

# **Place Select Committee**

## **Scrutiny Review of Area Transport Strategy**

**Final Report  
December 2019**

Place Select Committee  
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council  
Municipal Buildings  
Church Road  
Stockton-on-Tees  
TS18 1LD

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### **Select Committee - Membership**

Councillor Chris Barlow (Chair)  
Councillor Louise Baldock (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor Pauline Beall  
Councillor Julia Cherrett  
Councillor Luke Frost  
Councillor Mohammed Javed  
Councillor Hilary Vickers  
Councillor Alan Watson  
Councillor Bill Woodhead MBE

### **Acknowledgements**

The Committee would like to thank the following people for contributing to its work:

- Richard McGuckin (Director of Economic Growth & Development Services) - Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC)
- Andrew Corcoran (Highways, Transport and Design Manager) - SBC
- Jonathan Kibble (Principal Transport Officer) - SBC
- John Angus (Projects Officer) - SBC
- Gordon Smith - Chair of the Western Area Partnership
- All those who responded to the Committee's ATS stakeholder survey

### **Contact Officer**

Gary Woods (Scrutiny Officer)  
Tel: 01642 526187  
E-mail: gary.woods@stockton.gov.uk

## **Foreword**

On behalf of the Place Select Committee, we are pleased to present the final report and recommendations following our review of Area Transport Strategy (ATS).

This review provided an opportunity to examine the current ATS scheme and establish if it was fit for purpose, inclusive, and allowed the public to have the appropriate level of influence, while being an efficient and effective process. A fundamental aspect of the scheme was its intention to engage with a range of local stakeholders in order to identify and progress appropriate transport-related projects, and the views of those previously / currently involved in the process greatly aided the Committee in trying to determine if this was the case.

During the course of this work, and in trying to identify the best way forward, the Committee was mindful of the need to maximise the limited resources available, both in terms of the available funding associated with the ATS, and the time spent by Officers to administer the process and investigate / progress project proposals. Retaining the key element of public involvement was also central to our endeavours, and the recommendations made in the report reflect this approach.

We would like to thank all those involved during the review, particularly the Local Authority Officers who provided insight throughout and those who contributed to the ATS stakeholder survey.



**Cllr Chris Barlow**  
Chair  
Place Select Committee



**Cllr Louise Baldock**  
Vice-Chair  
Place Select Committee

## Original Brief

### **Which of our strategic corporate objectives does this topic address?**

Improvements to the highway network supports all of the Council's four policy principles:

- Protect the vulnerable – delivering schemes such as traffic calming to improve road safety help protect the vulnerable such as the elderly, young children and the mobility impaired.
- Create economic prosperity – improvements to the highway network can provide better access for individuals to jobs, education and training opportunities, improving people's economic prosperity and opportunities.
- Tackle inequality – delivering improvements to the public right of way, footway or cycle networks can assist people to access jobs and education.
- Help people to be healthier – most people use the transport network on a daily basis, whether to get to work, to an educational establishment, for a health appointment, to go shopping, to enjoy leisure pursuits, or to get to a social engagement, therefore improvements funded via the ATS process help develop, support and maintain strong & healthy communities.

### **What are the main issues and overall aim of this review?**

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.

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.

This review aims 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.

### **The Committee will undertake the following key lines of enquiry:**

- ATS concept – where did it come from; why was it brought in; what did it aim to achieve?
- ATS process – how does the scheme work; how has this developed over time; Terms of Reference / membership (who decides); individual ATS group boundaries; how much is allocated from the Council's Local Transport Plan funding (has this changed over time); how are decisions reached in terms of what proposals are selected (is this fair / partial); is this consistent across the four ATS groups, Officer time / resource required (inc. potential efficiencies if done differently)?
- Community involvement – how is this facilitated; what are the benefits of community input; is the level of public influence effective and balanced; how aware are the

community re. ATS?

- Is ATS a cost-effective process for involving the community in the decision-making process and is it achieving its aim? Are there alternative cost-effective ways of achieving the aims of the ATS?
- Do other Local Authorities involve the community in the selection of highway and transport schemes, and if so, how?
- How many and what types of projects are proposed; who are they being proposed by; what has been spent in recent years as a percentage of the overall budget, and on which geographical areas; any themes in terms of what is not funded?
- Decision-making balance – criteria for choosing to support a project/s from all those proposed; cost-benefit (less, more costly projects versus more, less costly).
- ATS meetings – who is involved; how are meetings managed (inc. papers issued)?
- How / what schemes would be delivered if the funding was used for core LTP work; what would not?
- How much has been spent on feasibility studies?
- Are schemes funded through other budgets (e.g. CPB) – how / where?
- External funding opportunities.
- Views of ATS stakeholders – is the scheme effective and efficient; is it well managed?

**Provide an initial view as to how this review could lead to efficiencies, improvements and/or transformation:**

To ascertain whether the ATS process is efficient and effective in giving the community an opportunity to influence highway improvements and expenditure while representing and ensuring value for money. If necessary, determine any ways that this could be enhanced or facilitated in a different way for the benefit of all ATS stakeholders.

