



Date: Monday, 27 November 2017

Time: 2.00 pm

Venue: Shrewsbury Room, Shirehall, Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury, Shropshire,  
SY2 6ND

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## COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

### TO FOLLOW REPORT (S)

#### **7 Environmental Maintenance Grant Task and Finish Group Report (Pages 1 - 60)**

To consider the report and recommendations of the Environmental Maintenance Task and Finish Group, to follow marked: 7

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Communities Scrutiny  
Committee

27<sup>th</sup> November 2017

Item

## **Report from the Task & Finish Group on the Environmental Maintenance Grant Programme**

**Responsible Officer** Steven Brown, Highways, Transport and Environment  
Commissioning Manager  
Kate Garner, Locality Commissioning Manager  
e-mail: Kate.garner@shropshire.gov.uk Tel: (01743) 252344

### **1. Summary**

Shropshire Council's Highways and Transport team have operated the Environmental Maintenance Grant (EMG) programme for the last 8 years. The programme has operated successfully and is seen as delivering a number of benefits.

The recipients of the grants are overwhelmingly rural parish councils and a small number of town councils. There is one community group using a grant to enable local residents to carry out litter picks and environmental tidy-ups.

Feedback from local councils that have received an EMG is that a review of the design and delivery of the EMG programme is needed. Their general view is that the grants are welcome, valued and a practical way for Shropshire Council to support locality working.

There is an alternative view, which is that the current grants system doesn't achieve a critical mass to make community and service impacts and generate financial efficiencies, and should be stopped, within an agreed and communicated process.

Finally, there is the view that as Shropshire Council is still in the challenging position of budget reductions and increasing expenditure, it simply cannot afford to continue to fund the EMG programme and the activity could be funded directly by local councils.

At its meeting of 4th September 2017, Shropshire Council's Communities Overview Committee confirmed Terms of Reference for a time limited Task & Finish Group to review the EMG programme.

The purpose of the Task & Finish Group was agreed as making recommendations on Shropshire Council's future approach to its EMG programme, e.g. the programme is stopped, the programme continues as is, or the programme is redesigned and continues.

To inform this work the design and the delivery of the current programme – e.g. its budget, the application process, any monitoring and evaluation and the overall outcomes achieved by the programme needed to be understood.

These considerations were made in the context of Shropshire Council's extremely challenging financial position. Members of the Task & Finish Group wanted to consider if continuing the grant programme was a sustainable position at a time of declining revenue budgets, and what added, social and preventative impact is enabled through the investment of the grant.

The status of the EMG programme is a grant programme and as such, Shropshire Council is able to make changes to the delivery of the programme at any point. However, within the 2017/18 EMG application paperwork Shropshire Council advised potential applicants that the EMG programme would be reviewed and that the outcome of this review would be consulted on.

This report summarises work undertaken by the Task & Finish Group and the recommendations confirmed at its workshop on 16<sup>th</sup> November 2017.

## **2. Recommendations**

- A. To confirm the recommendations made by the Task & Finish Group at its workshop of the 16<sup>th</sup> November 2017 as detailed in 3.6 below.

## **REPORT**

### **3. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal**

#### 3.1 Assessment of risk

- There is a risk that ending the EMG programme will be seen as Shropshire Council demonstrating that it does not value local communities, recognise the efforts they are making to maintain and improve their environment or that it wants to work in partnership with them.
- There is a risk that ending the EMG programme will erode the levels of good will that currently exist between Shropshire Council and local councils, which has a positive effect in other areas of work.
- There is a risk that ending the EMG programme will result in the activity that is currently being delivered stopping, particularly in the most rural areas, as there is no guarantee that local councils will fill the gap left through the total withdrawal of the grant.
- There is an ongoing risk to the Highways revenue budget as it finances an ongoing revenue grant programme whilst making reductions to its other frontline and operation services due to revenue pressures.
- The EMG funded activity is not captured accurately to enter Shropshire Council's asset database. There is a risk that knowledge and service intelligence is not captured.

#### 3.2 Assessment of opportunities

- The continuation of the EMG programme will provide an opportunity for Shropshire Council to maintain an effective partnership with local councils, which will support other areas of work and activity.

- The continuation of the EMG programme is an opportunity to demonstrate that localism in Shropshire has not been lost, even in these difficult times of austerity.
- Redesigning the grants programme will enable Shropshire Council to shape and influence how social action is created in communities, and how social value is generated through the medium of people improving their local environment.

#### 4. Financial implications

- 4.1 The Highways revenue budget is top sliced to fund the EMGs, there is no specific budget, other than reducing existing revenue. The allocated budget is £110,000 per annum out of a total revenue and capital budget of £26,881,500.

The £110,000 is the equivalent of the operational budget for 10 pot holes gangs of the county for one month, or significant resurfacing of a road, kilometres of road markings provided. The current revenue reductions and savings provide a negative pressure on day to day services. The revenue budget is 100% funded by Shropshire, Capital budget is 100% externally funded.

The grants place a revenue pressure on the highways services, whilst simultaneously other front line services are being pressured due to revenue budget reductions.

- 4.2 It was agreed to increase the EMG programme to £152,000 in 2017/18 to meet the demand of and increased number of applicants. There is a tension between the highway revenue budget reducing year on year whilst the EMG programme budget stays the same.
- 4.3 Contrary to what many local councils understand, the EMGs do not actually have any savings impact on the amount Shropshire Council spends with its term maintenance contractor on planned and programmed work. If there is a cost saving to emerge, it will benefit the term maintenance contractor as they could find themselves in the position of not having to complete work that has been delivered through EMG funded activity.
- 4.4 Summary of EMG programme activity 2010 – 2017

Year	Core budget	Actual total grant value of grants awarded	No of grants awarded
2010/11	110,000	109,006	65
2011/12	110,000	103,072	63
2012/13	110,000	107,991	65
2013/14	110,000	106,877	62
2014/15	110,000	114,052	65
2015/16	110,000	101,392	57
2016/17	110,000	152,043	72
2017/18	110,000	152,000	96

#### 4.5 Summary of the 2017/18 EMG applications

96 local councils made an application and received funding. The eventual total budget allocation was £152,000 (an increase of £42,000 on the core budget of £110,000). The total value of the applications was £200,843, a 32.13% increase on 2016/17.

The programme was oversubscribed by £48,843 (@£152k)... or £87,343 of the original £110,000. Therefore 75.68 % of the original application values was agreed and funded.

#### 5.0 The Task & Finish Group

5.1 Questionnaires were sent to all town and parish councils regardless of whether or not they had received an EMG. Responses from 51 councils/organisations were received.

5.2 Summary of questionnaire feedback –

- EMG funded work is of a higher standard than Highways contractor work
- EMGs enable local councils to be more responsive to local issues
- EMGs enable local councils to deliver environmental maintenance works without raising their precept
- The work is delivered by local people with local knowledge
- Local members feel connected to the EMG funded work, which leads to a sense of control, empowerment and ability to respond quickly to local issues
- The EMG work is seen as reducing demand on Shropshire Council services and saving Shropshire Council money
- Local councils would like to see more scrutiny and monitoring of the grant programme
- Some local councils are already match funding the EMG and others would be willing to
- Respondees would like to see the EMG programme continue

5.3 Interviews were carried out with a small number of clerks of councils that receive EMGs.

There were mixed views on the complexity of the application process - some found application process easy, and others found it difficult. It was felt that first time applicants were more likely to find it hard and maybe the process is less complicated for smaller grants.

