

GROWTH AND INFRASTRUCTURE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

17 September 2012

AREA STEWARDSHIP FUND

UPDATE ON DELIVERY PROGRESS FOR 2012/13

**Report by
Deputy Director for Environment & Economy (Commercial)**

Introduction

1. Area Stewardship forms a part of the strategy for the Highways and Transport (H&T) Service. It's intention is to:
 - Deliver high quality, consistent frontline engagement with local communities
 - Act as the liaison point with elected members across all 3 tiers of local government
 - Understand the needs of the community and the highway network
 - Develop programmes of work for highway improvements
 - Operate "Pride in the Patch" and "One Team" delivery
2. In order to facilitate the delivery of this strategy, an Area Stewardship Fund (ASF) was established with an initial 18 month funding period. This funding was allocated to meet the prioritised needs of the community. Additional funding has been made available to support this initiative for 2012/13, with an in year budget of £2.4m.

Allocation of Funds and Governance

3. Funding has been allocated using the 14 localities model, with higher funding allocated to the 6 priority areas. As part of this on-going process, it is anticipated that as the fund develops towns and parishes could add their own funds to help meet specific local needs. This will further enhance the opportunities the ASF could deliver.
4. Each of the 14 localities has a defined group of County Councillors and allocated Lead Members. Each group has been tasked with prioritising their funding allocation. The Highways Area Steward works with Locality Member Group, engaging the necessary technical and professional support from within the H&T service. Once projects have

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been identified and developed, they are then prioritised considering such factors as cost, delivery, scheme suitability and other stakeholder considerations.

5. Whilst there are no specific limitations on how the ASF can be spent, it must be used for highway related schemes, which includes Public Rights of Way.
6. The Locality Member Group may wish to consider a number of potential areas to utilise their allocation of the ASF, including maintenance areas which have seen budgetary pressure or low cost schemes where clear public interest has been expressed. Examples of the potential use for the ASF include:
 - Carriageway repairs
 - Environmental enhancement projects
 - Drainage/Gully emptying
 - Footway repairs
 - Signing and lining
 - Minor improvement schemes
 - Grass/verge maintenance
 - Dropped crossings
 - Minor bridge repairs
 - Noxious weed control

TIMELINES

7. A fundamental objective of the delivery strategy is to ensure that the ASF is spent and delivered in a timely and appropriate fashion. At the outset, it was intended that the programme should be in place and ready for price estimating as early in the financial year as possible. This objective is aligned with our aspiration to deliver the works programme by each December to reduce the risk of non-delivery associated with adverse weather.

2012/13 CURRENT POSITION BY LOCALITY

8. Varying progress is being made towards spending the full 2012/13 ASF. Some localities have either fully committed their allocation or are well on the way to doing so. In other localities, more emphasis is required to prioritising and committing spend for this financial year. The following outlines the current position by locality:

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	Locality	2012/13 Allocation £	Delivered/Committed £	Available £	Available %
West Oxfordshire	Charlbury/Chipping Norton/Woodstock	£120,390	£47,221	£73,169	61%
	Burford/Carterton	£242,000	£57,885	£155,685	73%
	Witney/Eynsham	£122,425	£40,235	£82,190	67%
South Oxfordshire	Didcot	£244,000	£200,875	£22,626	10%
	Thame	£111,285	£108,436	£2,849	3%
	Henley	£120,000	£95,153	£16,706	15%
	Wallingford	£114,507	£94,779	£19,728	17%
Cherwell	Kidlington	£124,102	£26,564	£97,538	79%
	Bicester	£247,947	£247,947	£0	0%
	Banbury	£245,046	£72,318	£172,728	70%
Vale of White Horse	Abingdon	£234,000	£153,000	£86,872	36%
	Faringdon	£116,532	£80,300	£36,232	31%
	Wantage & Grove	£125,779	£84,000	£41,779	33%
Oxford	City	£244,000	£70,424	£129,576	65%
TOTALS		£2,413m	£1,379m	£1,034m	42%