## **1.0 Executive Summary**

- 1.1 This report outlines the findings and recommendations following the Place Select Committee's scrutiny review of Area Transport Strategy.
- 1.2 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.
- 1.3 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.
- 1.4 Over time, the process has been developed by Officers, in liaison with Members, 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), and if the process effectively engages with the community.
- 1.5 In addition, the ATS scheme 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.
- 1.6 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 was fit for purpose, inclusive, and allowed the public to have the appropriate level of influence, while being an efficient and effective process.
- 1.7 The Committee found that, in recent years, a significant driver behind a further review of the ATS scheme was around the amount of time Local Authority Officers had to spend developing proposals to a particular stage, regardless of whether they were selected for delivery or not – a factor which was of particular concern to the Committee. This resulted in much wasted work on unfunded projects, and therefore led to Areas being asked to submit a maximum of six top 'issues' to be investigated by Officers which then lead to schemes being developed depending on need.
- 1.8 The current annual ATS cycle was outlined which involves pro formas being sent out early in the calendar year, an ATS meeting each spring to receive and prioritise an Area's proposals, and an update on which projects are going forward around three / four months later following collection of survey information. However, the Committee and ATS stakeholders expressed frustration around the administration of ATS meetings (communication, amount of notice given), the amount of time it can take to progress proposals, and the lack of feedback given after the core spring meeting.
- 1.9 ATS stakeholders include a range of individuals and organisations such as Locality Forum members, Ward Councillors, Parish / Town Councils, Emergency Services, and former Road Safety Forum members. Whilst there is extensive representation on each of the four Area Partnerships, the Committee was disappointed to receive only eight responses to its ATS survey, and considered whether this was an indication of either general



satisfaction or perhaps apathy / lack of enthusiasm. Members were also informed that generally older people seem to attend ATS meetings in one particular Area, suggesting that the current scheme may not offer the most appropriate medium for engaging the younger generation in local transport issues.

- 1.10 The types of issues proposed across the four Areas cover three main categories – speeding, sustainable travel and parking. Strikingly, it was estimated that the ATS administration fee (Officer time, including community engagement, feasibility, consultations, Traffic Regulation Orders) could equate to £168,000 annually based on all 24 priority issues leading to schemes (approximately £7,000 costs per scheme) compared to around £54,000 if the same value of Strategic Maintenance schemes were delivered via LTP.
- 1.11 During deliberations on the future of the ATS, Members also noted that only Middlesbrough Council operate a vaguely similar scheme, and that all other Tees Valley authorities rely on Officer-developed schemes. In addition, whilst the original ATS process provided a platform for different Areas to prioritise their own needs depending on their geographical / demographic make-up, the four Area Partnerships had demonstrated that their priorities followed broadly similar themes – this called into question the need to have four separate ATS groups. A counterbalance to any potential changes to the current ATS scheme was the concern expressed by the Committee that there becomes a move to delivering only larger-scale accident-driven proposals, and that more ‘environmental’ projects (currently directed via the ATS) would never be progressed.
- 1.12 After careful consideration of the evidence gathered as part of this review, the Committee felt that the current ATS scheme was no longer the most effective or efficient process in fostering community engagement in transport-related proposals, principally due to the amount of time it takes to progress through the existing ATS annual cycle, and concerns around the communication of any developments relating to suggested projects. Members also recognised that a similar process enabling the community to identify potential solutions to issues across the Borough already exists in the form of the Community Participation Budget (CPB), which provides a quicker response to community-originated suggestions than the ATS presently allows.
- 1.13 The Committee therefore agreed that future annual ATS funding allocations should instead be transferred to the CPB as a ring-fenced amount for each Ward, who could facilitate continued community involvement in identifying transport-related issues and have oversight of any proposed schemes. This approach 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.

## **Recommendations**

The Committee recommend that:

- 1) **The existing ATS scheme ceases at the end of the current financial year (31<sup>st</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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).**

## **2.0 Introduction**

- 2.1 This report outlines the findings and recommendations following the Place Select Committee's scrutiny review of Area Transport Strategy (ATS).
- 2.2 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 was fit for purpose, inclusive, and allowed the public to have the appropriate level of influence, while being an efficient and effective process.
- 2.3 The Committee undertook a number of key lines of enquiry which focused on the following:
- ATS concept – where did it come from; why was it brought in; what did it aim to achieve?
  - ATS process – how does the scheme work; how has this developed over time; Terms of Reference / membership (who decides); individual ATS group boundaries; how much is allocated from the Council's Local Transport Plan funding (has this changed over time); how are decisions reached in terms of what proposals are selected (is this fair / partial); is this consistent across the four ATS groups, Officer time / resource required (inc. potential efficiencies if done differently)?
  - Community involvement – how is this facilitated; what are the benefits of community input; is the level of public influence effective and balanced; how aware are the community re. ATS?
  - Is ATS a cost-effective process for involving the community in the decision-making process and is it achieving its aim? Are there alternative cost-effective ways of achieving the aims of the ATS?
  - Do other Local Authorities involve the community in the selection of highway and transport schemes, and if so, how?
  - How many and what types of projects are proposed; who are they being proposed by; what has been spent in recent years as a percentage of the overall budget, and on which geographical areas; any themes in terms of what is not funded?
  - Decision-making balance – criteria for choosing to support a project/s from all those proposed; cost-benefit (less, more costly projects versus more, less costly).
  - ATS meetings – who is involved; how are meetings managed (inc. papers issued)?
  - How / what schemes would be delivered if the funding was used for core LTP work; what would not?
  - How much has been spent on feasibility studies?
  - Are schemes funded through other budgets (e.g. CPB) – how / where?
  - External funding opportunities.
  - Views of ATS stakeholders – is the scheme effective and efficient; is it well managed?
- 2.4 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 addressed the Committee to give their views on the current ATS scheme.

- 2.5 Recognising the increasing pressure on the Council's finances, it is imperative that in-depth scrutiny reviews promote the Council's policy priorities and, where possible, seek to identify efficiencies and reduce demand for services.

### **3.0 Background**

- 3.1 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.
- 3.2 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.
- 3.3 Over time, the process has been developed by Officers, in liaison with Members, 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), and if the process effectively engages with the community.
- 3.4 In addition, the ATS scheme 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.

