

**Report to:** Lead Member for Transport and Environment

**Date of meeting:** 25 September 2023

**By:** Director of Communities, Economy and Transport

**Title:** Proposed minor amendments to the Community Match Initiative

**Purpose:** To consider proposed minor amendments to the Community Match Initiative.

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**RECOMMENDATIONS:** The Lead Member is recommended to:

**(1) Approve the following proposed changes to the Community Match Initiative:**

- to increase the maximum match funding contribution that East Sussex County Council (ESCC) will make to a scheme from £50,000 to £60,000, which will need to be matched by the Parish Council, Town Council or community group;
- the introduction of a maximum indicative cost estimate for a Community Match scheme and that this is set at £120,000; and
- the introduction of a new gateway which will enable feedback to be provided within four weeks regarding the viability of proposed locally identified solutions to the traffic or transport issues; and

**(2) to note that new guidance and a community match handbook will be issued online at [www.eastsussexhighways.com](http://www.eastsussexhighways.com).**

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## **1 Background Information**

1.1 The Community Match initiative was launched by the County Council in 2014. The initiative offers the opportunity for local communities in East Sussex (typically a Parish Council, Town Council or community group) to take forward schemes identified as a local priority, but not assessed to be of sufficient priority to be delivered using County Council funding alone through the Council's capital programme of local transport improvements.

1.2 Currently the first stage of the community match application process is a feasibility study which assists applicants in identifying possible solutions to locally identified traffic or transport issues. The study also provides high level cost estimates for potential schemes. The feasibility study is undertaken by East Sussex Highways and is funded, at a cost of £500, by the Parish Council, Town Council, residents' group or organisation promoting the scheme. Many potential schemes do not progress beyond the feasibility study stage as the report will identify if a scheme is not deliverable, is too expensive to deliver using local community/authority funding, or there is no agreement among residents and businesses about the scheme proposals.

1.3 If a Parish Council, Town Council or community group support the measures suggested in the feasibility study, they can apply to the County Council for Community Match funds to take the scheme forward to detailed design and construction. The current maximum financial input from the County Council is £50,000 per scheme, which needs to be matched by the applicant. The feasibility study is only able to give approximate scheme costs and more detailed scheme costs are provided to applicants as the scheme design progresses through to preliminary and then detailed design. Applicants must demonstrate that the proposed scheme is supported by the local community. In addition, the relevant County Councillors are asked whether they support the proposed Community Match scheme in their division.

1.4 Community Match applications are considered annually by the Lead Member for Transport and Environment. Since 2015, 22 schemes funded by the Community Match initiative

have been delivered. These have included traffic calming, pedestrian improvements, new road markings and changes to speed limits, which otherwise would not have been implemented through the Council's capital programme of local transport improvements.

## **2 Supporting Information**

2.1 Following a review of the Community Match process, criteria and feedback received from Members, the following proposed changes have been identified to streamline and improve the process for applicants. These proposed changes include providing earlier feedback to applicants on whether a potential scheme is viable before they fund a feasibility study. In addition, these proposed changes will reduce the number of potential schemes that do not progress beyond the feasibility stage. The proposed changes are detailed below:

