

SCRUTINY COMMISSION

29 March 2022

Report Title	Major Highways Capital Works
Report Author	Graeme Kane, Assistant Director Highways and Waste graeme.kane@northnorthants.gov.uk
Relevant Executive Member	Councillor Graham Lawman, Executive Member for Highways, Travel and Assets

List of Appendices

None

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. To inform the Scrutiny Commission of how major highways capital works are prioritised for implementation within existing budgets.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. As a Highway Authority there is a legal requirement to have, and to update, a Local Transport Plan. Each year, the Department for Transport (DfT) provides annual allocations of capital funding for the maintenance and improvement of councils' transport and highway networks to achieve the policies and outcomes set out in their Local Transport Plan. DfT also provides funding streams for major highway and transport schemes as well as for specific grants to meet particular Government priorities. The Council can also secure development obligations through the planning system to mitigate the impacts of planning development on the highway and transport network.
- 2.2. It is necessary to prioritise schemes in order to remain within available budgets. The Council employs appropriate methods to select which schemes to prioritise each year. The selection methods are informed by data, community input and the expertise of qualified officers.
- 2.3. Highway maintenance schemes, such as resurfacing, and traffic signal schemes are selected based on a range of asset data collected by the highways service. This informs the selection and prioritisation of schemes each year.

- 2.4. Schemes funded by the Integrated Transport Block, such as pedestrian crossings, originate from requests within the community. They are ranked according to the objectives set out in the Local Transport Plan.
- 2.5. Road safety schemes are selected following analysis of traffic collision data.
- 2.6. Major highway schemes (over £5million) are mainly generated from modelling the impacts of Local Plans and identifying means to accommodate future transport demands.
- 2.7. The majority of the Section 106 developer obligations are secured to mitigate specific issues highlighted during the planning approval process.

3. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Scrutiny Commission:

- (a) Note the contents of this report;
 - (b) Recommends any improvements to the way in which highways capital schemes are selected and prioritised within available budgets.
- 3.1. *Reason for Recommendations – It would be valuable to receive comment and suggestions from the Scrutiny Commission regarding the process currently employed to prioritise highways capital schemes.*
 - 3.2. *Alternative Options Considered – The alternative would be to continue with the existing process without consulting the Scrutiny Commission. This would miss the opportunity for the Scrutiny Commission to make suggestions and recommendations on how the process could be adapted to add value. Given elected Members have demonstrated an interest in this topic and requested the opportunity to review it, this option has been rejected.*

4. Report Background

- 4.1. As a Highway Authority there is a legal requirement to have and to update a Local Transport Plan. The Council currently relies on the Northamptonshire Transportation Plan 2012 in fulfilling this duty, but it is expected that the preparation of a North Northamptonshire Local Transport Plan will be a priority for the Council once the highway service is disaggregated later this year.
- 4.2. There are a number of documents that sit under the Transportation Plan such as Thematic Transport Strategies, Town Transport Strategies and other documents that define, amongst other things, how the network will be managed such as the Network Management Plan 2021.

- 4.3. Each year, the Department for Transport (DfT) provides annual allocations of capital funding for the maintenance and improvement of councils' transport and highway networks to achieve the policies and outcomes set out in their Local Transport Plan.
- 4.4. The funding that will be received by North Northamptonshire Council for 2022/23 to 2024/25 will total £9.955m per annum, broken down as follows:
- Highways Maintenance Block needs element - £3.735m
 - Highways Maintenance Block incentive element - £0.934m (confirmed allocation for 2022/23, indicative for 2023/24 and 2024/25)
 - Potholes Fund - £3.735m
 - Integrated Transport Block Funding - £1.551m
- 4.5. The Highways Maintenance Block and Potholes Fund are provided to maintain the Council's existing highway assets; while the Integrated Transport Block is provided for minor improvement works.
- 4.6. The Department for Transport has, for many years, provided capital grants for major highway and transport schemes, defined as those costing more than £5million. The Department for Transport has also provided specific grants to meet particular Government priorities – including in recent years:
- 4.6.1. New Stations Fund – for new and reopened railway stations;
 - 4.6.2. Local Pinchpoint Fund – for tackling congested road junctions;
 - 4.6.3. Active Travel Fund – for walking and cycling schemes.
- 4.7. There have also been capital grants such as the Local Growth Fund and more recently the Levelling Up Fund, where highways and transport schemes can be funded as part of wider funding programmes.
- 4.8. Many of these funding rounds are announced at short notice, meaning that councils need to have schemes prepared and ready to bid. This requires councils to fund the preparation of a pipeline of suitable projects. They may also be required to make a contribution to the construction costs of the scheme.
- 4.9. In addition to Government grants, the Council can seek to secure developer obligations under Section 106 of the Town & Country Act 1990 to mitigate the impacts of planned development on the highway and transport network.

5. Issues and Choices

- 5.1. Highway maintenance schemes, such as resurfacing, are selected based on data collected regarding the network condition on an annual basis by our delivery partner KierWSP. Once this data is collected, KierWSP propose a list of schemes across a number of categories, ranked based on the needs of the network. The client team agree the sums to be allocated to each category and the schemes to be delivered in the upcoming year are agreed based on their place in the ranked list for each category. Progress to complete these agreed schemes is monitored monthly throughout the year by the client team.