## **4.0 Findings**

### **ATS Concept and Process**

4.1 The Area Transport Strategy (ATS) scheme forms part of the Council's Local Transport Plan (LTP). The LTP is a statutory, forward-looking strategy document, detailing current transport issues in a local area, and encompasses a delivery plan aimed at meeting objectives to overcome the identified issues. The main priorities of Stockton-on-Tees' current LTP are to:

- support national economic competitiveness and growth;
- reduce transport's emissions, with the desired outcome of tackling climate change;
- contribute to better safety, security and health by reducing the risk of death / injury and by promoting travel modes that are beneficial to health;
- promote greater equality of opportunity for all citizens, with the desired outcome of achieving a fairer society;
- improve quality of life for transport users and non-transport users, and to promote a healthy natural environment.

4.2 The Government (via the Tees Valley Combined Authority) provides annual funding to Local Highway Authorities to implement their LTPs in the form of a Highways Maintenance Block (typically £2.6m for Stockton-on-Tees) and Integrated Transport Block (typically £1.2m for Stockton-on-Tees). The schemes identified via ATS are funded from the Integrated Transport Block along with the other schemes identified to meet the objectives set out in Stockton-on-Tees' LTP.

4.3 Initiated in 2005 (as part of the 2006-2011 LTP) in response to a Government initiative to increase community involvement, ATS provided four area-based sub-strategies for local transport issues recognising the polycentric nature of the Borough and the difference in transport priorities in those areas. The areas were based on the four Area Boards of the Local Strategic Partnership, the forebear to the Locality Forums.

4.4 Initially, any constituted group registered with SCRAGA (now Catalyst) was invited onto ATS Steering Groups. This has since been refined to the following to ensure a transport focus:

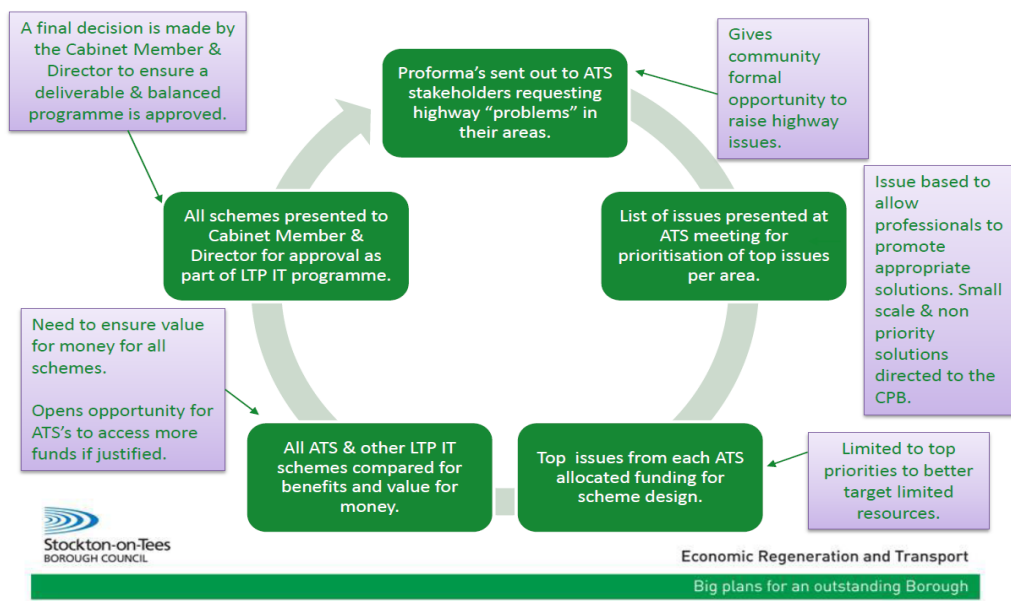
- Locality Forum members
- Ward Councillors
- Parish / Town Councils
- Emergency Services main bus operators
- Former Road Safety Forum members

In 2010, a further public consultation exercise was undertaken with Viewpoint (the Council's voluntary, residents' consultation panel which seeks the views of residents using monthly surveys that cover a range of council services) to determine transport priorities in each of the four ATS areas for the 2011-2016 LTP.

4.5 From its inception, Steering Groups for each Area agreed their top five priorities and were allocated £25,000 per annum to tackle these. Since 2008-2009, Officers scored subsequent schemes based on Area, national and Tees

Valley priorities, deliverability and value-for-money (scoring matrix circulated to Committee Members) – stakeholders then agreed schemes to be delivered (carried out by vote if agreement was not possible), with the final approval being determined by the Director of Economic Growth and Development Services in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport. Over the years, the amount of money available to each Area has incrementally increased to £45,000 per annum, of which £15,000 was to be allocated specifically to sustainable (walking/cycling) travel schemes.

- 4.6 A process review in 2014 led to the creation of an additional Borough-wide pot of funding of £100,000 to allow delivery of larger-scale schemes prioritised by stakeholders.
- 4.7 Prior to 2017, all schemes, regardless of whether they were selected for delivery or not, were developed to a certain stage which was a resource-intensive process. To reduce the amount of unproductive work spent on unfunded schemes, the process was reviewed – rather than stakeholders selecting schemes for delivery, they are now asked for the top ‘issues’ to be investigated by Officers which then leads to schemes being developed depending on need (no cap on cost level of schemes, providing benefits can be demonstrated). The current process is as follows:



- 4.8 Some Members felt the current scoring matrix was rather cumbersome and questioned whether schemes were approved on a political basis. It was noted that the matrix was an Officer-led process, but that the ATS group decide on which priorities to put forward for approval, with the matrix acting as a guide rather than a decisive tool.
- 4.9 In terms of the annual scheduling, ATS pro formas are sent out in January / February each year to get stakeholders thinking ahead of the usual spring-time meeting. An update on whether schemes are going forward is provided around three / four months later following collection of survey information. Relevant Ward Councillors will be consulted if a scheme is being developed. It was noted that schemes can take time to progress depending on the nature

of the proposal, and the fact that ATS submissions are a small part of the overall LTP work programme (only 3-4% of the total work).

