

<b>Report to:</b>	<b>Cabinet</b>
<b>Date of meeting:</b>	<b>9 November 2021</b>
<b>By:</b>	<b>Director of Communities, Economy &amp; Transport</b>
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Funding proposal for highways improvements</b>
<b>Purpose:</b>	<b>To seek Cabinet agreement to proposals for the use of the agreed additional one-off budget to support highways improvements</b>

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**RECOMMENDATION:** Cabinet is recommended to approve the proposed one-off additional investment in highways improvements as set out in paragraph 3.8 of the report.

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## **1 Introduction**

1.1 At its meeting on 12 October 2021 the Council agreed the Cabinet recommendation that a reserve of £8.855m be set up within the existing Priority Outcomes and Transformation Reserve and that the Terms of Reference for this reserve be extended to reference that the reserve can be used to fund “programmes that meet the Council’s priority outcomes” which include highways and climate change. This paper sets out proposals for the use of £5.8m one-off additional investment to improve the condition of our highway assets.

1.2 The paper also notes that longer term investment decisions will be considered through the Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources (RPPR) budget setting process.

## **2 Background**

2.1 The Council has operated an Asset Management approach to highway maintenance for a number of years which accords with Department for Transport (DfT) guidance. As a Band 3 Authority (highest) the Council is rewarded for adopting an Asset Management approach by receipt of the full incentive element of its DfT highway maintenance grant, worth £1.475m in 2021/22.

2.2 Through its asset management approach to maintenance the Highways Service has compiled an Asset Plan detailing all of its maintenance needs. As a result of these surveys and as a consequence of its asset management approach the Council now has a much better understanding of their condition, enabling more accurate modelling to be carried out to understand the maintenance needs, deterioration rates, and levels of investment required to achieve desired outcomes in the years ahead. These will be developed further to inform discussions about future levels of investment through the RPPR budget setting process.

2.3 In the short-term, the extension of the Priority Outcomes and Transformation Reserve provides an opportunity for additional one-off investment, over and above our ongoing maintenance programme, to improve the condition of our roads. The areas identified for investment below have been developed with reference to feedback from Members and residents and work undertaken by the Place Scrutiny Committee in recent years, including scrutiny reviews in relation to road repairs and road markings and the Committee’s Highways Contract Re-procurement Reference Group.

## **3 One off investment proposal**

3.1 One-off investment provides a significant opportunity to improve road signs, lines, road patching and pavements, all of which have a positive impact on the experience of the motorists, pedestrians and cyclists who use our road network.

## ***Patching***

3.2 One of the most common issues raised by residents relates to potholes and defects that do not meet the Council's intervention criteria for repair. The intervention criteria prioritise the use of limited resources to address the most urgent and significant defects. Potholes and defects that do not meet the intervention criteria for repair as safety defects are dealt with through a separate patching programme, for which there is a budget of £1.0m per annum. In 2019 the Place Scrutiny Committee completed a review of road repairs and recognised that preventative patching would improve road surface and deal with non-intervention level potholes. Both issues were identified by the Scrutiny Review as a concern for residents who do not necessarily understand that the Council's approach to prioritising repairs across the whole road network means that, in a specific location, some potholes will be repaired whilst others nearby are not, and in light of this the Committee has previously recommended that the amount of patching work undertaken should be increased if feasible.

3.3 There is currently a backlog of approximately £4.0m worth of patching. This situation would be improved significantly by investing one-off funding of £2.5m into the patching programme. This will fund 75,000 sq. metres of road repair, making a substantial impact on the backlog of work and responding to the scrutiny recommendations. The location of the extended patching programme will be determined by the asset management regime.

## ***Road markings, lines and signs***

3.4 Maintenance of road markings, lines, and road signs also contributes to the visual condition of roads. In 2020 the Place Scrutiny Committee undertook a specific review of lines and road markings which concluded that the current level of resources available only provides the ability to deal with any safety defects and undertake some renewal work and is not sufficient to keep up with the rate of road marking renewals ideally needed. The review noted that road markings are one of the most cost-effective measures in terms of promoting road safety and recommended that an injection of one-off funding would help bring all road markings up a maintainable standard. In line with this recommendation, a one-off investment of £0.5m would enable more road markings and white lines to be refreshed, adding three lining gangs to undertake this work.

3.5 Road signage also plays an important part in the experience of road users and contributes significantly to the efficient and effective use of the road network. Members have reported, through scrutiny and elsewhere, that residents express concern about the condition and maintenance of signs, reflecting the fact that a number of the road signs and signposts around the county are old and have reached the end of their life. One-off funding of £1.0m would provide for the replacement of ageing road signs and signposts. This would greatly improve our network and support well-maintained roads. This funding will replace 1,250 road signs and signposts.

## ***Pavements***

3.6 The condition of pavements also attracts significant volume of concerns from residents. The 2019 scrutiny review on road repairs confirmed the concerns being raised by residents, often via local councillors, and noted that there is a considerable amount of work required on 'red' condition pavements, which are in need of immediate repair, in comparison with the size of the available capital budget. The review also recommended that additional investment into pavements be explored. Additional one-off investment of £1.8m would make a significant improvement to the condition of our pavements. Subject to the type of work required this funding will repair between 18,000 and 54,000 sq. metres of pavement.

3.7 The opportunity to make use of one-off investment to address the points made above will have benefits for all road users, assist the Council in delivering its priority outcomes and responds to

recommendations made by scrutiny in recent years. Highway maintenance will continue to be assessed and prioritised using the Council's maintenance policies. A high level equalities impact assessment has identified potential benefits to older and disabled people from the proposed investment in pavements across the county, as well as in road markings and signs.

3.8 Cabinet is therefore asked to agree the use of one-off investment of £5.8m for the following:

Patching	£2.5m
Pavements	£1.8m
Lines and Road Markings	£0.5m
Road signs and signposts	£1.0m

3.9 The future longer-term investment in highways maintenance will be considered through the on-going RPPR budget setting and the medium-term financial planning (MTFP) process, including the 10-year Capital programme.

#### **4 Conclusion and Recommendations**

4.1 This report sets out the opportunity to utilise one-off investment to undertake some specific highway improvements as detailed in section 3. The proposed use of the funding responds to issues raised by local Members, residents and scrutiny and supports delivery of the Council's priorities.

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#### LOCAL MEMBERS

All

#### BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None