



HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE: 7 NOVEMBER 2024

MEMBERS HIGHWAY FUND UPDATE

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT & TRANSPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Members Highway Fund (MHF), to set out the final position statement on the MHF, and to confirm the closure of the MHF, other than to deliver the final committed schemes.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. On 22 June 2021, the Cabinet agreed, as part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy, an additional £5m highways funding to be spent in the financial year 2021/22. This included a Members' fund with a total value of £1.4m. This fund would allow each County Council Member a sum of £25,000 per electoral division for small scale highways and environmental improvements put forward by elected Members for the benefit of their division. It was subsequently agreed that the fund would continue for the financial year 2022/23 and cease after this point.
3. The MHF programme was an evolution of the successful Parish and Communities Fund, that ran for two years, which was implemented during 2020/21 as part of the Council's Covid-19 pandemic recovery measures. That fund has now ceased.
4. The MHF assisted the strategic objectives set out in the Council's Strategic Plan 2022-26 in the following ways:
 - a) 'Great Communities' objective by allowing people, through their Members and Parish Councils, to be involved in service design and delivery, especially where grants were provided;
 - b) 'Clean and Green' objective through providing opportunities to protect and enhance the environment;
 - c) 'Safe and Well' objective by enabling schemes to improve road safety, thus enabling people to be safer in their daily lives.
5. In its report to the Committee on 9 June 2022, an update on the MHF progress was provided and it was set out that applications for the 2021/22 were closed at the end of February 2022. It also informed the Committee that a further £1.4m was available for 2022/23.

Background

Member Highway Fund Delivery

6. Between August 2021 and August 2023, the Department received 845 formal applications for assessment, with all 55 Members having applied to the fund. Each request had to be logged before an assessment was undertaken. Six Members were responsible for 25% of all requests, and one Member submitted a total of 46 requests. The sheer number of requests added to the officer time spent in the assessment stage and contributed to the time taken to deliver projects.
7. By the end of August 2024, all schemes that had been submitted were assessed as per Table 1 below.

Table 1: Status and number of schemes

Status of schemes	Number of schemes	Overall %
Works completed	439	52%
Requests declined	398	47%
Schemes in delivery	8	1%
Grand Total	845	

8. Of the 439 completed requests, the types of schemes delivered are set out in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Numbers by type of scheme delivered

Type of schemes	Number of schemes	Overall %
Speed and safety	251	57%
Aesthetic	97	22%
Environmental	60	14%
Sustainability	31	7%
Grand Total	439	

9. An explanation of the types of schemes is as follows:
 - a) Speeding and safety include mobile and static vehicle activated sign, yellow lines, pedestrian crossings, dragons teeth;
 - b) Aesthetic schemes to improve the appearance of the highway include planters, bins, benches, bollards and sign cleaning;
 - c) Environmental improvements include street lighting, drainage, resurfacing; and
 - d) Sustainable transport schemes include bus shelters, cycle lanes, community bus.

10. Several of these requests were delivered by the provision of grants to parish councils and community groups as in many cases this was the most efficient way of delivering the project. A total of 170 requests, which delivered £818,752 of the work from the MHF, have been provided through grants.
11. A post-programme audit of parish councils, who have received the funding, is being put in place to ensure the funds provided have been used for the schemes put forward by the Members. These audits have been programmed using a random selection process. Audits to date have suggested that parish councils have used the money in a timely and effective manner and this, along with the selection process for audits, has meant that Members only receive feedback from those where an issue was encountered. In these cases, Members then have the opportunity to assist the relevant parish council.
12. Of the 845 requests, 398 applications have been declined for the following reasons.

Table 3: Reasons for declining

Scheme Type	No of schemes	Overall %
Withdrawn by a Member	166	42%
Not allowable on the highway	116	29%
Out of scope	50	13%
Cost prohibitive	40	10%
Duplication of request	19	5%
Unsafe	7	2%
Grand Total	398	

Conclusion of the Member Highway Fund

13. In line with the Cabinet decision of June 2021, outlined at paragraph 2, applications for projects under the MHF were accepted up until 30 September 2023. This was to enable officers to focus on delivery of the outstanding schemes. Members were advised of this by an email on 7 September 2023.
14. Of the 8 schemes still to be delivered, three are programmed for delivery by the end of November, the remaining five are expected to be completed in December. The success of the MHF is the delivery of 447 schemes. These schemes have enabled community facilities they would not normally have had to be provided via core highway funding.