### Decision-Making: Projects Proposed and Funded

#### *Area Priorities*

4.10 As previously stated, from its inception, Steering Groups for each Area agreed their top five priorities – this was considered an important part of the process as different Areas may have differing needs depending on their geographical / demographic make-up. The agreed 2017 priorities for each Area was outlined as follows:

Area	Objective 1	Objective 2	Objective 3	Objective 4	Objective 5
<b>Central</b>	Tackling congestion associated with the 'school run'.	Tackling inconsiderate parking.	Footpath maintenance is essential: highlighting kerbs on pedestrian crossings.	Improvements to Road Safety including provision of adequate street lighting and tackling excessive speed.	Improvements to public transport provision across the area.
<b>Northern</b>	Improvements to the walking and cycling network.	Tackling Excessive speeds on local roads.	Improvements to public transport provision across the area.	Addressing issues around the volume of Heavy Goods Vehicles passing through the area.	Improvements to Billingham Rail Station.
<b>Eastern</b>	Improvements to public transport provision across the area.	Tackling Inconsiderate parking.	Cycle lanes on the majority of Thornaby's major roads.	Addressing the issue of existing and future levels of congestion in Ingleby Barwick.	Support the actions associated with School Travel Plans by providing new / improved infrastructure where appropriate.
<b>Western</b>	School parking issues.	Improvements to Road Safety including tackling excessive speeds, reducing accidents and educating vulnerable users.	Reduce unnecessary commercial vehicle movements in the Yarm and Eaglescliffe area.	Improvements to footpaths and cycleways.	Reduce delays on Yarm High Street to secure viability of bus routes.



The previous table demonstrates that, whilst the four Area Partnerships cover a mix of urban and rural patches, many general issues affect them all (e.g. school parking, inconsiderate parking, congestion, public transport improvement).

### Spend

- 4.11 Over the last five years, ATS spend has totalled over £600,000, and has annually represented between 4-15% of the overall Integrated Transport Block allocation (the lower end of this scale occurred in 2017-2018 when the ATS process changed to its current guise).

#### Previous Process

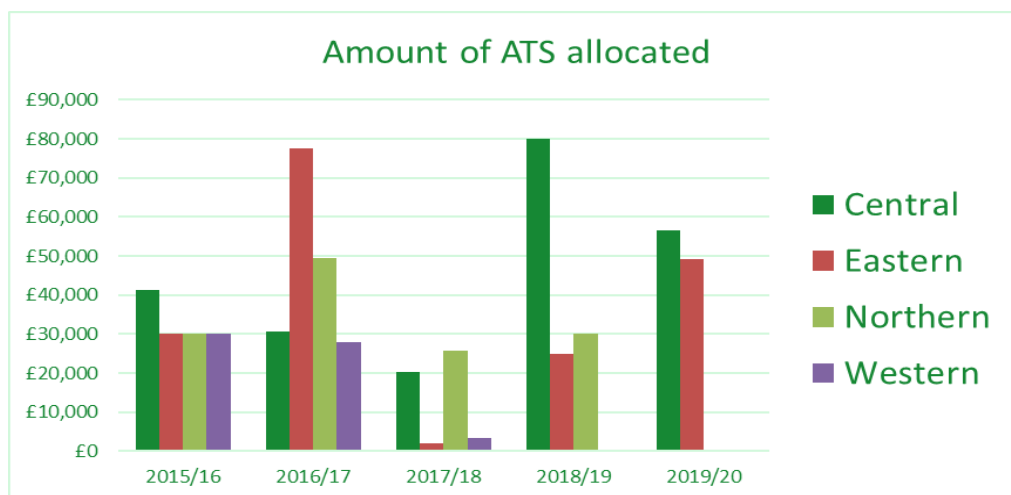
Year	Number of Schemes requested	Number of Schemes Funded	Total ATS spend
2015/16	50	22	£131,250
2016/17	25	18	£185,650

#### Current Process

Year	Number prioritised	Number of schemes developed	Number of schemes implemented	Spend
2017/18	23	12	6	£ 51,500
2018/19	24	15	6	£ 135,000
2019/20	23	0	5	£ 105,700

As seen above, the total number of schemes prioritised in the last three years (2017-2018 to 2019-2020) under the current process (70) is less than the total number of schemes requested in the previous two years (2015-2016 to 2016-2017) under the last process (75). However, the schemes being implemented under the current process are larger and more expensive than those funded during the previous process.

- 4.12 Variations in the amounts of ATS spend across the four Area Partnerships since 2015-2016 was demonstrated. As seen in the next graph, Central had the highest spend (approx. £230,000) and Western the lowest (approx. £60,000).



4.13 The number of issues raised per Area was shown, and whilst there were no particular outliers, it was noted that Western had an increasing number since 2017-2018, yet there had been zero spend in that Area in the last two years. The ATS Chair of Western understood that although requests were being put forward, they might not necessarily be considered or accepted as viable projects, either before or after investigation by Local Authority Officers.

#### *Spend by Category*

4.14 Over the last five years, ATS spend could be broken down into the following categories:

- Speeding (88 projects proposed, totalling £357,600) – any issue relating to speeding traffic.
- Sustainable Travel (51 projects proposed, totalling £213,000) – issues relating to pedestrians, cyclists and buses having difficulties in an area.
- Parking (25 projects proposed, totalling £38,500) – issues relating to parking causing an obstruction or request for additional parking.
- Other (19 projects proposed, totalling £0) – issues relating to traffic flow, e.g. difficulty exiting a junction.

