



**CABINET – 25 JUNE 2019**

**HIGHWAYS INITIATIVE - DELIVERING FOR PARISHES AND COMMUNITIES**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT**  
**PART A**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to seek approval for the allocation of additional resources for the provision of a service for parishes and communities from October 2019, and to enable the accelerated development of future works programmes.

**Recommendations**

2. It is recommended that:
  - a) An enhanced highways service for parishes and communities for the remainder of 2019/20 as detailed in the report be approved;
  - b) A detailed survey of targeted highway assets (signs and lining) be undertaken in preparation for the future delivery programmes;
  - c) That the additional allocation of £0.55m from the Environment and Transport reserves for the remainder of 2019/20 to enable the delivery of the proposals be approved;
  - d) Further reports be submitted to the Cabinet and Environment and Transport Overview and Scrutiny Committee later in 2020 regarding the initiatives progress and future funding proposals.

**Reasons for Recommendations**

3. The proposal for the enhanced service to parishes and communities has been developed due to the increase in the number of parish communications directly to the service and via County Council Members.
4. The analysis of parish communications has also identified increasing concerns with specific groups of highway assets, which the additional resources will be targeted at addressing.
5. The increased community and parish engagement combined with the enhanced provision contribute directly to the priorities of the Leicestershire

Communities Strategy “Working Together to Build Great Communities” and the Council’s Strategic Plan and Single Outcomes Framework.

### **Timetable for Decisions (including Scrutiny)**

6. Subject to approval, it is proposed that a monitoring and future development report will be considered by the Environment and Transport Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Cabinet in 2020.

### **Policy Framework and Previous Decisions**

7. The proposal is consistent with the framework of the Highways Infrastructure Asset Management Plan (HIAMP) which was approved by the Cabinet on the 15<sup>th</sup> September 2017.
8. The Council’s Strategic Plan includes the outcome “Great Communities” where Leicestershire communities are thriving and integrated places where people help and support each other and take pride in their local area. The Strategic Plan was approved by the County Council on the 6<sup>th</sup> December 2017.
9. The Leicestershire Communities Strategy “Working Together to Build Great Communities” was approved by the Cabinet on the 12<sup>th</sup> December 2017.

### **Resource Implications**

10. The resources required to deliver the enhanced service will be funded using Environment and Transport Reserves. It is anticipated that an initial allocation of £0.55m would be sufficient to deliver the enhanced service for the remainder of the 2019/20 financial year. Consideration will need to be given to on-going funding through the 2020/21 Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) process.
11. The breakdown of the £0.55m is as follows:
 

|                                 |          |
|---------------------------------|----------|
| Community and Parish Engagement | £70,000  |
| Enhanced Service Provision      | £180,000 |
| Preparing for 2020/21           | £300,000 |
12. Highways and Transport services are showing £4.3m growth alongside a requirement of £1.2m savings during the life of the current MTFS. The proposal will implement an effective delivery model that will enable the efficient delivery of services to communities and parishes in the context of the continued reduction in resources.
13. It is anticipated that due to the required lead-in time, to get the additional resource in place and to develop the appropriate process, full implementation of the enhanced service will not be able to commence until October 2019.
14. The Director of Corporate Resources has been consulted on this report.

**Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure**

15. A copy of this report will be circulated to all Members.

**Officers to Contact**

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## **PART B**

### **Background**

16. Over the last five years, the number of highways related interactions with parishes has increased by over 10%, however the resource available to respond to them has significantly decreased due to the ongoing financial pressures faced by the County Council. The five teams that would previously have dealt with the majority of these enquires have been reduced to two.
17. The reduction in resources has meant the amount of officer contact with communities and parishes has been restricted, resulting in officers being unable to attend parish meetings or site visits when invited.
18. In addition, the nature of enquiries from the parishes has become more complex, for example, increasingly communities are seeking alternative options for carrying out network improvements, including funding their own developments where the proposals do not meet with the Councils criteria to receive funding.
19. Clear guidance is in place with regard to third-party funding being required to cover all costs when communities seek to deliver their own improvements, including the initial discussions and proposal development. The requirement to fund the initial stage has led to a perception that officers are unwilling to engage with parishes and communities and has increased levels of dissatisfaction with the service, alongside a frustration with the level of support for specific community-led initiatives such as Vehicle Activated Signs (VAS).
20. To address this, the Department has improved its automated communications with parishes and communities and increased visibility at Leicestershire and Rutland Association of Local Councils (LRALC) events and presence at quarterly parish clerks' meetings. Feedback suggests, however, that communities would appreciate a greater level of officer contact.
21. The specific service areas highlighted by parishes as high priorities locally are reflected by the number of service requests received. The top most reported issues from parishes over the last five years are:
  - obstruction caused by overgrown trees and hedges; and
  - issues with signs (damaged/dirty/obstructed).
22. Service requests for these two areas have shown an increase over the last five years along with a growth in concerns over the visibility of road lining. During this period there has also been a £3.5m decrease in funding for highways maintenance as part of the County Council's MTFS savings.

