

Report to: Lead Member for Transport and Economy

Date of meeting: 19 November 2018

By: Director of Communities, Economy and Transport

Title: Community Highways review and allocation of the 2018/19 Community Match Funding

Purpose: To update Lead Member on the Community Highways initiative, to seek approval for the proposed allocation of match funding for 2018/19 and to seek approval of the local delivery Volunteering Guidance Document.

RECOMMENDATIONS: The Lead Member is recommended to:

- (1) Note the review to the Community Highways initiative set out in the report;**
 - (2) Agree that £37,500 of match funding should be allocated to three community led transport improvement schemes; and**
 - (3) Approve the Volunteering Guidance Document.**
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1 Background Information

1.1 The Community Highways initiative was launched in 2014 comprising three key elements: Community Match, Community Extras and Community Local Delivery. In May 2016 as part of their Social Value commitment and offering, the new highways contractor took on the responsibility of managing and delivering the Community Highways projects in conjunction with the County Council, introducing a new approach and relaunching the suite of products available to local councils and communities. The products are summarised as follows:

- *Community Match* – An initiative which enables local communities to take forward small scale transport schemes that are not of sufficient priority to be delivered using County Council funding alone. Funding was initially set at £100,000 per annum but this was increased to £250,000 per annum for the purposes of taking forward schemes of local importance.
- *Community Extras* – A pay as you go option for local communities to purchase extra support and works for highway services and funded entirely by the Parish Council or Local Community Group. Requests can include items such as fingerpost maintenance, traffic management hire and grit bin installation.
- *Community Local Delivery* – a way of enabling communities to take on some elements of maintenance within their local area and deliver services using local suppliers e.g. employing their own grass cutting contractor or by organising local volunteer groups.

1.2 Following the relaunch in May 2016 a number of changes were made to improve and update the Community Highways offering, particularly in relation to the delivery of the Community Match initiative with the introduction of a feasibility study to assist Parishes and Communities in identifying possible solutions and determining cost estimates. A review has been undertaken of Community Match to assess the progress over the previous two years, evaluate the feedback and any lessons

learnt to improve the offering. A summary of the review is provided in Appendix A and those schemes which have been delivered since 2016 are detailed in Appendix B.

2 Supporting Information

Community Match Schemes for 2018/19

2.1 A sum of £250,000 has been allocated from the County Council's 2018/19 Capital Programme for Local Transport Improvements to match fund improvement schemes of local importance through the Community Match Fund. The funding that was unallocated in 2017/18 has also been rolled forward at the beginning of 2018/19, giving a total of £312,276 available to take forward schemes in this financial year.

2.2 Although since the re-launch of Community Match there have been many feasibility studies (listed in Appendix C) requested, there have only been three subsequent applications to take schemes forward. As there is sufficient funding available to deliver all the applications, it was recommended to the Cross Party Member Panel that they should all be taken forward, The Cross Party Member Panel unanimously agreed that the Sevenoaks Road and Friston schemes should be recommended to be taken forward. However one member of the panel had concerns over the value of implementing double yellow lines in Robertsbridge due to lack of enforcement. The Parish Council are keen to proceed with this scheme to resolve parking issues in the vicinity, and we are working towards implementing Civil Parking Enforcement within Rother District, so we would anticipate that in the future there will be consistent enforcement of double yellow lines.

2.3 The schemes, together with estimated costs are shown below. The community contribution will be 50% of the costs for all three schemes.

Scheme	Total cost	Community contribution	ESCC contribution
Sevenoaks Road – pedestrian crossing/traffic calming	£50,000	£25,000	£25,000
A259 Friston – pedestrian buildout	£20,000	£10,000	£10,000
Station Road, Robertsbridge – double yellow lines	circa £5000	£2,500	£2,500

Community Extras

2.4 Community Extras continues to be a popular initiative with Parishes and Community Groups with varied items requested or purchased through this. Fingerpost repairs remain one of the most popular items as Parishes take great pride in the upkeep of these. Further requests include dropped kerbs, signage and as the winter season approaches we receive requests for the installation of new grit bins and filling of current grit bins.

Community Highways Volunteering Guidance

2.5 Parishes and Local Communities have shown a keen interest in the potential to self-deliver certain activities associated with the highway in their local area. These are things that are important to local communities, but where the County Council do not have a statutory requirement to deliver, for example cleaning signs, painting or tidying up vegetation and foliage. In some areas local

communities have already been undertaking volunteering activities such as litter picking and cleaning signs.

2.6 In order to provide clarity to parishes and volunteer groups and ensure the safety of volunteers a guidance document has been produced (shown in Appendix D). The guidance provides advice and support for those looking to undertake volunteering activities which are on or around the public highway and sets out the minimum requirements that need to be met for a local community group or parish council in order for them to be permitted to carry out volunteer tasks on or near the highway.

2.7 This guidance only covers requests for volunteers working in 30mph or less zones and no work will be permitted on those roads with higher speed limits or on the carriageway itself. This recognises both the dangers of working on the public highway, as well as the statutory requirement to adhere to safety and traffic management legislation. It also recognises the County Council's responsibility to ensure the safety of those carrying out maintenance or working on the public highway.

3 Risks and Opportunities

3.1 Community Highways is seen as a positive initiative which provides an option for Parishes to purchase additional items, deliver schemes that are important to them locally and explore different options of meeting the needs of the local community. However aspects of Community Highways have proved to be very time consuming as despite careful management there can often be divided opinions within communities about solutions, how best to proceed and requests for changes or amendments to designs which can also have a further cost implication or lead to the scheme not going ahead. This can impact on the amount of time spent by Parish Councils on those who do not always have the appropriate amount of resources to handle these additional enquiries. Community expectations are not always realistic and costs are often more than Parishes expect which is difficult to mitigate if changes are made to the design or construction of a scheme. It is recognised that strong stakeholder management is key in the successful delivery of Community Highway projects, as well as improving the perception and understanding of parishes and local communities about the highways service.

3.2 For Community Match schemes there is a notable risk around delivering solutions which include the need for a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO), and the increase in costs that comes with delivering these types of schemes due to the additional resource and administration required to deliver. It can be difficult to justify community led TRO schemes as they are not a County Council priority and usually there are no evidenced safety implications.

3.3 The County Council needs to review whether speed limit and parking restrictions are appropriate projects for Community Highways. Although they are popular, they can be disproportionately expensive to implement, and there may be better ways the County Council can help Parishes with speeding issues, for example awareness campaigns. For Parishes that are within controlled parking areas, requests for parking restrictions could be taken forward via the regular parking reviews.

3.4 There is an opportunity for the County Council to review what pre-application steps a parish council or local community group takes, including requiring a more detailed consultation with local residents. It is important that projects have significant justification and represent the desires of the Parish and not just one or two residents. It is also important that all projects are compliant with the County Council's policies.

3.5 A review of the Community Match initiative has been undertaken considering which schemes such as TRO's and Road Safety should be included and a further report will be presented to Lead Member for Transport and Environment in 2019.

4 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

4.1 Lead Member is therefore asked to: note the review of the Community Highways initiative; agree that £37,500 of match funding should be allocated to deliver three community led transport improvement schemes in 2018/19; and approve the Volunteering Guidance Document and concept for implementation under Community Local Delivery.

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LOCAL MEMBERS

ALL

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None