The Committee noted the use of funds for sustainable transport, and observed that the public perception of the ATS may be more towards road safety projects. Officers also stated that the ATS was made up of capital funding only, so cannot support revenue-making schemes.

#### *Category by Area*

4.15 The total number of projects proposed (though not necessarily funded) over the last five years, broken down by category across each of the four Area Partnerships, was also demonstrated as follows:

- Central: Speeding 32, Sustainable Travel 14, Parking 2, Other 0
- Eastern: Speeding 19, Sustainable Travel 18, Parking 1, Other 9
- Northern: Speeding 23, Sustainable Travel 9, Parking 10, Other 1
- Western: Speeding 14, Sustainable Travel 10, Parking 12, Other 9

## Efficiency and Effectiveness

4.16 The Committee was presented with analysis of estimated total Officer time which compared the demands of meetings between the previous and current process, as well as staff costs associated with a typical ATS speed management scheme and a highway maintenance scheme undertaken via the Strategic Maintenance programme (see below).

	Community Engagement Team	Total Officer Time (inc. Community Engagement)	Civil's Costs	Total Cost	% Officer Time
Meetings (Old Process)	£932	£14,366.00	£ -	£14,366	N/A
Meetings (Current Process)	£466	£906.00	£ -	£906	N/A
Typical Speed Management Scheme via ATS	N/A	£7,134.00	£30,000	£37,134	24%
Highway Maintenance scheme through Strategic Maintenance	N/A	£2,260.00	£30,000	£32,260	8%

Key features highlighted in relation to this analysis included:

- Meetings (Old Process): each issue raised was investigated before schemes were selected. Total cost (£14,366) equates to around 300 Officer hours.
- Meetings (Current Process): Area Partnerships prioritising schemes themselves, leading to a drastic reduction in Officer hours.
- Typical Speed Management Scheme via ATS: labour-intensive, Officer time includes feasibility, consultations, surveys, investigations, design and Traffic Regulation Orders. Based on the potential for 24 ATS schemes being put forward for delivery in any one financial year (six per Area Partnership), the £7,000 costs for Officer time could equate to an annual £168,000 administrative fee (compared to around £54,000 when delivering Strategic Maintenance schemes).

Reflecting on those schemes that are initiated via ATS, Local Authority Officers noted that it is difficult to answer if these projects are achieving their objectives as no work is done to assess their impact.

4.17 Members expressed concern regarding the amount of Officer time being taken to investigate proposals that are put forward by each of the ATS groups (maximum of six per group per annum), a number of which are not ultimately approved. Suggestions were made that the maximum number may need to be reduced further.

### *What if there was no ATS?*

- 4.18 The Committee were keen to understand what schemes would / would not be delivered if the ATS funding was instead used for core LTP work. Examples of LTP spend from the 2019-2020 programme were provided which met the four LTP objectives of supporting economic growth, road safety, network management, and accessibility.
- 4.19 It was noted that a number of ATS projects are speed-related rather than based on crash incident hotspots – Members therefore expressed concern that if the ATS did not exist, there would be a sole focus on accident-driven schemes rather than more 'environmental' proposals. Local Authority Officers acknowledged that, without the ATS, the vast majority of schemes that come through that process would probably not be funded, and the public perception of the benefits of the ATS would be lost. The Council do however fund speed-related schemes in order to increase walking / cycling (not just due to accidents), though not to the numbers currently funded via the ATS process.
- 4.20 Members queried how many proposals come via Parish Councils and community groups. The Committee were informed that in recent years, most suggestions are put forward by Ward Councillors (though Western was more 50/50 between Parish and Ward), though it was recognised that these Councillors can be acting on behalf of other groups (it is not always their own concept, but Councillors may be considered to have more 'clout'). The ATS Chair for Western questioned whether the community understand the benefits of the ATS scheme, thereby inhibiting their desire to become involved.
- 4.21 Local Authority Officers drew attention to the amount of money required to simply maintain assets across the Borough, and stated that current Central Government funding levels were not enough to keep infrastructure at a steady state. This needs to be factored in when proactively seeking and considering potential new schemes (whether these are funded via ATS or LTP).

### Stakeholder Views

- 4.22 To capture a range of views on the current ATS scheme from the numerous stakeholders, a survey was issued in September 2019 to members of all four Area Partnerships via the Council's Engagement Team (who issue ATS invitations and meeting papers). Despite the original three-week deadline being extended by a further week, only eight completed surveys were returned (see Appendix 1). Concerns were expressed about:
- Awareness of the scheme – what it is for / not for.
  - Management of the meetings – communication, amount of notice given, etc.
  - Feedback to stakeholders as the process progresses.
- 4.23 Regarding the latter, it was suggested that there was not enough enthusiasm for people to come and put their views forward. In addition, whilst ATS meetings are the focal point for presenting ideas and getting initial feedback, there can be frustration that nothing appears to happen until the next meeting (whenever that is scheduled) or that there are inevitable financial constraints.

- 4.24 Members raised the possibility that the lack of survey responses could indicate either a lack of enthusiasm for the scheme or, alternatively, satisfaction with how things currently operate.
- 4.25 The ATS Chair of Western noted that those who do attend ATS meetings are generally older, and considered if there were generational differences in attitudes to transport issues. Members also pondered whether the way the current ATS process works offers the most appropriate medium for younger people.