DELIVERY CAPACITY FOR UNCOMMITTED FUNDING

11. Whilst considering the risks of underspend and/or non-delivery, we need to consider delivery capacity as we move through the financial year.
12. Smaller value works attract a lower level of risk due to the nature of the work involved and the process they need to follow prior to delivery on the ground. This type of work, which includes such things as minor refurbishments, weed killing and dropped crossings, will continue to be delivered and programmed via the operational workforce where on-going programmes of work are in place.
13. With higher value schemes, a more involved process is required prior to delivery on the ground. Sufficient time is required for site walk and talks, feasibility studies, design, price estimating, Traffic Regulation Orders (TRO's) and to comply with our obligations under the Traffic Management Act (TMA). In addition, the overall highways delivery

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programme needs to be able to accommodate, notwithstanding the risks associated with adverse weather.

14. The delivery of the Area Stewards Fund schemes need to be programmed alongside the rest of the Councils schemes. To accommodate the additional £1m of maintenance funding the current programme is back loaded and so late decisions on ASF schemes may mean that delivery within the financial year is not possible as resource is already allocated elsewhere.
15. At the time of writing, capacity and time exists to mitigate these risks, provided we expedite schemes for approval from the remaining ASF funds not currently committed.

ENCOURAGING LOCALITIES TO COMMIT SPEND

16. Following initial launch where the purpose of the ASF was explained and the overall process outlined, a number of key activities have been on-going to encourage commitment of outstanding funds. These include:
 - ASF and process 'Locality Meeting' and workshops
 - Individual meetings with Area Stewards and every elected member, and on-going 1-2-1's
 - Attendance and briefings at Parish Council meetings
 - Monthly reports on progress
 - Personal reminder e-mail from Councillor Rose
 - On-going discussions to help identify work or approve priced work
 - Further 1-2-1 sessions where submissions or sign offs were not forthcoming
 - Briefing packs
17. To further help facilitate the drive for fund commitment, a price book has been developed which outlines the indicative lump sum costs and timescales associated with a typical work type. This will serve as a quick reference guide for members when considering various proposals. This document is a tool to assist in assessing the cost of construction work, aimed at helping Members identify schemes that they can afford and making choices between the options they want to consider.

We have established a system so that we can be certain of the cost associated with each item delivered under the ASF. This system clearly identifies category of spend and is the basis for monitoring trends and regularly updating the price book in terms of accuracy and completeness.

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18. The next round of 'Locality Meetings' (scheduled throughout September 2012) will also be used to discuss the Fund in more detail, focusing on each individual locality. Officers from E&E will attend each locality meeting to help stimulate scheme suggestions where there is sufficient underspend/non-committal.

RANGE OF PROJECTS DELIVERED/COMMITTED

19. A wide variety of schemes have been approved and committed, with a number already delivered on the ground. These include both maintenance and improvement works as well as new works in certain areas. Examples include:
- Traffic management scheme improvement
 - New and refurbished footways
 - Parking restriction extensions or minor modifications
 - Dropped kerbs to improve access in town centre for the disabled and parents with children
 - Verge improvements in urban areas
 - Surveys to consider future transport strategy improvements
 - Winter maintenance facilities
 - Contributions to bus shelters
 - Siding out of existing footways and paths
 - Maintenance of vegetation on minor routes
 - Verge protection
20. It is important to consider the impact of whole-life costing when considering potential schemes for the ASF. For electrical items, consideration will need to be given to a whole-life cost at the outset providing 30 year maintenance cover. Hard construction will be different, where on-going maintenance liability would be expected to be minimal in the years immediately following construction.

This Committee is asked to:

- i) Note the progress made during 2012/13;
- ii) Use the Locality Meetings in September to further consider potential schemes in their 'patch' where underspend exists

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