It was felt that the timings and timescales on grant approval and payment was out of sync with budget setting – some precepts are set before Christmas.

It was also felt that firmer guidelines were needed on how the grants are to be spent.

Through the interviews, it was established that clerks thought that the funding supports local budgets, provides savings that are 'hidden' e.g. work on ditches will reduce surface flooding and reduce maintenance costs, and adds to the 'contentment of communities'.

The fact that local people are employed to deliver the EMG funded work was seen as a positive, as was activity such as gritting on pavements in outlying areas, which was seen as a making a saving to Shropshire Council as a centrally located gritter didn't have to be sent out to very rural locations.

Finally, it was noted that some local council budgets are set with an assumption that the EMG will automatically be awarded, and that grants are being used to fund activity that is not on highway land.

- 5.4 Representatives of local councils, a community organisation and a contractor delivering lengthsman activities joined the workshop for a 90 minute question and answer and discussion session.

<b>Organisation represented</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Link to EMG programme</b>
Various rural PCs across south Shropshire	Eileen Reynolds	Clerk to PC that uses EMG
Various rural PCs across south Shropshire	Jayne Madeley	Clerk to PC that uses EMG
Cleobury Mortimer Town Council	Matt Sheehan	Clerk to PC that uses EMG
Church Stretton Town Council	Danny Chetwood	Clerk to PC that uses EMG
Church Stretton Pride of Place	Trevor Halsey	Clerk to PC that uses EMG
Various rural PCs across central and south Shropshire	Rebecca Turner	Clerk to PC that uses EMG
Environmental Maintenance Officer for Munslow, Diddlebury & Culmington.	Gary Trim	Delivering EMG funded lengthsman activity Also a councillor for PC that uses EMG

- 5.5 Summary of the final thoughts that emerged through discussion –

- The EMGs offer value for money and have a wider benefit to Shropshire Council for creating a high quality environment
- If Shropshire Council wants to have pride in its county, it should do what it can to help local councils to help Shropshire Council to achieve this
- Health & Safety has to be a priority
- Rural road networks have to be kept safe and clear to enable residents to travel to work and school
- Can Shropshire Council afford not to continue with the programme, given all the evidence it has heard at the workshop
- No EMGS will result in a worsened environment leading to fewer tourists and less economic growth activity
- Town councils could not guarantee to be able to continue with the same level of environmental maintenance in their towns if they didn't have an EMG.

5.6 The full report and presentation considered by the Task & Finish Group at its workshop on the 26<sup>th</sup> April 2017 is included as **Appendix 1 and 2**. The notes from the workshop are included as **Appendix 3**.

5.7 The following recommendations were confirmed at the workshop:

Shropshire Council's Environmental Maintenance Grant programme should continue with the following changes to its design and delivery –

- i. Changes to eligible activity**  
The activity eligible for funding from the programme should be the activity that brings most added value to the delivery of Shropshire Council's Highways term maintenance contract. Highways officers should advise what this activity should be.
- ii. Application eligibility**  
The eligible applicants should be limited to Shropshire's rural town and parish councils. Urban town councils a population of over 10K should be ineligible to apply.
- iii. Value for money and incentivising added value**  
The grant should not be used to top up core budgets but should be used for discrete maintenance purposes. Applications should be scored according to how they demonstrate value for money and provide added value to the core funding and activity. Examples of VFM and added value should be –
  - Councils demonstrating that they are committed to their effective delivery of environmental maintenance works in their areas by contributing to or matching grant funding.
  - Demonstrating that councils are working together to provide economies of scale and reduce costs, e.g. multiple parishes let 1 contract.
  - The design of activity that clearly creates social value, the appropriate use of volunteers to add value to the core activity
- iv. Design of the funding programme**  
Funding decisions should be made for a 3 year period, e.g. 2018/19 – 2020/21. This will reduce bureaucracy associated with the application process and provide more time for monitoring and evaluation of applications. It should also enable local councils to let 3 year contracts that offer greater value for money with confidence. It is recommended that the EMG programme is reviewed in year 2 and a decision then made about the future of the scheme, from the end of year 3. If the decision is made to end the EMG programme at this point, a 12 month notice period should be given.
- v. Annual value of the funding programme**  
The annual value of the programme should be £75,000. There will be no increase to this amount.
- vi. Value of individual grants**  
The maximum value of individual grants should be £1500 p.a. There should be no increase to this amount.



**vii. Application criteria, guidance notes and monitoring.**

The guidance notes accompanying the application process should be reviewed and rewritten to ensure that there is absolute clarity about the design and delivery of the grant funded activity. There should be a particular focus on health and safety. This should also include a more robust approach to monitoring the funded activity through the completion and submission of an annual report from each recipient, and a process for this should be designed and implemented. A process should be put in place to ensure appropriate signing off of the annual reports.

**viii. Consultation on proposed changes to the EMG programme**

A recommendation should be made to Cabinet that it approves the delivery of a 6 week consultation period in early 2018 on the recommended changes to the EMG programme based on previous Committee Overview Committee reports.

**ix. Delegated authority**

A recommendation should be made to Cabinet to delegate authority to the Head of Infrastructure and Communities in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport to implement the revised EMG programme detailed specification following the consultation.

**6.0 Key areas of feedback from the Task & Finish Workshop**

**6.1 Future funding arrangements**

It is recommended that the maximum amount of future individual EMGs will be reduced from £3,000 to £1,500, recognising that the majority of the applications in 2017/18 were for less than the maximum amount; there were 35 applications for the maximum amount and 59 applications for less than this.

Reducing the maximum funding figure will help to manage the pressure on the significantly reduced total budget that is being recommended, but managing the demand on the budget will have to be done in other ways. It is recommended that this is done through a streamlining of the eligible activity, which should reduce application values, through application eligibility criteria, and through how applications can demonstrate added value (economic, social and environmental) and value for money.

It is recommended that a scoring assessment against these criteria is designed and used as part of the application assessment process. Applications should be assessed by officers from Highways, Environmental Maintenance and the Community Enablement Team.

**6.2 It was clear through the evidence heard by the Task & Finish Group that it is felt by grant recipients that EMG funded activity has a greater impact than its key purpose of maintaining the local environment. The wider agendas that it was felt the works contributed to were –**

- economic growth – creating an attractive, safe and welcoming environment that people will want to live, work and play in
- individual and community well-being – creating contentment within communities through a sense of local ownership over the works that are delivered through the EMGs

Evidence was also received that demonstrated that the funded works did not

fall into the category of 'nice to have', but were necessary for a safe and healthy infrastructure within a community.

