

Item

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME



To:

Councillor Katie Thornburrow, Executive Councillor for Streets and Open Spaces

Environment & Community Scrutiny Committee

21/03/2019

Report by:

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Not a Key Decision

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report reviews the Council's Environmental Improvement Programme (EIP), including delivery performance, up to 2018/19; and recommends a way forward for the extended period, 2019-21.

2 Recommendations

The Executive Councillor is recommended:

- a) To approve a new two year EIP, 2019-21 at current funding levels of £170,000 per annum, to be allocated as follows:
- £70,000 per annum for strategic, city-wide programme developed by officers and approved by the Executive Councillor; and
 - £100,000 per annum to be apportioned based on population, for Areas to allocate to Ward Councillor/

voluntary and community sector promoted projects in accordance with proposed eligibility criteria.

- b) To carry forward £170,000 of the current programme balance into 2019/20 and allocate £70,000 for strategic, city-wide programme and £100,000 (proportionate to population) for Areas to allocate to Ward Councillor/ voluntary and community sector promoted projects.

3 Background

- 3.1 The Council's Environmental Improvement Programme (EIP) has been operating as a rolling programme since 2004. The programme budget, which has been £170,000 per annum for the most recent period up to 2018/19, has been devolved to Area Committees to allocate to outdoor public realm improvement schemes, identified through Ward Councillors. The creation of direct, lasting and noticeable improvements to the appearance of the public realm environment has been at the heart of the programme, since its introduction. The current EIP eligibility criteria are set out in **Appendix A**.
- 3.2 The programme has been subject to periodic review to improve flexibility, ensure good value and help speed up project delivery; most recently by Community Services Scrutiny Committee on 8th October, 2015. That said, there have been delivery difficulties where project aspirations have complexities, such as where they involve the public highway. Such difficulties have led to a disproportionate impact on staffing resource, with the associated projects often taking a significant amount of time and staffing to deliver.
- 3.3 The current year (2018/19) is the last of the current four year programme funding commitment and so, it has been appropriate to use the opportunity to consider the future focus and composition of any extended programme.
- 3.4 EIP work remains much valued by councillors and communities alike, but might be re-focused to ensure it continues to best meet strategic objectives and the needs of a rapidly expanding city. This paper presents the outcome of a review work undertaken over the last 15 months; and recommends an investment plan for the period, 2019-21, in order to ensure the programme remains effective and efficient, thus providing good value for the Council, and Cambridge.

4. Review of Project Delivery Progress and Capacity

- 4.1 New applications for EIP projects were last invited in late 2017, with Area Committees adopting a further 37 projects to the programme over the winter, 2017/18, cycle. Steady progress with delivery is being made across most areas and many of these new project commitments from 2017/18 cycle are under development; or have already been completed. That said, there are currently circa 35 committed EIP projects still to be delivered (including those still incomplete from previous years). A breakdown of these c35 projects, listed by Area Committee and year of allocation, is included in the attached spread sheet **Appendix B**.
- 4.2 A review of all EIP projects completed, or deferred, since 2011/12 (the year of the oldest yet to be completed projects) is included in the attached spread-sheet at **Appendix C**. This spread-sheet similarly lists the projects by Area Committee and year of allocation, and details when the project was completed, or deferred.
- 4.3 Since 2011/12, some 195 separate EIP projects have been added to the programme by the four Area Committees city-wide. Of these approved projects, 148 (76%) have now been fully delivered; 11 abandoned or deferred, with 15 expected to be delivered this year (2018-19). The remaining 21 project commitments are unlikely to be completed this year but will extend in to 2019/20; if they are to be realised. A summary breakdown, by Area Committee, for all approved projects since 2011/12 is included in the following table:

Area C'ttee	Complete	Abandoned	Delivery 18/19	Delivery 19/20	Total
North	34	5	9	10	58
South	24	1	0	1	26
East	44	3	2	7	56
West Central	46	2	4	3	55
Total	148	11	15	21	195

- 4.4 Available officer capacity is currently focused towards development and delivery of the outstanding projects and, as a consequence, no new scheme applications have been invited during 2018/19 year. Not all project suggestions were approved in the last round (2017/18) and

most Area Committees have further aspirations that they would like to see taken forward.