- A dedicated ESCC Officer in the Highways Contracts Management Group will oversee the administration of the initiative and act as first point of contact for applicants and key stakeholders. Applicants will be able to seek early advice and guidance from this officer.
- Introduction of a new gateway where feedback on the viability of proposed locally identified solutions to the traffic or transport issues will be provided within four weeks of initial contact and prior to paying £500 for a feasibility Study.
- Over recent years there has been a considerable increase in both construction materials and labour costs. As such, to reflect these price increases it is recommended that the maximum contributions from the County Council be raised from £50,000 to £60,000 per scheme, which will need to be matched by the Parish Council, Town Council or community group. Community Match will still require local communities to pay the full cost of feasibility appraisal and contribute at least 50% of the detailed design and construction costs, whilst ESCC will fund up to 50% of the design and construction costs.
- The indicative cost estimate will continue to be provided as part of the feasibility study process, with more detailed scheme costs provided to applicants as the scheme design progresses. Once the scheme design is finalised a cost for implementation will be provided to the applicant who will then decide whether to progress. If the final cost for implementation is higher than £120,000, the applicant will be responsible for funding the additional costs.
- When the community match initiative was introduced, the intent was that it would enable local communities to implement relatively low cost smaller scale schemes through the Council's wider delivery programme. Although, the initiative has delivered a number of these smaller scale schemes, there have been numerous feasibility studies commissioned for larger scale, complex and higher cost schemes and the vast majority of these have not progressed as they are too expensive to deliver using local community or local authority funding. These feasibility studies have taken a disproportionate amount of design and delivery resource to progress. As Community Match schemes are not a sufficient priority for the Council to wholly fund and to ensure potential schemes could be match funded by a Parish Council, Town Council or community group, it is recommended that a maximum indicative cost estimate of £120,000 (with a maximum ESCC contribution of £60,000) is introduced for an individual Community Match scheme.

- If a Parish Council, Town Council or community group wish to progress and develop a scheme with an indicative cost estimate greater than £120,000, this would still be possible through a section 278 Agreement. A section 278 agreement is where developers (in this case the applicant) enter into a legal agreement with the County Council to make alterations or improvements to the public highway. However, the Parish Council, Town Council or community group would be wholly responsible for the progression of this scheme and would need to employ their own consultants to manage the design, any required informal and formal consultations and the construction of the scheme. At the stage that a potential scheme had been designed and costed, Stage 1 and 2 of the Road Safety Audit processes completed, and informal or formal consultation undertaken with the local community and statutory consultees, the Parish Council, Town Council or community group could choose to apply for a contribution from the Community Match Initiative of up to £60,000. If approved by the Lead Member for Transport and Environment, the applicant would remain responsible for the scheme's construction and delivery as well as any additional costs incurred over and above the £120,000 maximum scheme cost. They would also be responsible for the post construction Road Safety Audits and any required alterations. Further guidance on section 278 agreements will be produced.
- Types of schemes that will be considered as part of the Community Match initiative, include:
  - New road markings
  - Changes to speed limits
  - Parking restrictions
  - Dropped Kerbs/tactile paving
  - Signage
  - Traffic Calming
  - Pedestrian refuges (Traffic islands)
- Zebra, Puffin, Toucan, Parallel and Pegasus crossings will not be eligible for progression through the Community Match initiative as the cost will be higher than £120,000.
- Community Match applications will be presented and considered twice a year by the Lead Member for Transport and Environment in June and December.

2.2 New Community Match guidance will be published on the East Sussex Highways website and will include a downloadable guidance booklet which can be shared with applicants. This guidance will include examples of the type of schemes and their potential cost that may be eligible for match funding and implementation through the initiative.

2.3 The budget for Community Match will remain £250,000 per annum, and any future in-year underspend will continue to be reallocated to fund additional community focused road safety interventions and schemes. Following the decision by the Lead Member at her decision-making meeting on 21 February 2022 to reallocate the underspend in the Community Match budget, 10 community focused road safety schemes were delivered during 2022/23, and it is estimated that a further 15 to 20 schemes will be delivered over the next two financial years.

### **3 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations**

3.1 Since its launch in 2014, the Community Match initiative has delivered 22 schemes of importance to local communities, such as traffic calming and changes to the speed limits which otherwise would not have been implemented through the Council's capital programme of local transport improvements.

3.2 The community match initiative remains an important funding route for local communities to progress schemes which are not currently a priority for the County Council. The proposed changes to the management and administration of the initiative would enhance its accessibility and improve the customer experience for applicants.

3.3 The proposed increase to the maximum amount of funding from ESCC from £50,000 to £60,000 to any one project will help ensure that the identified cost pressures do not act as a barrier to the progress of these smaller scale projects.

3.4 It is therefore recommended to approve the proposed changes to the Community Match initiative, as set out in section 2.1 of the report, and note that new guidance and a community match handbook will be issued.

#### **RUPERT CLUBB**

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#### LOCAL MEMBERS

All

#### BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None