- 6.3 Added value (economic, social, environmental) and value for money  
The Task & Finish Group recommends that future EMG applications are assessed on how they demonstrate added value through the delivery of the core activity, or provide value for money through the way the grant will be spent. Examples of added value are the contribution of additional funding to the EMG by the applicant, demonstrating that the way in which the activity will be delivered will generate social value, e.g. use of volunteers or provision of work experience placements, or that the environment is being improved over and above the what the core funded activity will achieve. Examples of value for money are a number of parishes working together to create and tender one contract, providing greater economies of scale.
- 6.4 Current application process and associated guidance  
There is a need for much greater clarity in the EMG programme application criteria, guidelines and supporting paperwork to ensure high quality, appropriate applications are received. This should also include a more robust approach to monitoring the funded activity through the completion and submission of an annual report from each recipient, and a process for this should be designed and implemented.
- 6.5 Health & Safety issues  
There appears to be a mixed understanding of the important Health & Safety issues associated with the delivery of EMG funded activity. The current grant application does provide some guidance, but this should be reviewed and updated to make it clearer and more comprehensive. The grant agreement, signed by the recipients discharges responsibility for H & S and insurance cover from Shropshire Council to them, and this needs to be as clear as possible. Currently, members of the Highways teams will support grant recipients with any H & S or liability queries they may have, and this support should remain in place.

## **7.0 Conclusions**

- 7.1 The Task & Finish Group considered that the EMG programme achieves 2 important things –
- the delivery of the actual grant funded activity
  - the way EMGs make the local councils feel, i.e. supported and trusted by Shropshire Council to design and deliver their own environmental maintenance programme, which in turn results in a sense of empowerment and local ownership over the resolution of programmed and reactive works.
- Consequently, Task & Finish Group members felt that there was a balance to be achieved between the value generated by the existence of the programme and the value of the EMG funded activity through a redesigned scheme, alongside Shropshire Council's budgetary constraints and the need to make fiscal savings.
- 7.2 It was demonstrated through the workshop that EMG funded activity makes a big difference to day to day life in very rural areas, where local lengthsman are most active. It could be argued that this is where EMGs are making their

greatest impact and where their loss would be most keenly felt.

- 7.3 It was agreed that many of the issues of concern that were raised through the workshop could be addressed by a review and update of the guidance, criteria and health and safety advice that is supplied through the application process. It is recommended that these are reviewed and updated in light of what has been discovered through the workshop.
- 7.4 The Task & Finish Group recognised the importance of good communication and co-operation between local councils and their area Highways officers (inspectors/technicians). When this relationship is working well, additional value can be achieved without the needed for additional funding.
- 7.5 Through the workshop it was demonstrated that there was a mixed understanding of health and safety issues linked to the delivery of EMG funded activity along with concerns about liability. A consistent appreciation and understanding of these issues will be addressed through improved guidance in the application process and through training.

**List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)**

- Communities Scrutiny Committee EMG Task & Finish Group Terms of Reference
- Information about other local authority grant programmes
- EMG application paperwork
- Summary of EMG applications 2017/18
- Summary of EMG funded activity delivered in 2017/18
- Collated feedback from EMG questionnaires
- Summary of EMG questionnaire feedback
- Feedback from EMG applicant interviews
- Highways financial background and context
- Highways/EMG financial comparison

**Cabinet Member:**

Cllr Steve Davenport– Portfolio Holder for Highways  
Cllr Joyce Barrow – Portfolio Holder for Communities

**Local Members:**

All Members

**Appendices:**

Appendix 1 – Report to the EMG Task & Finish Group, 16<sup>th</sup> November 2017  
Appendix 2 – Presentation from the EMG Task & Finish Group, 16th November 2017  
Appendix 3 – Notes from the EMG Task & Finish Group, 16th November 2017

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**Shropshire Council  
Communities Scrutiny Group  
Task & Finish Group Workshop  
Environmental Maintenance Grant Programme**

## **Workshop Part 1**

### **Purpose of the Task & Finish Group – Terms of Reference (Appendix 1)**

The purpose of the Task & Finish Group has been agreed as making recommendations on Shropshire Council's future approach to its Environmental Maintenance Grant programme, e.g. the programme is stopped, the programme continues as is, or the programme is redesigned and continues.

To inform this work the design and the delivery of the current programme – e.g. its budget, the application process, any monitoring and evaluation and the overall outcomes achieved by the programme should be understood.

Specifically, the Task & Finish Group will be looking for evidence that the programme -

- provides value for money for the council, i.e. it fulfils the benefits of the Highways service
- adds value to the council's core environmental maintenance work, i.e. investing in the programme results in overall savings
- generates social value within communities
- makes a difference to the residents of Shropshire

The budget for the EMG programme is derived directly from Highways revenue budgets. Members of the Group will want to consider if there is an opportunity for further investment in highways maintenance if the grant programme was to cease, and what the impact of this might be on local communities.

These considerations are being made in the context of Shropshire Council's extremely challenging financial position. Members of the Group will want to consider if continuing the grant programme is a sustainable position at a time of declining revenue budgets, and what added, social and preventative impact is enabled through the investment of the grant.

### **Background**

Shropshire Council's Highways and Transport team have operated the Environmental Maintenance Grant for the last 7 years. The programme has operated successfully and is seen as delivering a number of benefits –

- Local provision of services at a reduced cost
- Flexibility and responsiveness through service delivery at a local level
- Removal of contractual and administrative process from Shropshire Council
- Local determination of services and requirements
- Recycling of the Shropshire pound

The recipients of the grants are overwhelmingly rural parish councils and a small number of town councils. There is one community group using a grant to enable local residents to carry out litter picks and environmental tidy-ups.

In previous years the programme had been limited to existing recipients, i.e. the opportunity to apply for funding was not widely advertised. In 2016 it was agreed that the 2017/18

programme would be opened up to all town and parish councils. This resulted in many more applications being received and the available budget being greatly oversubscribed. The value of individual approved grants (capped at £3,000) was reduced significantly to enable all eligible applications to be supported.

Feedback from local councils that have received an EMG has been that a review of the design and delivery of the EMG programme is needed. Their general view is that the grants are welcome, valued and a practical way for Shropshire Council to support locality working.

There is an alternative view, which is that the current grants system doesn't achieve a critical mass to make community and service impacts and generate financial efficiencies.

Finally, there is the view that as Shropshire Council is still in the challenging position of budget reductions and increasing expenditure in areas of social care, it simply cannot afford to continue to fund the EMG programme and the activity could be funded directly by local councils.

To understand the value and impact of the EMG programme, it was agreed that it would be scrutinised through the Communities Scrutiny Committee and consequently a Task & Finish Group established and a Workshop organised.

**Examples from other councils (Appendix 2)**

As part of the evidence we have collated, we have looked at 44 unitary, county, borough or district councils to see if they have specific programmes in place to support local environmental maintenance works.