- 4.5 The number of projects submitted for consideration for EIP funding, their feasibility and the complicated technical solutions required has made management and delivery of the programme challenging at times, with a corresponding disproportionate impact on staff time. The EIP is supported by a revenue budget allocation to support its delivery that equates to 2 FTE. Any additional delivery staff time, over and above the 2 FTE, cannot be recovered against the EIP budget.
- 4.6 Many submitted and approved EIP projects have focused on improvements to core highways and transport infrastructure, which is dependent on agreement with the County Council, as Highway Authority and, in certain cases, such as Traffic Regulation Orders, to statutory processes. This is despite efforts to channel such aspirations towards the County's Local Highways Improvement (LHI) programme, and has further complicated programme development and delivery. Particular care is needed to ensure adopted EIP and LHI projects do not also disproportionately add to service operational and maintenance pressures.
- 4.7 The overlap between the operating criteria for EIP and LHI are such that Ward Councillors, in some areas, have continued to seek to use EIP as a means of expediting highways associated aspirations that offer the potential for environmental improvement. Examples include measures to protect grass verge areas from vehicular damage, or the provision of on-street seating and/ or cycle parking stands.
- 4.8 Whilst annual budget allocations vary across Areas in proportion to populous, since 2011/12, significantly less new EIP projects have come forward in some areas than others. In the latest (2017/18) application round, of the 37 new projects adopted, 30 (81%) came from North and East areas and only 7 (19%) from South and West Central areas. The complexities often faced in bringing forward some project aspirations to delivery stage, with significant delays in some instances, may have disincentivised further bid submissions from Ward Councillors.

5. **Funding Position**

- 5.1 Since 2011/12, capital investment in EIP has been in excess of £2M (including the comprehensive projects for Riverside, Fitzroy Street/ Burleigh Street, Wulfstan Way and provision of dropped access

crossings for pedestrians across North area). The approved programme budget for the recent period, 2016-19, has been £170,000 per annum; allocated across the four Area Committees proportionate to population as follows:

- North £50,320 per annum (29.6%)
- South £35,530 per annum (20.9%)
- East £47,770 per annum (28.1%)
- West Central £36,380 per annum (21.4%)

5.2 Whilst there has been an acceleration of spend in recent years, savings in delivery out-turn costs alongside delays and other complexities in implementing some projects have resulted in operating surpluses across all four Areas (exact values are dependent on final costs of projects currently being delivered). There are differing levels of remaining funding across the city, with particularly significant amounts in Areas where fewer projects were approved. Taken as a whole, there is sufficient funding remaining to operate an EIP for a further year without further new capital investment.

5.3 Following consideration by Scrutiny Committee on 11 February 2019, the Executive Councillor for Strategy and Resources approved the allocation of £170,000 re-phased from 2018/19 to continue with EIP in 2019-20, and a separate budget proposal (C4192) of £170,000 for the following year 2020/21 (subject to annual budget setting). A further review will be carried out before any commitment is made for after 2020/21.

6. Improving Value

6.1 The Council's capital funded EIP programme has delivered some particularly significant enhancements to the city's public realm, over its lifetime, that may not, otherwise, have been realised.

6.2 The end of the current four year EIP funding commitment provides an opportune point to review what has worked well, and not so well, and options for the future. Engagement with the Council's SLT/ Executive suggested an appetite to retain a capital funded programme, but one more aligned with core corporate and service objectives, and operational needs.

6.3 EIP has been successfully used to support other public realm infrastructure investment; including s106 funded improvements secured

through new growth in the city. As s106 and other such investment opportunities diminish in the years ahead, there may be increased need for EIP to help 'bridge the gap' remaining.

6.4 With the support of SLT/ Executive, officers have, over the last year, been further investigating how a future programme might be re-shaped. Retaining a ward Councillor led approach is still favoured, but one perhaps better informed by other areas of Council work – including the day to day operational needs of the service. Some suggested target areas for future EIP investment could include:

- Verge and grass landscape protection/ enhancement measures
- Engineered tree pits and new street trees, to increase canopy
- Enhanced seating, and lighting
- Community orchards, and notice boards
- Pictorial meadows
- Murals and related street art
- Public drinking water outlets/ fountains
- Improved pedestrian way-marking signs
- Rationalising signing and other street furniture
- Enhancing materials in sensitive conservation areas
- Improving private shop-front forecourts

6.5 The city's verges and other green highway areas contribute much to environmental amenity, but damage caused by parking is an increasing problem. Responsibility for the upkeep of these areas is on a shared basis between the County and City Councils. A number of interventions have been trialed and funded through EIP area allocations, via legal (Bye-laws and Traffic Regulation Orders) and physical (fences, bollards and other barriers) means. Whilst the issue is of increasing concern to Area Committees, schemes have tended to come forward on an individual and piecemeal basis, and there would be merit in taking a more holistic, city-wide, approach.

6.6 The Council is also investing significantly in increasing tree cover across Cambridge, which, in addition to enhancing environmental amenity, assists with managing the impacts of climate change; absorbing heat and rainfall, and improving air quality, and ecology. Street trees have an important role to play but face an increasingly hostile environment, unless measures are included to create healthy growing conditions. EIP has previously, and might continue to fund the

introduction of ground improvement works to support the establishment and growth of new and replacement trees.

- 6.7 The provision of further public, free drinking water fountains, along with improved places for people to sit, in Cambridge's streets and open spaces, would align with a number of the Council's key priorities and areas of work, including equality, diversity and making better use of space for people in inclusive, vibrant, communal areas. Taking a more strategic, holistic, approach to further deployment would enable inspection and maintenance implications to be more effectively managed.

