

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

23 JANUARY 2020

**REPORT OF PLACE
SELECT COMMITTEE**

CABINET DECISION

Lead Cabinet Member – Environment and Transport – Councillor Mike Smith

SCRUTINY REVIEW OF AREA TRANSPORT STRATEGY

SUMMARY

The attached report presents the outcomes of the Place Select Committee's review of Area Transport Strategy (ATS).

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S) / DECISION(S)

This topic was included in the Scrutiny Work Programme for 2019-2020. The review is now complete and the recommendations have been endorsed by the Place Select Committee for submission to Cabinet.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee recommend that:

- 1) The existing ATS scheme ceases at the end of the current financial year (31st March 2020), with the yearly ATS funding allocation to be transferred to the Community Participation Budget (CPB) on a Ward-by-Ward basis determined by population per Ward. This addition to CPB funding should be ring-fenced for transport-related spend only.
- 2) To allow for a greater range of potential schemes to be supported, as part of the new arrangements in recommendation 1 (from 1st April 2020):
 - a) Council should enable, subject to overall budget control, Elected Members to have advanced access to some of their future CPB / ATS (ring-fenced) annual allocations should a larger-scale project be proposed and accepted – equally, Members should be able to roll over their allocations to enable the delivery of larger schemes.
 - b) Council should enable Elected Members to pool / transfer their CPB / ATS (ring-fenced) allocation with / to neighbouring Wards should a larger transport-related scheme be identified that cuts across more than one Ward. Any disputes will be resolved as per the current CPB dispute resolution process.

- c) Council should produce a formal protocol outlining what transport-related schemes could qualify for core LTP funding, and what would be more suitable for the CPB / ATS (ring-fenced) route.
- 3) An appropriate communication plan is put in place to inform all existing ATS stakeholders of the planned changes to the existing scheme, including the mechanisms in which to raise future transport-related issues / proposals directly with Elected Members.
- 4) The new ring-fenced transport-related element of the CPB is not tied to the future of the overall CPB initiative (i.e. it is not dependent upon the existence of CPB).

DETAIL

1. The Area Transport Strategy (ATS) scheme allows the community an opportunity to influence where a proportion of Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council's limited funding for improvements to the highway is targeted. Four Borough-wide ATS groups were established to introduce public involvement in the selection of highway and transport schemes, and a budget was identified from the Council's Local Transport Plan (LTP) allocation to fund projects on an annual basis.
2. Over time, the process has been developed by Officers to try and ensure the most appropriate schemes are selected and funded from a single budget rather than split between areas. However, concerns still exist as to whether the scheme provides value-for-money for all, especially at a time when there are growing pressures on funding allocations and resources have to be carefully prioritised. In addition, it can create a demand for services and projects that cannot always be satisfied, and can be a more staff-intensive process for the delivery of projects than other expenditure methodologies.
3. The aim of this review was to examine the current ATS scheme and, through an assessment of this and previous year's ATS rounds, establish if it is fit for purpose, inclusive, and allows the public to have the appropriate level of influence, while being an efficient and effective process.
4. The Committee took evidence from key Local Authority Officers, principally the Highways, Transport and Design Manager and the Principal Transport Officer. A survey was issued to ATS stakeholders across all four Area Partnerships, and the Chair of the Western Area Partnership also attended Committee to give their views on the current ATS scheme.

COMMUNITY IMPACT IMPLICATIONS

5. As identified within the report, the Committee recognised that potential changes to the current ATS scheme could lead to a move to delivering only larger-scale accident-driven proposals, and that more 'environmental' projects (currently directed via the ATS) would never be progressed. However, transferring future annual ATS funding allocations to the CPB (a similar process enabling the community to identify potential solutions to issues across the Borough) as a ring-fenced amount for each Ward could facilitate continued community involvement in identifying transport-related issues and provide oversight of any proposed schemes.
6. This core recommendation would lead to a timelier Local Authority response regarding suggested projects, a better flow of information between Officers, Elected Members and the community regarding the progression of potential schemes, and would retain the possibility that money can still be spent on community rather than purely technical priorities. To further strengthen this new approach, the Committee encouraged flexibility around how Elected

Members could use, and even pool, their new ring-fenced transport-related CPB allocation to maximise the range of projects that could be proposed.

CORPORATE PARENTING IMPLICATIONS

7. There are no direct implications in the report.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

8. Removing the ATS would enable some savings on administration fees (Officer time, including community engagement) associated with the current scheme.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9. There are no legal implications identified at this stage.

RISK ASSESSMENT

10. The review is categorised as low to medium risk. Existing management systems and daily routine activities are sufficient to control and reduce risk.

WARDS AFFECTED AND CONSULTATION WITH WARD/COUNCILLORS

11. All Wards are represented across the four Area Partnerships that currently consider and prioritise ATS scheme proposals, and the report's recommendations will thus affect all Wards across the Borough. The ATS stakeholder survey undertaken as part of this review gave all Ward Councillors the opportunity to provide their views on the current ATS scheme and identify areas to improve / enhance it.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

12. None.

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