Weed Killing in Exeter

Report of the Head of Highways, Capital Development and Waste

> ***Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Committee before taking effect.***

Recommendation: It is recommended that the Committee notes the following report.

1.   Background/Introduction

A report was brought to the Exeter Board Committee of 28 April 2014 to inform Members on the Weed Spraying Programme for 2014/5 in Exeter and the outcome of the Community Payback trial in 2013/14. This report is intended to update members on amendments to the programme and planned works.

2.   Proposal

Cabinet approved the report of the Head of Highways, Capital Development and Waste to Cabinet on 12 March 2014 setting out the County Road Highway Maintenance Revenue Budget for the financial year 2014/15. The report included an allocation of £343,916, for Weed Clearance County Wide. Of this, £37,923 is for Harmful & Invasive Weeds, £20,400 is for the Community Payback Scheme. The remainder is for targeted weed spraying.

Approximately £25.5K of the weed spraying budget is allocated for Exeter.

The £20.4K allocated Countywide for the Community Payback scheme will fund approximately 15-20 days of work to be undertaken in Exeter. Local County members will be kept informed on the development of this programme.

Whilst an order was in place with Exeter City Council to undertake weed spraying in the city in line with the treatment undertaken last year, the advice received from the City Council was that it would not be cost effective to spray due to the level of growth this year.

As a result of this advice, the budget has been reallocated to undertake a programme of targeted weed pulling on strategic routes and key areas of the city. It will also fund a mechanical sweeper to clear weeds from kerb edges. Much of this work is already underway. This will be in addition to the budget for work to be undertaken by the community payback teams.

Weed Spraying of sites on strategic routes and key locations will be undertaken following weed pulling subject to timing, budget and resource availability.

3.   Options/Alternatives

The revenue funded programme for 2014/15 optimises the use of the available funding to provide for reactive and clear up activities, winter maintenance, safety defect repairs and routine and cyclic maintenance activity.

The distribution of Highway Revenue funding is based on experience of managing the network, data on asset management and consultation feedback. It strikes a balance between the competing needs of the network, travelling public, communities and residents.

Alternative levels of funding of work functions were considered as part of the budget consultation process. Feedback from the consultation was taken into account in drafting the detailed budget proposals.

There is a need for in year flexibility in the funding of work functions to enable the service to respond to unforeseen and extreme events.

4. Consultations/Representations/Technical Data

The allocation of a budget to fund Community Payback work follows a successful trial undertaken in Exeter and Newton Abbot areas in 2013/14. The work proved to be very cost effective in terms of productivity and social value as reported to this committee on 27 January.

The results of the 2013 National Highways and Transport (NHT) Public Satisfaction Survey reflect public perception of performance, importance and desire for various activities to be funded. Analysis shows that the condition of the highway network and the speed and quality of repairs are important to the public.

The complete survey can be seen at http://nhtsurvey2013.econtrack.co.uk. The National survey shows that whilst levels of satisfaction are generally very low, compared to other highway authorities included in the survey Devon is a relatively high performing authority.

Consultation on the highway budget proposals were included in the Tough Choices consultation which can be found at http://toughchoices.co.uk

5. Financial Considerations

The cost of this work will be met from the County Council's Revenue Budget.

6. Sustainability Considerations

Contingency budgets pressures have presented the highways service with a real challenge in maintaining the level of service for weed control. Increasingly safety related activities dominate the budget setting considerations. However by introducing new, cost effective ways of delivery and by being flexible in managing the budget, the service has managed to sustain a reasonable level of service.

7. Carbon Impact Considerations

This proposal will have a neutral carbon impact.

8. Equality Considerations

An Impact Assessment has been carried out for the savings to the Highways Revenue budget compared to 2012/13, a copy of which was circulated to Cabinet Members, and is available alongside this report on the Council's website at: http://www.devon.gov.uk/index/councildemocracy/decision_making/cma/index_exc.htm

9. Legal Considerations

The lawful consequences of the recommendation have been considered in the preparation of this report.

10. Risk Management Considerations

The proposals contained in this report have been assessed and all reasonable actions are taken to safeguard the Council's position.

11. Summary/Conclusions/Reasons for Recommendations

The proposed programme is designed to make best use of the financial resources agreed by Cabinet and following the Cabinet endorsed approach to Asset Management.

David Whitton
Head of Highways, Capital Development and Waste

Electoral Divisions: All Exeter Divisions

<u>Local Government Act 1972: List of Background Papers</u>

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Background Paper	Date	File Ref.

Nil

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