7. Suggested Way Forward

- 7.1 It is suggested that the £170,000 annual investment be split for future years; retaining £100,000 per annum to allocate to local voluntary and community sector/ Ward Councillor promoted projects across the four Area Committees (split proportionately and with individual schemes subject to approval by Area Committees, as now), and directing the remaining £70,000 towards a more strategic, city-wide programme led by officers and subject to approval by the appropriate Executive Councillor (as is currently the case for Minor Highways Improvements – the City Council contribution towards County Council LHIs).

- 7.2 The £100,000 per annum would continue to be allocated across the city's four Areas proportionate to population, resulting in the following available funds by Area:

- North £29,600 per annum
- South £20,900 per annum
- East £28,100 per annum
- West Central £21,400 per annum

This should provide sufficient funding to progress a minimum of 4-6 projects per area each year, subject to selection and approval by Area Committees.

- 7.3 It is proposed that, as well as Ward Councillors continuing to be able to promote projects for EIP funding, the local voluntary and community sector would also be able to. The eligibility criteria would be amended to reflect this, with clear application windows and associated forms provided for groups/ Ward Councillors to use. The extension to enable the voluntary and community sector to access the EIP fits with the

Streets and Open Spaces service development strategy aim of increasing opportunities for communities to engage in supporting service operations, plans and projects and building community capacity to be able to help itself.

- 7.4 To qualify for the County Council LHI programme, a project must demonstrate there is a persistent highway problem and that the proposed project makes an improvement, has local benefit and adds value. Projects are assessed by the local highways project team. They are then scored and a priority list considered and approved by a Member Advisory Panel, acting on behalf of the Cambridge Joint Area Committee
- 7.5 If the approach outlined above is supported, it is suggested that a similar arrangement could be developed for prioritising the £70,000 strategic element of the new EIP budget. Officers would develop a suitable appraisal mechanism; and make recommendations to the Executive Councillor, who following scrutiny via consultation with the serving Environment and Community Scrutiny Committee chair and vice-chair, would then consider and approve the allocations within his/her delegated authority.
- 7.6 In order to expedite allocation and spend of EIP funding available in 2019/20 it is suggested that, if supported by Scrutiny Committee and the Executive Councillor:
- A further area based EIP application round is undertaken early in 2019/20, following a review of process and eligibility criteria, with consideration and allocation of apportioned funds by Area Committees, and
 - Officers would devise an identification and appraisal/ prioritisation mechanism for the EIP strategic funding element, targeted towards maximum benefit/ quick win spend where there are few dependencies and other complexities
 - That these initial strategic priorities be focused towards measures to improve, enhance and protect verges (in association with the County Council and other key stakeholders), engineering works to support increased tree canopy, and enhanced opportunity for people to dwell and enjoy our streets and open spaces through enhanced facilities and other service infrastructure provision (such as benches and drinking water outlets), where practicable.

8 Implications

a) Financial Implications

The current EIP (2016-19) has an approved budget allocation of £170,000 per annum up to and including 2018/2019, and there is sufficient funding remaining in existing budgets to support continuation in to 2019/20. Should there be support for a continuation of EIP, in some way, shape or form, beyond 2020, a budget proposal will need to be submitted for inclusion in the Budget Setting Report for 2020/21.

b) Staffing Implications

The changes to operating protocols approved in 2015 should ensure that the continued programme can be delivered within existing staffing resource (2 FTE). It is custom and practice to record time on projects to ensure that projects are not over or under resourced.

c) Equality and Poverty Implications

The impact of all programme schemes on Equality Act 'protected groups' is assessed at the design/ planning stage. All hard infrastructure schemes are designed to national standards to accommodate the needs of those with physical impairments, including mobility, sight and hearing. The overall impact of the programme is considered positive.

d) Environmental Implications

The programme is delegated to Area Committees to approve projects which deliver local environmental improvements. As a result, the overall impact of the programme on the environment for Cambridge is rated as +M.

e) Procurement Implications

The programme projects are either delivered in-house utilising existing resources within the Streets & Open Spaces service, or via existing framework contract arrangements. To ensure value for money, the larger programme schemes may be delivered through competitive tender processes.

f) Community Safety Implications

The programme is designed to deliver local public realm environmental improvements and foster increased pride of place and community cohesion. As a result, the programme is considered to have a positive impact on community safety.

9. Consultation and communication considerations

All the programme's projects are consulted on at the planning/ design stage, with the level/ type of consultation determined by and proportionate to the nature, scale and scope of the proposed project. With the majority of the programme being small-scale projects, it is imperative that the proportionate principle continues to be followed in any future extension of the programme.

10. Background papers

Background papers used in the preparation of this report:

Community Services Scrutiny Committee meeting 8/10/2015 – paper and meeting minutes

11. Appendices

Appendix A – EIP eligibility criteria

Appendix B – EIP projects not yet delivered

Appendix C – EIP projects completed/ deferred (2011 to date)

12. Inspection of papers

To inspect the background papers or if you have a query on the report please contact:

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