We found that -

- 31 had no details of a local environmental maintenance grant programme
- 13 had funding programmes that can be spent on maintenance/highway works as part of a range of activities along with a number of other options
- 2 had dedicated grant programmes for EM works – Devon and Surrey
- 1 council provided 'annual funding pots' for recommendations made by elected members to support initiatives in their areas – including highways/EM work - Gloucestershire

**Description of the current programme  
EMG programme paperwork (Appendix 3)**

**Summary of programme activity 2010 – 2017**

Year	Core budget	Actual total grant value of grants awarded	No of grants awarded
2010/11	110,000	109,006	65
2011/12	110,000	103,072	63
2012/13	110,000	107,991	65
2013/14	110,000	106,877	62
2014/15	110,000	114,052	65
2015/16	110,000	101,392	57

2016/17	110,000	152,043	72
2017/18	110,000	152,000	96

### **Summary of the 2017/18 applications**

#### **Appendix 4**

96 local councils made an application and received funding. The eventual total budget allocation was £152,000 (an increase of £42,000 on the core budget of £110,000). The total value of the applications was £200,843, a 32.13% increase on 2016/17.

The programme was oversubscribed by £48,843 (@£152k)... or £87,343 of the original £110,000. Therefore 75.68 % of the original application values was agreed and funded.

### **Summary of the activity funded by the grants in 2017/18**

#### **Appendix 5**

Through all the applications, a total of 407 different activities will be delivered in 2017/18.

#### **The top 5 activities were –**

Tidying grass - mowing/ strimming grass in amenity spaces – 109 councils  
 Clearing leaves/debris from grids – 41 councils  
 Straighten and clean road signs – 41 councils  
 Litter picking – 39 councils  
 Controlling weeds – 36 councils

#### **The bottom 5 activities were –**

Street sweeping - 10  
 Clear vegetation from culverts – 9  
 Maintain closed churchyards – 9  
 Pointing of visibility fences – 5  
 Cleaning toilets – 4

#### **Office time spent administrating the programme**

Using conservative figures it has been calculated that the cost of officer time spent administering the grant programme using the current approach is between £3,500 and £4,000 per annum. These costs would increase if a greater level of monitoring and evaluation of the grant funded activity was carried out.

### **Collated questionnaire feedback**

#### **Appendix 6**

Questionnaires were sent to all town and parish councils regardless of whether or not they had received an EMG. Responses from 49 councils/organisations were received.

### **Summary of the feedback received in the questionnaires**

#### **Appendix 7 (to follow)**

### Summary of interviews with a small number of grant recipients Full report Appendix 8 (to follow)

Interviews have been carried out with a small number of clerks of councils that receive EMGs.

Organisation represented	Name
Various rural PCs across south Shropshire	Jayne Madeley
Various rural PCs across north Shropshire	Melanie Joyce
Ellesmere Town Council	Mandy Evans
Cleobury Mortimer Town Council	Matt Sheehan
Church Stretton Town Council	Danny Chetwood
Various rural PCs across central and south Shropshire	Rebecca Turner

### Headline feedback on the application process

There were mixed views on the complexity of the application process - some found application process easy, and others found it difficult. It was felt that first time applicants were more likely to find it hard and maybe the process is less complicated for smaller grants.

It was felt that the timings and timescales on grant approval and payment was out of sync with budget setting – some precepts are set before Christmas.

It was also felt that firmer guidelines were needed on how the grants are to be spent.

### Headline feedback on the effect of the grants

Through the interviews, it was established that clerks thought that the funding supports local budgets, provides savings that are 'hidden' e.g. work on ditches will reduce surface flooding and reduce maintenance costs, and adds to the 'contentment of communities'.

The fact that local people are employed to deliver the EMG funded work was seen as a positive, as was activity such as gritting on pavements in outlying areas, which was seen as a making a saving to Shropshire Council as a centrally located gritter didn't have to be sent out to very rural locations.

Finally, it was noted that some local council budgets are set with an assumption that the EMG will automatically be awarded, and that grants are being used to fund activity that is not on highway land.

### Financial comparison Appendix 9 (to follow)

Members of the Group will want to understand how the cost of the activity delivered through the EMG programme compares to the cost of similar activity delivered by the council's term maintenance contractor. e.g. approximation of contract costs, local agreements and costs and current Highways processes.

### Discussion session with local council clerks and councillors and others involved in the delivery of EMG funded activity

Representatives of local councils, a community organisation and a contractor delivering lengthsman activities will be joining the Workshop for a 90 minute question and answer and discussion session.



Organisation represented	Name	Link to EMG programme
Various rural PCs across south Shropshire	Eileen Reynolds	Clerk to PC that uses EMG
Various rural PCs across south Shropshire	Jayne Madeley	Clerk to PC that uses EMG
Various rural PCs across north Shropshire	Melanie Joyce	Clerk to PC that uses EMG
Ellesmere Town Council	Mandy Evans	Clerk to PC that uses EMG
Cleobury Mortimer Town Council	Matt Sheehan	Clerk to PC that uses EMG
Church Stretton Town Council	Danny Chetwood	Clerk to PC that uses EMG
Church Stretton Pride of Place	Trevor Halsey	Clerk to PC that uses EMG
Various rural PCs across central and south Shropshire	Rebecca Turner	Clerk to PC that uses EMG
Environmental Maintenance Officer for Munslow, Diddlebury & Culmington.	Gary Trim	Delivering EMG funded lengthsman activity Also a councillor for PC that uses EMG

## Workshop Part 2

### Reflection on the available information and the evidence heard

Members of the Group will want to discuss what they have heard so far. Members will also want to share their initial thinking as it relates to the purpose of the Workshop and the future of the grant programme, i.e. stop, continue as is, or continue with change.

### Further exploration of the options

Building a shared understanding of the pros and cons of each option and reaching an agreement on which will be recommended and the implications of this.

### Design of the recommended option and actions related to this

The grant programme is stopped – when would this happen, would there need to be a transition period?

The grant programme continues without change – what would be the justification for this?

The grant programme continues with change – what would a redesigned programme look like?

### Agreement on recommendations to the Communities Scrutiny Committee

The next meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Committee is on 27<sup>th</sup> November. It is proposed that a report is then taken to Cabinet on 20<sup>th</sup> December.

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# Communities Scrutiny Group Task & Finish Group Workshop

## Environmental Maintenance Grant Programme

# Welcome

Introductions

Agenda

Workshop Part 1

Coffee break

Lunch

Session with grant recipients

Workshop Part 2

Housekeeping – toilets, fire exits

# Purpose of the Task & Finish Workshop

The purpose of the Task & Finish Group has been agreed as making recommendations on Shropshire Council's future approach to its Environmental Maintenance Grant programme, e.g.

- the programme is stopped
- the programme continues without change
- the programme is redesigned and continues

Appendix 1 – Task & Finish Group Terms of Reference

## Appendix 9: Environmental Maintenance Grants – Task and Finish



# Introduction

Highways & Transport provides the following services:

- Highways maintenance
- Highways projects
- Bridges & structures
- Street lighting
- Flooding and drainage
- Weather emergencies
- Street scene
- Emergency responses
- LTP
- Street works
- Dog wardens
- Car parking

A mixture of statutory, discretionary, historical services across the county, 365 days per year, seven days per week, 24 hours per day, about 5,000 orders per month.