23. The following proposals have been developed in order to improve communications with local communities and facilitate works programmes whilst remaining within the framework of the HIAMP and acknowledging the Council's on-going funding and resources challenges.

### **Proposals**

24. The proposals are to:
- a) Increase officer capacity in order to enable timely conversations with communities and parishes and sustain/improve relationships, effectively increasing the amount of contact with officers;
  - b) Maintain and improve the Department's service delivery to customers in line with the HIAMP, whilst providing greater support to help communities and parishes maximise the opportunities available;
  - c) Support communities and parishes to take on activities or deliver improvements themselves where they are keen to do so;
  - d) Create the ability to be supportive without increasing asset burden for the Council's future maintenance programme; and
  - e) Rejuvenate existing assets which are considered low risk but important to communities such as edging back footways, and accelerating response times for tree and hedging work.

### **Community and Parish Engagement**

25. The enhanced engagement would be made possible by the recruitment of two special projects officers and the provision of resource to purchase additional engineering and design capacity. The expertise will be based within the Department and liaise closely with the Customer Services Centre, which will continue to remain the central portal through which enquiries enter into the system.
26. The proposals will enable:
- a) officers to increase dialogue with parish officers and Councillors through attendance at parish meetings and local site visits where appropriate;
  - b) communities and parishes to increase their understanding and expertise regarding highways operating as well as the type of scheme that is permissible on the highway. It is hoped that this knowledge will increase the effectiveness of current dialogue and support future discussions, benefiting both parties; and

- c) 'business as usual' activities to be undertaken smoothly and investigated proactively if problems occur.

### **Enhanced Service Provision**

- 27. The proposal to provide an enhanced service on local priorities will seek to accelerate the delivery of tree and hedge maintenance and increase the speed in which obstructions caused by vegetation are addressed, together with providing funding to support local schemes such as Vehicle Activated Signs (VAS). This reflects current areas of concern/enquiries from Parish Councils.
- 28. The additional resource would cover works such as:
  - a) Column testing and the installation of posts for fixed and mobile VAS units. The purchase of the actual VAS asset and the costs of connection to the appropriate energy supply if required would remain the parish council's responsibility, along with the annual maintenance and running costs;
  - b) Working collaboratively with parishes to address engagement and enforcement with regard to vegetation and providing additional resource to carry out vegetation works; and
  - c) Edging back on the pavements in built up environments, including maintenance of any issues that are uncovered through this work.

### **Preparing for 2020/21**

- 29. The additional resource will partially fund the costs for a survey of lining and signing asset data across the county. The condition data collected from this exercise will inform the development of the 2020/21 works programme and enable a draft medium to long term programme to be produced. The remaining costs of the survey will be funded from the existing Department budget.
- 30. The asset data provided by the survey will enable officers to develop a medium to long term programme for signing and lining maintenance in a shorter time span than through the traditional inspection data. It also enables the Department to remain confident it can address higher priority work first thus aligning with its risk based approach while also effectively addressing an area of considerable community concern.
- 31. The on-going programme will give both officers and Members an informed view of the planned works within localities, enabling clarity of understanding, and management of parish and community expectations as well as the ability for future plans to inform current decisions.

### **Equality and Human Rights Implications**

32. There are no equality or human rights implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

### **Background Papers**

Report to the Cabinet – 15 September 2017 – Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Plan

<http://politics.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=135&MID=4863#A152292>

Report to the County Council – 6 December 2017 – Strategic Plan and Single Outcomes Framework

<http://politics.leics.gov.uk/documents/s133861/Strategic%20Plan.pdf>

Report to the Cabinet – 12 December 2017 – Working together to build Great Communities in Leicestershire : The Leicestershire Communities Strategy 2017-21

<http://politics.leics.gov.uk/documents/s134009/FINAL%20Communities%20Strategy%20report.pdf>

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