Lessons Learned Workshop

15. To enable the Department to build on the experiences of delivering the MHF, a lesson learned workshop was held in February 2024. The workshop was attended by staff involved in the assessment and delivery of the MHF. The purpose of this was to capture the successes, as well as what might have been improved for any future projects.

16. The top five successes identified at the workshop were:
- a) Creating one data management file for all stages of the request – this allowed multiple teams to have common oversight of the whole programme in a single location.
 - b) Providing online 'shopping list'/drop down menu - Members were guided towards selecting feasible options with clear cost estimates and timescales following feedback from the initial stage.
 - c) Distributing news bulletins - Members were kept informed about the progress of their schemes through a regularly emailed news bulletin.
 - d) Establishing a Minor Improvement Programme Board - Members understood that final decisions on each request were based on rigorous assessments independent of delivery officers.
 - e) Utilising a SharePoint site and dedicated email - assisted multi-team collaborative working and is now the standard set up for multi-team projects.
17. The top five areas for improvement identified at the workshop were:
- a) Being clear on the aims of the MHF would have allowed for better prioritisation and reduce delays.
 - b) Staff shortages/staff turnover had significant impact on progress of the scheme. Consideration should be given to recruiting earlier in the process and identification of suitably qualified resource at the inception stage to reduce delays. It may also be necessary to build time for training and development of staff into the project programme for similar schemes.
 - c) As a result of the lack of resources, the MHF project relied on inexperienced staff to work on the project – their lack of experience meant they were not always able to act without peer review, leading to delays.
 - d) Due to the variety of work areas, and numbers of teams involved, escalation routes were not as clear as with other projects. This was rectified during delivery of the programme but had this been achieved earlier delays could have been reduced.
 - e) Officers attempted to update Members individually on the progress of their requests. However, as the programme grew, more requests were received and various officers were involved in their delivery, this became more difficult. A more formal communication plan would have improved this. All of the projects and programmes now produce a communications plan in the inception stage to address this.
18. The areas for improvement identified in the workshop have been used to improve and strengthen project management processes, to ensure that these issues are not perpetuated in other projects.

Resource Implications

19. Following the Cabinet's decision in 2021, a further £400,000 was agreed for 2021/22 and £200,000 for 2022/23 to provide resource to deliver the MHF, as well as community and member liaison activities.
20. A total budget of £2.8m for design and build was made available for the MHF for delivery of schemes.

21. A total budget of £0.6m for resourcing the MHF was made available for the MHF's additional member and community liaison work.
22. From the total £3.4m available for the MHF by 31 March 2025, a total of £2,556,494 will have been spent on processing, assessing, and delivering projects. The remaining unallocated funding of £843,506 will be returned to the reserve pot to fund other Council priorities.
23. From the £2.8m for scheme design and delivery, the expected spend by 31 March 2025 of £1,847,102 is as follows:
 - a) £818,752 on grants;
 - b) £589,822 on works to delivering schemes;
 - c) £438,528 will have been spent on assessment, project management, member liaison, and delivery of schemes.
24. From the £0.6m set aside to provide resources for the schemes, the expected spend by 31 March 2025 will be £709,392. The overspend on this is due to the sheer number of schemes requiring processing and assessing.
25. The Director of Corporate Resources and the Director of Law and Governance have been consulted on the content of this report.

Background Papers

Cabinet – 22 June 2021, Members Highway Fund – Proposals

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=135&MId=6444&Ver=4>

Highways And Transport Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 20 January 2022 – Members' Highway Fund Update

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=1293&MID=6732#A170380>

Highways And Transport Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 9 June 2022 – Members' Highway Fund Update

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=1293&MID=6734#A171954>

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

26. This report will be circulated to all Members.

Equality Implications

27. There are no equality implications arising directly from the content of this report. It has not been necessary to undertake a detailed equality assessment on the MHF.

Human Rights Implications

28. There are no human rights implications arising from the content of this report.

Environmental Implications

29. No detailed environmental assessment was undertaken on the MHF.

Partnership Working and Associated Issues

30. Working with key partners, such as district councils, parish councils, and other local stakeholders, was important in ensuring the MHF met the aspirations of Members, communities, and was delivered effectively.

Risk Assessment

31. The MHF has been risk assessed as part of a wider risk assessment of the Department's business planning process. The delivery of this programme is supported by the Department's business planning process and risk assessments were undertaken for individual teams, schemes and initiatives, as appropriate.

Officers to Contact

Ann Carruthers
Director, Environment and Transport
Telephone: (0116) 305 7000
Email: ann.carruthers@leics.gov.uk

Janna Walker
Assistant Director, Development and Growth
Telephone: (0116) 305 0785
Email: Janna.Walker@leics.gov.uk