## Financial impact of the Environmental Maintenance Grants.

- Highways revenue budget is top sliced to fund the Grants, there is no specific budget , other than reducing existing revenue.
- Allocated budget is £110,000 pa out of a total revenue and capital budget of £26,881,500.
- The £110,000 effectively is the operational budget for 10 pot holes gangs of the county for one month, or significant resurfacing of a road, kilometres of road markings provided..
- Current revenue reductions and savings provide a negative pressure on day to day services.
- Revenue budget is 100% funded by Shropshire, Capital budget is 100% externally funded.
- Consider the councils position reducing or ceasing other grants or services but continuation with this process?

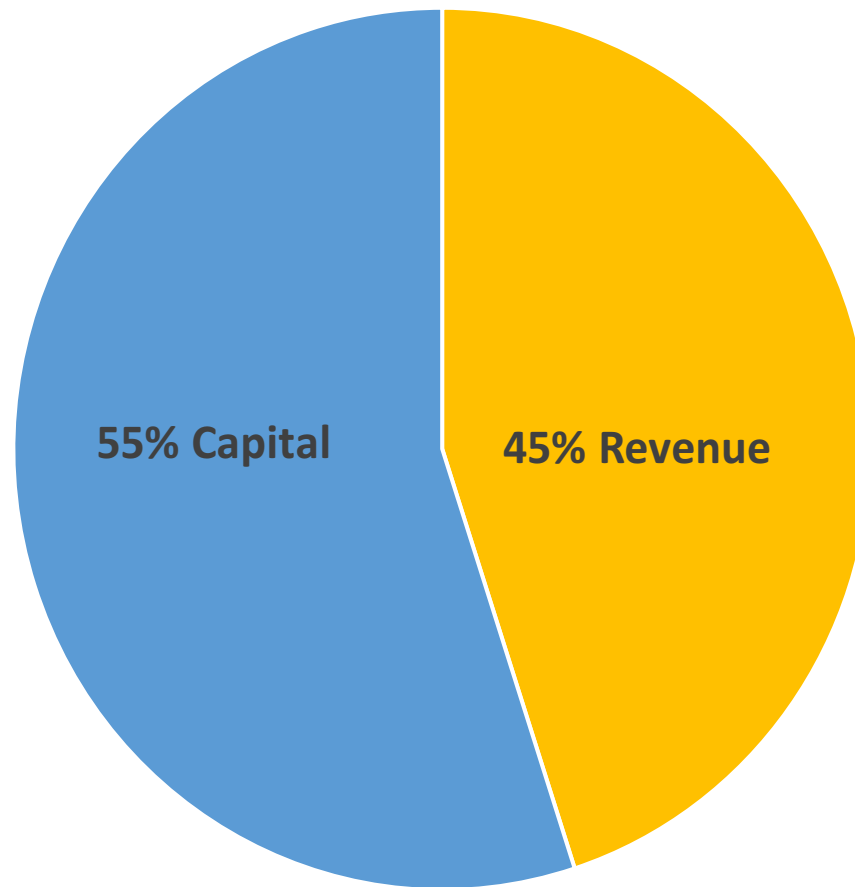




- Over cost of administration and loss of opportunity cost ?
- Factor in new contract costs?
- Does £110,000 provide a critical mass of improvements to justify itself ?
- Does the budget currently meet “modern costs” of local contractors and necessary health and safety ? A point often raised from local councils?
- Health and Safety obligation / burden the grants require on local councils ?
- On going revenue pressure for the service and the council ?
- Undoubtedly there are local benefits and improvements that the Grants provide, which will be evidenced today....

