

Highways & Transport Committee

Date of Meeting:	13 January 2022
Report Title:	Ward Members Highways Budget Pilot Scheme – Update
Report of:	Andrew Ross, Director of Infrastructure & Highways
Report Reference No:	HT/27/21-22
Ward(s) Affected:	All Cheshire East wards

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. The ward members highway budget pilot scheme was introduced following the Full Council decision in February 2021. The ward budgets pilot replaced the former Area Highways Group arrangements, including its funding.
- 1.2. This report details the work that has been done to develop and then roll out the pilot and updates members of the committee on its operation to date and the level of uptake.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. That the Committee note both this report and the intention to submit a further report to this Committee later in 2022 to seek a decision on the future approach to ward budgets.

3. Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1. To inform the committee on the uptake of the Ward Members Budget Pilot Scheme to date ahead of any decisions on the future of this, or similar schemes.

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1. Not applicable. It is intended that a report be presented to a future meeting of this Committee, which considers options following this pilot.

5. Background

- 5.1.** Following the Full Council decision in February 2021 and in the lead up to the new committee system, the former relevant Place Portfolio Holders were briefed on the development of a Ward Members Highways Budget Pilot Scheme. The relevant approved amendment to the council resolution on the Medium Term Financial Strategy was :

.....to establish devolved ward member highways budgets of at least £4,200 per Ward Member for the financial year 2021/2022, with the proposal to be funded from the current allocation of Capital Grant funding to the Area Highway Groups of £350,000 and that the Committee System review achievements of the ward budgets scheme in 2021/22 with a view to widening the scheme in 2022/23 and beyond with a significant increase in the budget amount to be allocated to each Ward Member.

- 5.2.** The scheme developed involved the transfer of the previous £350,000 budget for the Area Highway Groups (AHG's) to individual ward members resulting in a £4,200 fund for each member to spend on additional highway and transport services.
- 5.3.** Given the nature of the works under consideration in the ward member pilot, it was decided to open the scheme up to Town and Parish Councils to enable them to buy additional highway services if they wished.

6. Ward Members Fund Pilot Scheme

6.1. Development of Pilot Scheme

A briefing on the scheme were presented to Ward Councillors on the 7th May 2021 (See slides attached). The briefing outlined the scheme in terms of what sorts of highway works may be eligible and gave an indication of the likely costs and sought comments and feedback from members.

- 6.1.1.** Following the briefing, amendments were made to the proposal and the scheme was launched in June 2021.
- 6.1.2.** A key consideration with the pilot has been the source of the funding, being capital grant from the Department for Transport (DfT) Local Transport Plan Block. The Council has previously determined, including in its returns to the DfT, that this funding is spent on improvements to the highway and transport networks within the borough.
- 6.1.3.** The ward budget pilot has been developed to be consistent with this requirement. This restriction has led to some frustrations from those members who hoped to use the budget on more community-based initiatives, for example on park benches or provision of litter bins.
- 6.1.4.** A few requests have been for highway related work but have been declined as they run counter to current council policy or were for work on private roads which are not maintainable at public expense.

- 6.1.5.** Some members have been disappointed with the level of funding available especially given the size of their wards as this can limit their ability to deliver any meaningful works. This is to some degree addressed by the fact that the pilot is to run over two financial years, from 1st June 2021 to 1st July 2022. This means that there is more time to take up the opportunity of spending the budget, as well as raising the possibility of combining two years of funding if a similar budget is made available for 2022/23. Subject to this funding being available, then then applications will be able to be made up to the end of the scheme (1st July 2022) to combine 2 years funding, for delivery in the 2022/23 financial year. This will also allow time for Town and Parish Councils to consider utilising the scheme when setting budgets for the financial year 2022/23.
- 6.1.6.** During the early stages of the pilot, enquiries were extremely slow in being submitted but started to pick up following a reminder sent to members by Cllr Browne.
- 6.1.7.** At the time of writing, the requests have started to come through steadily and so far we have received 26 applications from 16 Members outlining areas where they would like to spend their budgets.
- 6.1.8.** Members can spend their ward budgets on a variety of highway assets or activities and so far, successful schemes have included street lighting upgrades, footway patching, carriageway patching, additional road signage, replacement road name plates, drainage works and road markings.
- 6.1.9.** There are many other elements of work the budget can be spent on including additional maintenance works such as non-routine improvement works and transport related items such as cycle stands and bus stop flag and pole replacement.
- 6.1.10.** Although there have been 26 formal applications, there have also been a large number of enquiries that have been raised and need to be responded to. In total, this has cost approximately £3,000 to answer these enquiries and process the 26 official applications.
- 6.1.11.** Progress on the 26 official applications received since the commencement of the pilot is as follows:

Progress on official applications:	No. of Schemes
Initial assessment: 7 - Highways Team 3 - Parking Team	10
Awaiting Final Estimates	6
Programmed for delivery	1
Delivered	1
Declined: 2 - Not compliant with council policy 5 - Already in Highway Service core programme 1 - Requires extensive work already being considered in Highway Service core forward programme	8
Total No. of Schemes To date	26

6.1.12. The two requests that were declined as not compliant with council policy were:

- Request for additional winter gritting
- Replacement of a streetlight on a private road.

6.3 Next Steps

6.3.1 The pilot scheme will continue to run through to 1st July 2022.

6.3.2 Following the close of the pilot scheme a full review of will be carried out and it is proposed to present a report on the findings to the Highways and Transport committee later in 2022. A survey to obtain members views on the operation of the scheme will be undertaken to inform the review. This is to enable a discussion and decisions on whether to make the pilot scheme permanent, vary it and continue, or to end the scheme and consider other options.

7. Implications

7.1. Legal

Update report only, so no direct legal implications

7.2. Finance

The capital budget is approved within the 2021-25 Medium Term Financial Strategy as part of the Local Transport Plan Block (LTP) annual allocation of £2.003m.

The Integrated Transport Block grant is the allocation granted from the Department of Transport for local Council's to spend on transport capital improvement schemes. The definition of capital is expenditure on a new asset or additions/improvements to an existing asset.

Work of a non-routine nature, i.e., significant enough to make an improvement can be treated as highways capital expenditure and therefore includes the work undertaken for the devolved ward member budgets.

The purpose of the Integrated Transport Block grant is to provide support to local authorities in England towards expenditure lawfully incurred or to be incurred by them. Grant paid to a local authority under this determination may be used only for the purposes that a capital receipt may be used for in accordance with regulations made under section 11 of the Local Government Act 2003.

The claims are required to be audited each financial year by the Council's internal auditors and a signed copy of the declaration is sent to the Department of Transport confirming that the all the expenditure is eligible under the capital accounting rules as per the Local Government Act 2003 and the CIPFA Code of Practice and that the spend has met the objectives as stated above.

7.3. Policy

No policy implications

7.4. Equality

No equality implications

7.5. Human Resources

No human resource implications

7.6. Risk Management

No risk management implications

7.7. Rural Communities

No rural community implications

7.8. Children and Young People/Cared for Children

No children and young people implications.

7.9 Public Health

No direct implications for public health.

7.10 Climate Change

Update report only, so no climate change implications.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Chris Hindle Head of Infrastructure Chris.hindle@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Appendices:	None
Background Papers:	None