

# Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

18 September 2019

## Highways Review Update

### Recommendation(s)

That the Committee:

1. Requests Officers put in place better communication with members to improve the transparency of scheme delivery. This will be done over the next year with improvements to the Council website, member newsletters and access to programmes of work.
2. Requests Officers bring forward proposals to Corporate Board to improve the administration of the Delegated Budget scheme enabling a greater degree of transparency for members, faster delivery of works and a greater amount of in-year delivery of works. These proposals should include ideas and solutions generated from the member workshop.

### 1.0 Key Issues

- 1.1 This report provides scrutiny members with feedback from the recent member workshop and to highlight officer recommendations and next steps.
- 1.2 In October 2018 a motion was passed at full Council expressing concerns about road repairs and the delay in delivery of some member delegated budget works. The motion was proposed by Cllr Olnier and seconded by Cllr Phillips.
- 1.3 *“That this Council expresses its disappointment at the time taken to carry out road repairs and member highways schemes in Warwickshire and agrees to the establishment of a cross party working group reporting to the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee to identify the barriers to improving performance for the residents of Warwickshire.”*
- 1.4 Following discussion at O&S, officers began a review of member highway scheme delivery and minor highway fault resolution. This involved interviews with a number of members to capture the key concerns. A presentation was given to O&S in June of the initial findings which was then followed up with a member workshop on 8 July.

- 1.5 Thirteen members attended the workshop which was focused on discussing potential solutions to support improvements in the delivery of highways fault resolution and member delegated budget works. Officers from County Highways, Road Safety and Transport teams were on hand to help facilitate the workshop. A presentation was given which highlighted the key areas of concern and provided a set of potential solutions or improvements to existing processes. Member worked in groups to discuss each proposal providing feedback and input which was captured by the facilitating officers.

## **2.0 Options and Proposal**

- 2.1 The 'solutions focused' workshop was very supportive of the ideas being put forward and officers were able to glean a clear steer from members on which solutions should be focused on. Solutions discussed with members included:

### **2.2 Fault reporting and resolution**

- A briefing note to members on highways budgets and how they are determined and allocated
- Greater visibility of the forward programme of works including maps and lists of schemes with delivery timescales made available on the Council website.
- Regular update meetings with highways locality officers providing members with lists of planned works,
- Provision of dashboards on the website providing key statistics on the timeliness of works being completed
- Open invitation to members to visit the County Highways operations centre to see how Balfour Beatty and WCC handle fault reporting and repair works.

### **2.3 Delegated Budgets**

- The development of a website dedicated to delegated budgets explaining the scheme, what it should be used for, generic costs for different works and how to put works forward.
- Quarterly updates provided to all members showing the list of delegated works that have been requested along with completion or planned completion dates.
- Elimination of the £6k scheme minimum requirement to enable members to agree smaller scale works.
- Inclusion of a deadline for communicating and agreeing delegated budget works early enough in the financial year so that a large percentage of the works can be delivered during the year.
- Consideration of a match funding scheme, enabling the delivery of larger or more complex schemes and doing away with the need to hold over funding between years.

- Strengthening of the Highways Locality Officer roles including overall responsibility for managing the Delegated Budget schemes with their allocated members.
- Setting up of a dedicated minor works team within County Highways which will speed up delivery of small scale works by bringing design, works ordering, supervision and contractor works crews together in a focused delivery team.

### **3.0 Financial Implications**

- 3.1 Currently there is over £2m of unspent Delegated Budget scheme funding. This is mainly as a result of complex scheme that involve consultation or significant design work or members holding over funding in order to deliver a specific higher costing scheme. One of the aims of redesigning how the Delegated Budget Scheme works will be to reduce this underspend and to focus on schemes that can be delivered in-year.
- 3.2 The £6k minimum limit had previously been required as the funding for the Delegated Budget scheme is capital and the Council has guidelines around the identification of capital works such that works under £6k in size are considered to be minor revenue expenditure. Highways Locality Officers have traditionally pooled smaller works together to form packages of work over £6k in order to meet the capital requirements. Reducing or removing the £6k minimum limit for members may result in some additional pressures on Highway revenue budgets, but officers are looking at how these can be managed or offset against other revenue works that could be capitalised.
- 3.3 The overall result of the proposed changes should be to reduce the capital underspends from Delegated Budgets and to see a higher number of member requested schemes delivered in-year.

### **4.0 Environmental Implications**

- 4.1 Works identified through the Fault Reporting processes and through the Delegated Budget scheme are delivered through County Highways and its sub-contractors under the umbrella of environmental policies and guidance that govern the service. This ensures that the development and delivery of work takes into consideration the environmental impacts of construction and the long term impact on the environment. Where possible works are delivered through sustainable methods and using environmentally friendly materials.

## 5.0 Timescales associated with the decision and next steps

- 5.1 Officers will begin to implement the improved communications around fault reporting over the next year. Some of these solutions can be implemented before the end of March 2020 but others are reliant on software improvements as well as further development of the Council's website; and these may take longer to put in place.
- 5.2 Officers will pull together a set of proposals for making changes to the Delegated Budget scheme and these will be presented to Corporate Board with any agreed changes being implemented for the start of the new financial year. Some of these solutions are already being worked on and will be in place for 1 April 2020 this includes the dedicated minor works team being set up in County Highways.

### Background papers

1. Member workshop presentation

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