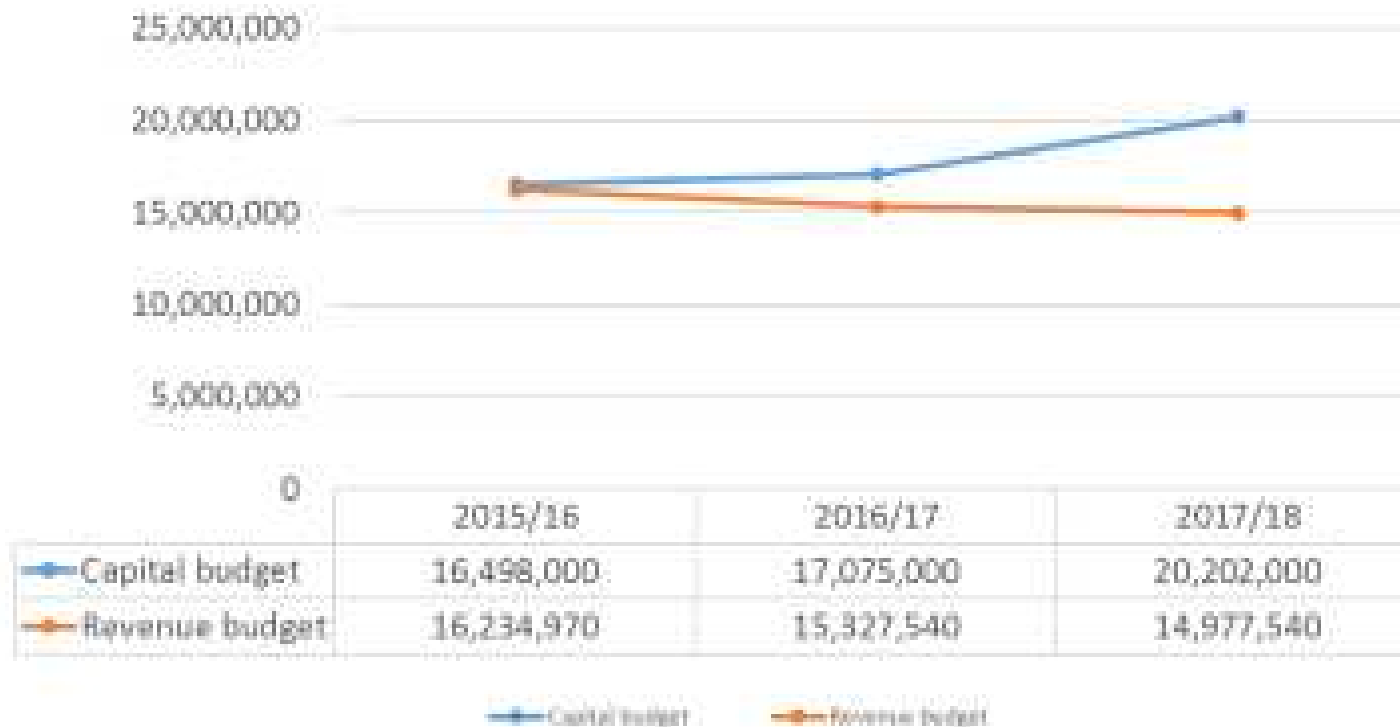


## Budget Ratio.



## Revenue and capital budgets going in different trajectories

Trajectory of Revenue and Capital Budgets

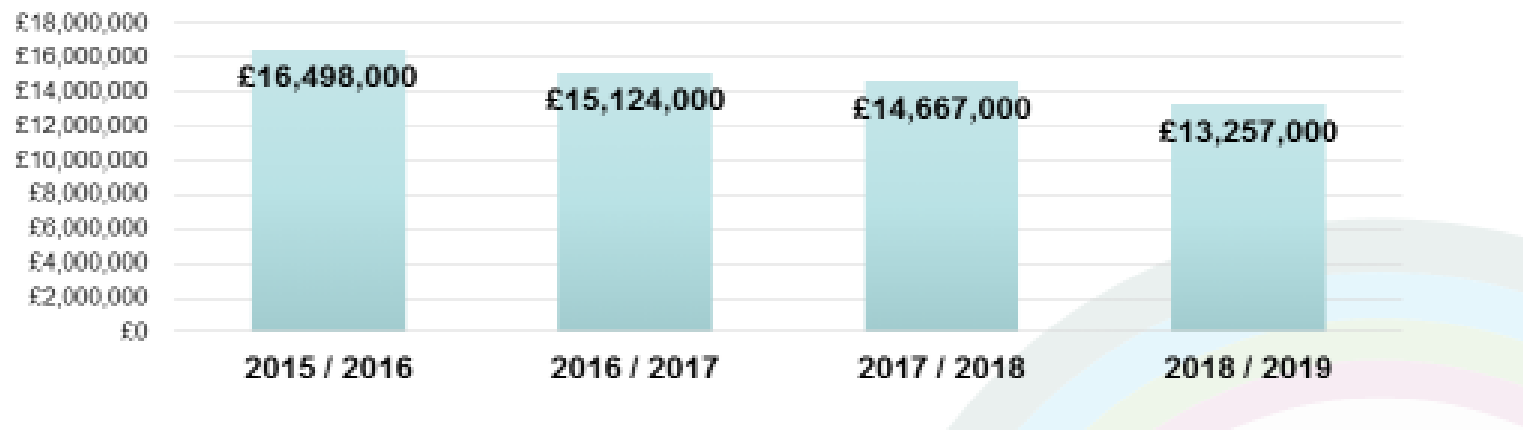




# Financial Issues

## Introduction: Reduction in Capital Grant

### DfT Block Grant Award



Minus 19.644% over 4 years in direct capital grant



## 2017 / 2018 capital budgets

Highways Maintenance Block Needs Formula	Pothole Action Fund	National Productivity Investment Fund	Level 3 award – of verified by DFT*	Total 2017/18 possible allocation
14,667,000	1,335,000	2,827,000	1,373,000	20,202,000

# Environmental Maintenance Grant Programme

- £110,000 could pay for an additional 10 pot hole gangs for a month
- If every local council was to receive an equal share of the £110,000 budget they would each receive £718.95 – by itself probably not enough to make a significant difference to each area
- Service increased grant pot to £152,000 in 2017/18 to meet demand of increased applicants

# Background

- Shropshire Council's Highways and Transport team have operated the Environmental Maintenance Grant for many years. The programme has operated successfully and is seen as delivering a number of benefits –
- Local provision of services at a reduced cost
- Flexibility and responsiveness through service delivery at a local level
- Removal of contractual and administrative process from Shropshire Council
- Local determination of services and requirements
- Recycling of the Shropshire pound

## Background

The recipients of the grants are overwhelmingly rural parish councils and a small number of town councils. There is one community group using a grant to enable local residents to carry out litter picks and environmental tidy-ups.

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In previous years the programme had been limited to existing recipients, i.e. the opportunity to apply for funding was not widely advertised. In 2016 it was agreed that the 2017/18 programme would be opened up to all town and parish councils. This resulted in many more applications being received and the available budget being greatly oversubscribed.



# Background

- Feedback from local councils that have received an EMG has been that a review of the design and delivery of the EMG programme is needed. Their general view is that the grants are welcome, valued and a practical way for Shropshire Council to support locality working.
- There is an alternative view, which is that the current grants system doesn't achieve a critical mass to make community and service impacts and generate financial efficiencies.
- Finally, there is the view that as Shropshire Council is still in the challenging position of budget reductions and increasing expenditure in areas of social care, it simply cannot afford to continue to fund the EMG programme and the activity could be funded directly by local councils.

# What's happening within other local authorities?

We looked at 44 unitary, county, borough or district councils to see if they had specific programmes in place to support local environmental maintenance works -

- 31 had no details of a local environmental maintenance grant programme
- 13 had funding programmes that can be spent on maintenance/highway works as part of a range of activities along with a number of other options
- 2 had dedicated grant programmes for EM works – Devon and Surrey
- 1 council provided 'annual funding pots' for recommendations made by elected members to support initiatives in their areas – including highways/EM work – Gloucestershire

Appendix 2

## Summary of programme activity 2010 - 2017

Year	Core budget	Actual total grant value of grants awarded	No of grants awarded
2010/11	110,000	109,006	65
2011/12	110,000	103,072	63
2012/13	110,000	107,991	65
2013/14	110,000	106,877	62
2014/15	110,000	114,052	65
2015/16	110,000	101,392	57
2016/17	110,000	152,043	72
2017/18	110,000	152,000	96

# Summary of programme activity 2010 - 2017

## Headlines

- Promoting the grant to all local councils in 2017 significantly increased the number of applicants
- The core budget was increased to try and meet demand – however only 70% of each grant application was awarded and no applicant received the same level of funding as in previous years

# Grant application paperwork

- Covering letter
- Agreement
- Schedule
- Description of tasks that can be funded by EMG
- Advice about the use of volunteers
- Guidelines for people working on the public highway
- Business case
- Annual review

# Summary of programme activity 2010 - 2017

96 local councils made an application and received funding. The eventual total budget allocation was £152,000 (an increase of £42,000 on the core budget of £110,000). The total value of the applications was £200,843, a 32.13% increase on 2016/17.

The programme was oversubscribed by £48,843 (@£152k)... or £87,343 of the original £130,000. Therefore 75.68 % of the original application values was agreed and funded.

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Grant recipients in 2017 –

- 1 community group
- 11 town councils
- 84 parish councils

Appendix 4

## Issues we're already aware of

- Grants are not being used up within the financial year
- Grants are sometimes being considered as part of a local council's core budget
- Grants are being used to support activity that is not on Shropshire Council owned land

# Possible opportunities

- Use of volunteers to support EM activity
- Local sponsorship of infrastructure or activity
- Local councils working in partnership with one contract



# Summary of the activity funded by 2017/18 grants

Through all the applications, a total of 407 different activities will be delivered in 2017/18

- **The top 5 activities were –**
- Tidy grass - mowing/ strimming grass in amenity spaces – 109 councils
- Clearing leaves/debris from grids – 41 councils
- Straighten and clean road signs – 41 councils
- Litter picking – 39 councils
- Controlling weeds – 36 councils
  
- Appendix 5

# Summary of the activity funded by 2017/18 grants

## The bottom 5 activities were –

- Street sweeping - 10
- Clear vegetation from culverts – 9
- Maintain closed churchyards – 9
- Pointing of visibility fences – 5
- Cleaning toilets – 4

- Appendix 5

## Officer time spent administering the programme

Using conservative figures it has been calculated that the cost of officer time spent administering the grant programme using the current approach is between £3,500 and £4,000 per annum. These costs would increase if a greater level of monitoring and evaluation of the grant funded activity was carried out.