#### Future Options

- 4.26 When considering potential future options, the Committee were keen to understand if / how other Local Authorities involve the community in the selection of highway and transport schemes. The Committee were informed that, of the other four Tees Valley Local Authorities, only Middlesbrough Borough Council operates a vaguely similar scheme – Officers receive issues and scheme suggestions from Councillors and the general public; all are logged and then scored using a matrix to determine the benefits. All other Tees Valley authorities rely on officer developed schemes.
- 4.27 The North East Transport Advisory Group were contacted for comment from wider North East authorities but no responses were received. However, Local Authority Officers felt that it was unlikely that many other Councils operate similar schemes to the one SBC run.
- 4.28 Alternative delivery options considered by the Committee were as follows (see Appendix 2):
- 1) the continuation of the current scheme.
  - 2) the continuation of the current scheme, but reducing the amount of proposals the four Areas can prioritise (from six to two / three).
  - 3) remove geographic split and allow each Ward to receive 'issues' and then prioritise one issue (all prioritised issues investigated).
  - 4) remove ATS and transfer part of Integrated Transport funding to the Community Participation Budget (CPB) – increase current CPB budget on a Ward-by-Ward basis determined by population per ward (or another metric such as percentage of highway per Ward).
  - 5) remove ATS process and prioritise schemes at officer level for sign off by Director and Cabinet Member. Issues will be data led – Modelling, Road Safety, Car Park capacity.

## **5.0 Conclusion & Recommendations**

- 5.1 Since its inception in 2005 as a response to a Government initiative to increase community involvement, the ATS scheme provided four area-based sub-strategies for local transport issues recognising the polycentric nature of the Borough and the difference in transport priorities in those areas. However, whilst four 'Area Partnerships' (Central, Eastern, Northern and Western) still exist, the Committee was informed of a number of alterations to the level of funding available, the criteria for successful bids, and the process for selecting projects which had been made over the years in an attempt to make the ATS scheme more efficient and effective for all stakeholders.
- 5.2 In recent years, a significant driver behind a further review of the ATS scheme was around the amount of time Local Authority Officers had to spend developing proposals to a particular stage, regardless of whether they were selected for delivery or not – a factor which was of particular concern to the Committee. This resulted in much wasted work on unfunded projects, and therefore led to Areas being asked to submit a maximum of six top 'issues' to be investigated by Officers which then lead to schemes being developed depending on need.
- 5.3 The current annual ATS cycle was outlined which involves pro formas being sent out early in the calendar year, an ATS meeting each spring to receive and prioritise an Area's proposals, and an update on which projects are going forward around three / four months later following collection of survey information. However, the Committee and ATS stakeholders expressed frustration around the administration of ATS meetings (communication, amount of notice given), the amount of time it can take to progress proposals, and the lack of feedback given after the core spring meeting.
- 5.4 ATS stakeholders include a range of individuals and organisations such as Locality Forum members, Ward Councillors, Parish / Town Councils, Emergency Services, and former Road Safety Forum members. Whilst there is extensive representation on each of the four Area Partnerships, the Committee was disappointed to receive only eight responses to its ATS survey, and considered whether this was an indication of either general satisfaction or perhaps apathy / lack of enthusiasm. Members were also informed that generally older people seem to attend ATS meetings in one particular Area, suggesting that the current scheme may not offer the most appropriate medium for engaging the younger generation in local transport issues.
- 5.5 The types of issues proposed across the four Areas cover three main categories – speeding, sustainable travel and parking. Strikingly, it was estimated that the ATS administration fee (Officer time, including community engagement, feasibility, consultations, Traffic Regulation Orders) could equate to £168,000 annually based on all 24 priority issues leading to schemes (approximately £7,000 costs per scheme) compared to around £54,000 if the same value of Strategic Maintenance schemes were delivered via LTP.
- 5.6 During deliberations on the future of the ATS, Members also noted that only Middlesbrough Council operate a vaguely similar scheme, and that all other Tees Valley authorities rely on Officer-developed schemes. In addition, whilst the original ATS process provided a platform for different Areas to prioritise

their own needs depending on their geographical / demographic make-up, the four Area Partnerships had demonstrated that their priorities followed broadly similar themes – this called into question the need to have four separate ATS groups. A counterbalance to any potential changes to the current ATS scheme was the concern expressed by the Committee that there becomes a move to delivering only larger-scale accident-driven proposals, and that more ‘environmental’ projects (currently directed via the ATS) would never be progressed.

- 5.7 After careful consideration of the evidence gathered as part of this review, the Committee felt that the current ATS scheme was no longer the most effective or efficient process in fostering community engagement in transport-related proposals, principally due to the amount of time it takes to progress through the existing ATS annual cycle, and concerns around the communication of any developments relating to suggested projects. Members also recognised that a similar process enabling the community to identify potential solutions to issues across the Borough already exists in the form of the Community Participation Budget (CPB), which provides a quicker response to community-originated suggestions than the ATS presently allows.
- 5.8 The Committee therefore agreed that future annual ATS funding allocations should instead be transferred to the CPB as a ring-fenced amount for each Ward, who could facilitate continued community involvement in identifying transport-related issues and have oversight of any proposed schemes. This approach 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.

### **Recommendations**

The Committee recommend that:

- 1) The existing ATS scheme ceases at the end of the current financial year (31<sup>st</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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.**

**Recommendations (continued)**

The Committee recommend that:

