising the detail of the bid is yet to be completed, however, it is not expected to exceed £250,000. The bid will require a commitment from the County Council to provide match-funding of at least 10%. Therefore, in agreeing to this bid the authority is committing itself, if the bid is successful, to providing match-funding of £25,000. The match-funding will be sourced from within the existing resources of Transport Planning's Transport Development Fund.

4.0 Timescales associated with the decision and next steps

- 4.1 The deadline for submission of bids is Thursday 7 November 2019. A bid will be submitted by this date, subject to gaining the necessary approvals to support it. This decision is being considered under the Warwickshire County Council Urgency Procedure in order to meet the deadline set by the DEFRA.
- 4.2 Bid applications are due to be assessed during the following 3 months and successful bidders will be notified by March 2020.
- 4.3 If the funding is obtained, the project will be delivered from March 2020 to the end of March 2021.

5.0 Background papers

None

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This report was circulated to the following elected members prior to publication:

Councillor Jeff Clarke (Portfolio Holder for Transport and Planning)
Councillor Les Caborn (Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Health)
Councillor Heather Timms (Portfolio Holder for Environment, Heritage and Culture)