# Collated questionnaire feedback

Questionnaires were sent to all town and parish councils regardless of whether or not they had received an EMG. Responses from 50 councils/organisations have been received.

Appendix 6

Appendix 7

# Interviews with a small number of grant recipients

## Approach

- Small number of of clerks approached and interviewed
- Purpose - to gain further understanding of the effect of EMGs in local communities
- General conversational interview with a few written questions

# Interviews with a small number of grant recipients

## Process

- Mixed views on complexity of application process
- Timescale on approval and payment out of sync with setting budgets

## Effect

- Supports local budgets
- Hidden savings
- “Contentment of Communities”
- Local people employed

# Financial comparison with the Maintenance Contract

- Approximation of contract costs
- Local agreements and costs
- Current Highways processes

# Coffee Break



## Session with clerks, councillors and other EMG recipients

Representatives of local councils, a community organisation and a contractor delivering lengthsman activities will be joining the Workshop for a 30 minute question and answer and discussion session.

## Workshop Part 2

### Using the information and evidence heard

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# WORKING LUNCH

Reflection on the available information and the evidence heard

# Using the information and evidence heard

Further exploration of options

- stop the programme
- continue the programme without change
- continue the programme with change

Building a shared understanding of the pros and cons of each option and reaching an agreement on which will be recommended and the implications of this.

# Using the information and evidence heard

Design of the recommended option and actions relating to this

Page 5  
The grant programme is stopped – when would this happen, would there need to be a transition period?

The grant programme continues without change – what would be the justification for this?

The grant programme continues with change – what would a redesigned programme look like?

# Using the information and evidence heard

Agreement on recommendations to  
Communities Scrutiny Committee and next steps

Page 51

Next meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Committee is on 27th November.  
It is proposed that a report is then taken to Cabinet on 20th December.

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**Communities Overview Committee  
Environmental Maintenance Grant Task & Finish Group Workshop  
16<sup>th</sup> November 2017**

Cllr Cecilia Motley, Cllr David Evans, Cllr Viv Parry, Cllr Simon Harris, Cllr Paul Milner, Cllr David Turner

Chris Edwards, Steve Brown, Ffion Horton, Nikki Cheek, Tom Dodds, Danial Webb, Kate Garner

Apologies – Cllr Robert Tindall

**Workshop Part 1 notes**

**Issues and queries raised**

Tension between highway revenue budget reducing whilst EMG top sliced amount stays the same.

Strategic scales of economy versus locality delivery opportunities.

How are TPCs spending the grant, e.g.

Is it being spent efficiently?

Is it being matched?

Is it being programmed over 1 year?

Is the EMG saving SC funding on the planned programmed work? Is the saving actually to the term maintenance contractor?

Is the EMG saving SC money on the responsive works?

Volunteers have more flexibility when doing things like litter picking as they will cover all areas – not be limited or constrained by ownership issues – a lengthsman will be constrained by land ownership issues.

Issues of concern we've raised – may not be clear in our guidance leading to lack of clarity.

The work done through EMG is not taken out of the term contract, therefore it doesn't reduce the cost of the term contract.

Therefore however, does the EMG add value to the way the contract is delivered? Does it result in better outcomes? Could this still be the case without the EMG?

The importance of good communication between parishes and the Highways teams (Inspectors/technicians) – when it's working it works really well.

Health & Safety issues, clarity needed.

**Feedback from interviews with EMG applicants**

Eileen Reynolds, Jayne Madeley, Rebecca Turner, Gary Trim, Trevor Halsey, Danny Chetwood, Matt Sheehan, councillor from Billingsley PC

Apologies – Mandy Evans

**Eileen Reynolds** – exceptionally rural parishes vulnerable to flooding. 2 local lengthsman working over the parishes able to respond to issues such as the need for gritted roads early in the morning - people getting to work, children getting to school.

There is good communication between the lengthsman, the parish clerk and Shropshire Council. Lengthsman is able to respond very quickly to issues that could become serious by taking preventative action.

Q. any suggested changes?

A. More budget!

**Church Stretton Pride of Place Group**

**Trevor Halsey** : group of volunteers started after F&M to help to attract visitors back to CS – used to get grant via CSTC, not gets it directly from the EMG; litter picking, street sweeping, station gardens, planting

Group relies on the EMG – only source of income – has enough funds for 2 more years, but will run out of money after that.

The group is going over and above both the SC works and the CSTC works – adding a lot of value.

Need a regular source of income.

**Rebecca Turner**– Clerks for 5 parishes - small to medium councils – precept £5k - £25,000k

Atcham – maintenance, viability splays, pavement between bridge and Salop Leisure, it is a gateway into Shrewsbury, improve it as a gateway to Shrewsbury

Play areas, street lighting, support other organisations such as local play areas

Get good value for money and better customer services from small organisations

Timeline for the grant is difficult – precept set before the grant is aware

Aware of current arrangements, what are the current standards

Is insurance level appropriate? £5m?

Do give more budget to the work but smaller parish less able to do so

Rebecca:– Atcham PC – ‘highways work’ on an area that is a gateway into Shrewsbury

Great Ness – maintaining a cemetery owned by SC

Good VFM by using local contractors – standard of customer service is greater

Could do with knowing what the maintenance contract standards are to help with resident queries.

**Gary Trim** – lengthsman

No expectation with safety, bollards, bridges, culverts, weld bridges back up, should be immediately done, when requested the materials not available from SC,

Lots of emails thanking for their work

If he doesn't do it then who will

Let things get to a desperate point before work is done

Will provide materials at own cost, needs a flow of materials

Can't dispose of the material he's collected – can't they put it in the tip and therefore should they not be able to put it in the same place of the SC waste is put

Seeing works that need to be done, e.g. repairs to metal work on bridges - that are a hazard – SC saying that they can't do these works – so these works aren't 'nice to have' – they are resolving hazards - a safety issue.

Has used his own materials FOC to resolve issues

**Jayne Madeley:** 2 lengthsman over 3 parishes - used to be able to involve people from Oak Farm (not currently)

Lots of reporting back to JM who reports it on to relevant services

Contented communities – little jobs that SC will never be able to do, get done and this increases community well-being.



DPPC doing more works than originally agreed in the application – adding value.

### **Cleobury Mortimer Town Council**

#### **Matt Sheehan**

Feels the loss of Hedge 2 Hedge gangs

EM person partially funded by grant – about 40% of the EM budget from the grant

Partnership working, alternative potentially cheaper option than contractor gang

MS is listed as a environmental penalty officer

Potential for collaborative works with other councils

Taken things away but didn't replace - £5-6k spent but only received £1,900

Communication – will contact H&T to inform of the work they have done – great working relationship

### **Church Stretton Town Council**

#### **Danny Chetwood**

Has dedicated environmental team, grant tops up the team. It is 4-man team, parks, environmental work, they deliver the grant work, much less of the cost of the work funded by the grant than Cleobury but figures not known

Quickly and efficiently deliver on site reactions

Value added – residents know the team, team know the area, seamless deliver, quickly, efficiently, don't have to complain to get a reaction

Reduction on the grant this year but no discussion on what the grant will no longer fund

Time sheets taken – not requested by SC

Record of assets in each area and which ones are managed by who – discussions can be had on how added value can be given

Stops a lot of complaints coming through to the council

### **Question & Answer session**

Viv: How responsive are lengthsman to issues such as trees on footpaths?