- 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).**



## APPENDIX 1: ATS Stakeholder Survey Responses

<b>2. Are you clear on the ATS process – do you understand how it works?</b>			
<b>Area Partnership:</b>	Central Area Partnership	<b>Involved for how long:</b>	8 years
Yes			
<b>Area Partnership:</b>	Central Area Partnership	<b>Involved for how long:</b>	6 years
No – have not attended a meeting for many years as it did not seem very well organised then. How it has developed since my last meeting I do not know. I did not understand how it worked when I attended.			
<b>Area Partnership:</b>	Central Area Partnership	<b>Involved for how long:</b>	2 years
I do understand it.			
<b>Area Partnership:</b>	Eastern Area Partnership	<b>Involved for how long:</b>	
Unsure – would need further clarification re. <u>timings</u> of applications, meetings, etc.			
<b>Area Partnership:</b>	Northern Area Partnership	<b>Involved for how long:</b>	4 years
Yes. You put your proposals forward. They are assessed and put forward to the meeting where discussion takes place on which to take forward. Usually the ones meeting the criteria the best i.e. safety etc. are at the top of the list. If there are only a few requests put in then they all move on to the next stage.			
<b>Area Partnership:</b>	Northern Area Partnership	<b>Involved for how long:</b>	4 years
I am clear on the ATS process, but it does not seem to work as advertised all the time. There is no feedback once a scheme has been submitted, no consultation on proposed solutions, and no updating of status/planning/implementation to the member that submitted it. In an election year forms are sent out in February, but members have no idea if they will be re-elected in May. The timing in election years should be post-election not pre-election. This year I chose not to complete a form as I did not know I would be re-elected, the date of the meeting was also not re-advertised post-election, so I was not invited and missed the opportunity to submit.			
<b>Area Partnership:</b>	Western Area Partnership	<b>Involved for how long:</b>	
Yes			
<b>Area Partnership:</b>	n/a	<b>Involved for how long:</b>	n/a
Yes			

## APPENDIX 1: ATS Stakeholder Survey Responses

<b>3. Do you attend ATS meetings? If so, are these managed well (e.g. invitations to meetings, circulation of papers, opportunity to speak)?</b>			
<b>Area Partnership:</b>	Central Area Partnership	<b>Involved for how long:</b>	8 years
<p>Yes I have attended, apart from the last 2.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is not enough notice given of the date of the meeting, which is difficult for a parish council / community group to be able to organise who can go.</li> <li>• The agenda is not sent out anywhere near enough in advance for a Parish Council / Community Group to be able to discuss beforehand. These organisations only meet monthly very often, if that.</li> <li>• The papers sent out are not very understandable, and need some interpretation as to what various columns mean.</li> <li>• The papers do not make clear what the options are for an organisation. For instance can they suggest alternatives, how much is already decided, do they need to bring agreement of funds available to match fund to the meeting.</li> <li>• There is no reference to the "marking system" on the papers for them to refer to before the meeting so there is a proper understanding of how a proposal is marked for when they get to the meeting.</li> <li>• The minutes of the last meeting are not sent out till the last minute.</li> <li>• Maps of locations that are shown on power points are not set into context as to where they actually are in relation to other estates / villages.</li> <li>• Whilst there are opportunities to speak in the meeting, the meeting can be overtaken by arguments between councillors, which is intimidating for some. Behaviour is not always of a high standard.</li> </ul>			
<b>Area Partnership:</b>	Central Area Partnership	<b>Involved for how long:</b>	6 years
<p>No. The last meeting, I attended was years ago. At that time we had to wait in a separate room while the agenda formulated.</p>			
<b>Area Partnership:</b>	Central Area Partnership	<b>Involved for how long:</b>	2 years
<p>I attended one where I submitted a proposal. And the second one I had to send apologies for but I submitted a proposal and discussed it with officers in advance so they could present it on my behalf. The one meeting I did attend seemed well attended and everything was fine. We get plenty of time to pull proposals together in the run up to the meeting.</p>			
<b>Area Partnership:</b>	Eastern Area Partnership	<b>Involved for how long:</b>	
<p>Have not attended any meetings as yet, but Hilton Council has plans to attend future meetings.</p>			
<b>Area Partnership:</b>	Northern Area Partnership	<b>Involved for how long:</b>	4 years
<p>Usually I or my fellow Ward Member would attend. Notification of meeting sent out months in advance but not by meeting request where it would go into your diary. We missed the one just after the May elections due to this. Everything else is ok.</p>			

## APPENDIX 1: ATS Stakeholder Survey Responses

<b>Area Partnership:</b>	Northern Area Partnership	<b>Involved for how long:</b>	4 years
I do attend ATS meetings, when I am made aware of them. Meeting notices are not sent using Outlook but via Email. Dates are set which often conflict with other meetings, using Outlook diaries would help to alleviate this.			
<b>Area Partnership:</b>	Western Area Partnership	<b>Involved for how long:</b>	
Yes. Fairly managed with reasonable opportunity to speak. The online submissions have changed the opportunity for some attendees to participate.			
<b>Area Partnership:</b>	n/a	<b>Involved for how long:</b>	n/a
No – I am no longer a member.			

### 4. ATS was set-up to provide communities with direct input on investment in transport schemes in their local area – do you think that the current scheme delivers this (please explain your answer)?

<b>Area Partnership:</b>	Central Area Partnership	<b>Involved for how long:</b>	8 years
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not necessarily.</li> <li>• Organisations do not necessarily understand just what they can apply for.</li> <li>• Match funding can be difficult if not impossible to find for some organisations.</li> <li>• The public are not aware of what sort of proposals to put forward via their councillor.</li> <li>• Very often there is only the funding available for feasibility studies for larger projects. Smaller <u>one's</u> that are more about sustainable transport, or just small local projects are not put forward.</li> <li>• The process is something of a mystery to most people.</li> </ul>			
<b>Area Partnership:</b>	Central Area Partnership	<b>Involved for how long:</b>	6 years
Having not attended for many years I find it difficult to answer. My recollection was that schemes accrued points for safety, predestination etc. It seemed to me that the public had little input – most input was by the borough councillors.			
<b>Area Partnership:</b>	Central Area Partnership	<b>Involved for how long:</b>	2 years
As far as I can determine, in our area, the community input comes through individual requests to parish, town and borough councillors, or through TRAs where they take part, hoping that those elected members or organisations will put forward their local concerns. This is rather imperfect but it is better than there being no mechanism at all for the community to raise local issues.			