Occasionally it is necessary to demote schemes from the list due to urgent issues on the network such as the effects of unusually hot weather or following a storm event. The schemes to be demoted from the list are agreed with the client team and they are then placed on the long list for the following year.

- 5.2. Minor improvement schemes, such as pedestrian or cycle crossings, are funded by the Integrated Transport Block and come mainly from community requests relayed through the Council's Community Liaison Officers, and other schemes generated by officers within the highways service. The schemes are ranked for their compatibility with the objectives set out in the Local Transport Plan, and their public acceptability. The cost of the scheme, and any match funding available, are also important considerations. Traffic signal schemes are also funded from the Integrated Transport Block and are selected on a similar basis to maintenance schemes as described in 5.1 above, whilst road safety schemes are based on collision data in the local area.
- 5.3. Proposals for major highway schemes (those over £5million) are mainly generated from modelling of the impacts of Local Plans, which give a suitable long-term prediction of future traffic problems in order to be able to understand future needs.
- 5.4. The Council has inherited both the former priority projects of the former County Council within North Northamptonshire, and projects which were priorities for the individual borough and district councils. Owing to the costs involved in developing such schemes, the decision to pursue these projects will normally have involved a report to an appropriate decision-making committee. They would also normally feature in the capital strategy/programme.
- 5.5. The securing of funding for such schemes can take time, as suitable funding rounds can be infrequent, perhaps once in a four-year Government spending round. To be successful, bids need to be well-prepared and demonstrate good value for money, and also to meet the specific objectives of the funding, which may differ from previous rounds.
- 5.6. The majority of Section 106 developer obligations are secured in mitigation of specific issues highlighted in the Transport Assessments which accompany planning applications. Where there are existing known problems, Section 106 funding may be secured towards a scheme which is already a Council priority.

6. Next Steps

- 6.1. Any feedback from the Scrutiny Commission will be considered by the Executive Member for Highways, Travel & Assets in consultation with the Executive Director of Place and Economy who will consider whether the process of allocating capital funds to highways projects could be improved to reflect the Scrutiny Commission's recommendations.

7. Implications (including financial implications)

7.1. Resources, Financial and Transformation

There are no resources or financial implications arising directly from this report. The report considers a topic which is involved with either deciding how the Council should spend grants secured from Government, or which require external funding to be secured. The Council may need to invest resources in developing such schemes before external funding can be secured.

7.1.1. The development of the highways capital programme and any review of the Local Transport Plan forms part of the highways service plan are not part of the Council's Transformation Programme.

7.2. Legal and Governance

7.2.1. There are no legal implications arising directly from this report. Many of the schemes require Traffic Regulation Orders and for some (typically) larger schemes, more complex legal procedures such as Side Roads Orders and Compulsory Purchase Orders, both of which may involve a public inquiry, may be required.

7.3. Relevant Policies and Plans

7.3.1. The schemes considered in this report will assist the Council in meeting the priorities in the Corporate Plan around:

- Safe and Thriving Places
 - Maintain our highways infrastructure to help people move safely around North Northamptonshire
 - Enable people to travel across North Northamptonshire and beyond
- Green, sustainable Environment
 - Promote sustainable, active travel
 - Embed low carbon technology, sustained and improved green infrastructure, and sustainable forms of transport fit for the future.

7.3.2. The schemes will assist the Council in delivering the objectives of the Northamptonshire Transportation Plan (the Council's Local Transport Plan) and its various Local Plans.

7.4. Risk

7.4.1. There are no significant risks arising from the proposed recommendations in this report.

7.5. Consultation

7.5.1. Highway improvement schemes are often suggested or requested by Councillors or members of the public. If schemes are subject to a permanent Traffic Regulation Order, then public consultation is carried out through this

process. In advance of any works, communication is shared with Councillors and local communities to minimise the impact of any works or road closures.

7.5.2. Larger schemes, such as proposals for new roads, will involve an extensive consultation process.

7.6. Consideration by the Executive

7.6.1. The Integrated Transport and Highway Maintenance Block funding for 2022/23 was considered by the Executive on 17 March 2022. The Executive accepted the receipt of the grants for 2022/23, noted the allocations for 2023/24 and 2024/25 and agreed that the 2022/23 grants be spent on maintaining and upgrading the highway network in line with the Northamptonshire Transportation Plan.

7.7. Equality Implications

7.7.1. Equality implications are considered as part of the development of individual schemes. There are no equality implications arising directly from this report.

7.8. Climate Impact

7.8.1. Climate impacts will be considered as part of the development of individual schemes. It is expected that, in developing a new North Northamptonshire Local Transport Plan, the Council will wish to prioritise the delivery of schemes and initiatives with positive climate impacts.

7.9. Community Impact

7.9.1. The schemes considered in this report can all be expected to be of benefit to one or more individual communities.

7.10. Crime and Disorder Impact

7.10.1 Crime and disorder impacts will be considered as part of the development of individual schemes.

8. Background Papers

8.1. Executive paper, 17 March 2022, Agenda No 10 Local Transport Plan – Integrated Transport Plan 2022-23 Funding Allocation and Capital Funding 2022-23

8.2. Northamptonshire Transportation Plan:
<https://www.northamptonshire.gov.uk/councilservices/northamptonshire-highways/transport-plans-and-polcies/Pages/local-transport-plan.aspx>