## APPENDIX 1: ATS Stakeholder Survey Responses

<b>Area Partnership:</b>	Eastern Area Partnership	<b>Involved for how long:</b>	
Unsure of process – unable to answer.			
<b>Area Partnership:</b>	Northern Area Partnership	<b>Involved for how long:</b>	4 years
Yes. Our residents I don't think understand it but seem ok when we explain what we are doing to improve things in the Ward.			
<b>Area Partnership:</b>	Northern Area Partnership	<b>Involved for how long:</b>	4 years
It allows direct input, but see comments above on implementation or non-implementation. There is just NO feedback everything seems to disappear in to a black hole, and then it's a complete surprise if/when it is implemented.			
<b>Area Partnership:</b>	Western Area Partnership	<b>Involved for how long:</b>	
Inputs are reduced. The shift in transport strategy to the TVCA which in the current status with no declared strategy it is difficult for SBC to respond to questions relating to transport investment schemes.			

### 5. Is there anything in your view that would improve / enhance the ATS scheme?

<b>Area Partnership:</b>	Central Area Partnership	<b>Involved for how long:</b>	8 years
Clearer information well in advance, which includes : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What has happened, including minutes, but importantly updates on schemes previously decided upon.</li> <li>• Better notice given</li> <li>• Clearer layout and explanation, before the meeting, so matters can be discussed with others in a particular community group or parish council</li> <li>• Better explanation of match funding.</li> </ul> Also <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding that not all organisations have access to match funding when decisions are made, as proposals can be excluded my people present at the meeting if none is offered.</li> <li>• It be built into the timescales that if a parish council is to match fund, they need to know how much to put aside when they begin their budget making in November.</li> </ul>			

## APPENDIX 1: ATS Stakeholder Survey Responses

<b>Area Partnership:</b>	Central Area Partnership	<b>Involved for how long:</b>	6 years
Make more transparent and give it more publicity for the public to be aware of its existence.			
<b>Area Partnership:</b>	Central Area Partnership	<b>Involved for how long:</b>	2 years
Being allowed to put forward schemes where there have been no casualties and having some chance of success. (I think you call those "environmental" schemes).			
A menu of possible things people might want to propose and how much those things might cost, broadly. So a list might say "Average zebra crossing costs £30k, average pelican crossing costs £100k, buying a mobile speeding van for the police costs £75k" etc so that people are realistic about what is achievable.			
Being able to suggest schemes that go across ward or locality boundaries – the ring roads affect us all for instance. But currently, although technically we might be able to do that, there is nowhere in the process that says "Have you thought about making a joint proposals with other wards or forums?"			
<b>Area Partnership:</b>	Eastern Area Partnership	<b>Involved for how long:</b>	
As the Council only meets 6 times a year, notice of meetings, completed pro <u>formas</u> need to be given well in advance of the dates to allow for discussion at HPC meetings.			
<b>Area Partnership:</b>	Northern Area Partnership	<b>Involved for how long:</b>	4 years
I preferred the original system. Also it takes too long to go from one stage to another as schemes have to get worked up with limited staff.			
<b>Area Partnership:</b>	Northern Area Partnership	<b>Involved for how long:</b>	4 years
The system would be enhanced immensely if feedback to and consultations with the submitting member were available. I have an idea what my residents want/need, but have no way to influence what ATS thinks is correct. See above.			
<b>Area Partnership:</b>	Western Area Partnership	<b>Involved for how long:</b>	
The ATS must require TVCA representatives to attend, report and respond to questions.			
<b>Area Partnership:</b>	n/a	<b>Involved for how long:</b>	n/a
I support the move to allocating resources to where there is the most need rather than an area based allocation with decisions being made by unelected, unaccountable Area Partnerships. One concern/complaint I have is that there is little, if any, communication of progress in between the 6 monthly meetings even when you have a prioritised project proposal.			

## APPENDIX 2: Alternative Delivery Options

No.	Options	Comments
	<i>For information only – Previous process (pre-2017).</i>	<i>Projects did not necessarily address technical issues. High level of cost for administration and officer time in scheme preparation and scoring. Did involve community process.</i>
1	Current process.	More efficient and cost effective way to address issues than above. Involves community via Locality Forums. Indifferent engagement across areas. Ensures there is a technical need for a scheme. Can take a long time for decisions to be made on schemes.
2	Current process with fewer issues per area prioritised by stakeholders (currently 6 could go to 2 or 3).	Reduced workload to investigate Fewer schemes to deliver. Less spent on fees therefore more for scheme delivery. Involves community via Locality Forums. Indifferent engagement across areas. Ensures there is a technical need for a scheme. Schemes can be implemented sooner although some schemes will still take a long time.
3	Remove geographic split and allow each ward to receive 'issues' and then prioritise one issue. All prioritised issues investigated.	Increase in number of issues submitted (potentially up to 26) Ensure fair geographical split of submission of schemes. Maintains community involvement. Likely to take a long time for decisions to be made on schemes. Could lead to inconsistency across areas.
4	Remove ATS and transfer funding to the Community Participation Budget. Increase current CPB budget on a ward by ward basis based on population per ward (or another metric such as KM's of road per ward).	Additional CPB amount ranging from £3.5k to £12.4k based on population. Gives Members the oversight of the process. Provides community involvement via direct contact through Members. The process exists to operate this already. Will be quicker responding to community issues than current ATS. Money can be spent on community rather than technical priorities.
5	Remove ATS process and prioritise schemes at officer level for sign off by Director and Cabinet Member. Issues will be data led – Modelling, Road Safety, Car Park capacity.	Transfers administration costs into scheme development and delivery. Community involvement maintained via suggestions from Members and the public being taken into account. Likely to lead to larger schemes being delivered, therefore more efficient. Likely to lead to less smaller local schemes being delivered like those currently funded via the ATS. Schemes prioritised based on current LTP / transport policies.