Jayne: ROW are not part of the EMG (not pavements)

Danny: CS EM team looking after the growth at the bottom of the lime trees

Paul: Would the parishes EM work continue if the budget stopped/reduced?

Jayne: Ditton Priors pC would not continue once it has spent all of its remaining grant.

Rebecca: Parishes already topping up grants/going over and above the core grant – and having to meet the shortfall of other services.

Matt: Adding value at every opportunity (volunteers from JCP) – sees the grant as SC supporting the parishes to do over and above and generate social value

David T: Obvious that there is a huge range of activities being undertaken through the EMG.

Eileen: Lengthsman paid £10 per hour – own tools, own vehicle - obviously a voluntary contribution from him and VFM.

David E: CATC tenders every three years for its EM contractor – EMG is topped up by the TC (about to re-contract)

Jayne: The PCs also put out a tender saying what they want doing for a fixed price.

Jayne: VFM – would like to know what SC wants from the TPCs to create VFM

Steve: We recognise the VFM that is created, just has to balance with the budget challenges.

### **What advice would TPCs give to us about how to go forward?**

Rebecca: Link well-managed places to the appeal of Shropshire as a place to live, work and play in (EG Strategy)

Matt: Recognise that the people here today are the proactive ones – wanting to go over and above and really support SC – think about how these people contribute to SC's outcomes.

Gary: If every TPC was given £3k they would probably find a way to spend it. If no TPC got the EMG, no work would get done. Focus the grant on the important issues – be more focused in what SC wants to see done.

Danny: Blurred lines in CS about who should be doing what – would welcome a new discussion on this to create clarity and avoid duplication.

David: Different expectations and aspirations in the parishes around the county

Jayne: Can tell the difference between a parish with a lengthsman, and one that doesn't – the PCs will work with whatever funding they are given – the PCs have stuck only to Highways Maintenance works only.

Cecilia: If PCs were given less money would they just 'manage' this and still keep on going? Majority of people thought they would.

Confirmed that CIL cannot be used to replace the EMG funding.

Confirmed that the EMG is a grant not a subsidy.

Rebecca: Concerned that a reduction in the grant would not fit well with reducing works. e.g. the cost of cutting a cemetery could not be easily reduced.

Matt: The person within the TPC who looks after the EMG is almost an additional employee for SC

Trevor: If you want VFM, make the TPCs utilise volunteers to add lots of value to the paid for work

Rebecca: Concern that PCs would not be able to co-ordinate volunteer groups

Kate: Could they be able to organise themselves?

Matt: CM only been in the scheme for a couple of years.

EMG is used to contribute to the cost of employing a LM (PC pays the rest)

EMG is giving SC the option of using local people to deliver works instead of sending people from Bridgnorth to CM.

CM PC is very proactive around EM – the EMG is used as part of a package of resources

CM PC could work in partnership with local parish councils

Very small feedback loop in reporting and resolution

The EMG is important to the PC – sees SC supporting the PC

Danny: CS has an EM team 4 people – added value – residents know the EM team; the EM team knows the area.

This year the grant reduced, but there was no conversation between SC and CSTC about what was not going to be done. CSTC has managed this itself – timesheets are kept, but not asked for by SC. Could there be a discussion about the assets within CS to establish who is going to do what and how?

CSTC values the grant – thinks that it could show VFM – (DC doing some work on this)

## **Workshop 2 – discussions on what was heard**

Importance of communication and co-operation between the TPCs and local Highways teams around EM issues and resolving these.

Health and Safety issues – can't be ignored, but there is a mixed understanding.

The role of volunteers in local environmental maintenance

## **Conclusions**

Do the EMGs do 2 things? How do these balance?

1. the actual activity the grant funds
2. The way the grants make the councils feel, e.g. supported by SC, giving a sense of empowerment.

<b>The added value generated by the EMG?</b>	<b>The actual activity</b>
Localism agenda, which SC has always valued	Small acts are making a big difference in very rural areas
Match funding as a criteria – sharing the burden of the cost	There are some activities that are more valuable to us than others – streamline the grants to these?
A well maintained environment supports the vibrant economy that Shropshire values	Much more clarity needed through the guidance
The generation of social value through the activity	What does good look like? What is best practice? Need for case studies.

### **What would we need to continue?**

A set of criteria would be a very wise addition in order to ensure the grant goes to those who genuinely need it. We need also to include something to the effect that the grant cannot be used to top up core budgets but must be used for discrete maintenance purposes. Recipients also need to report on the use to which they have put the maintenance grants on an annual basis to ensure they are meeting the criteria. We may have to think about who will be signing off the annual reports .

Much greater clarity in the guidelines

Review the criteria for eligible activity

The role of volunteers – what would we want them to do?

More accountability.

Match funding

Assume that it is unlikely that more TPCs will apply for funding if the activity criteria is limited and the application eligibility criteria changes.

Take out the larger market towns, population more than 10K

Offer training on insurance issues

Use the eligible activity criteria to shape a future programme and therefore, who would want to apply?

Rewarding the proactive areas – working with the willing

Link the eligible activity to the activity that is important to the Highways teams

Make match funding a desirable criteria

### **Impact of stopping the programme**

What's the cost of this?

What message do we give to communities about how we value them and how we work in partnership with them?

The activity that is currently being delivered will stop (not all of it, but a lot and probably where it matters most in the most rural areas)

An opportunity to have the relationship with local councils that means we can have a conversation with them about other things.

An opportunity to demonstrate that Localism is not lost, but difficult in times of austerity.

The following recommendations were confirmed at the workshop:

Shropshire Council's Environmental Maintenance Grant programme should continue with the following changes to its design and delivery –

#### **i. Changes to eligible activity**

The activity eligible for funding from the programme should be the activity that brings most added value to the delivery of Shropshire Council's Highways term maintenance contract. Highways officers should advise what this activity should be.

**ii. Application eligibility**

The eligible applicants should be limited to Shropshire's rural town and parish councils. Urban town councils a population of over 10K should be ineligible to apply.

**iii. Value for money and incentivising added value**

The grant should not be used to top up core budgets but should be used for discrete maintenance purposes. Applications should be scored according to how they demonstrate value for money and provide added value to the core funding and activity. Examples of VFM and added value should be –

- Councils demonstrating that they are committed to their effective delivery of environmental maintenance works in their areas by contributing to or matching grant funding.
- Demonstrating that councils are working together to provide economies of scale and reduce costs, e.g. multiple parishes let 1 contract.
- The design of activity that clearly creates social value, the appropriate use of volunteers to add value to the core activity

**iv. Design of the funding programme**

Funding decisions should be made for a 3 year period, e.g. 2018/19 – 2020/21. This will reduce bureaucracy associated with the application process and provide more time for monitoring and evaluation of applications. It should also enable local councils to let 3 year contracts that offer greater value for money with confidence. It is recommended that the EMG programme is reviewed in year 2 and a decision then made about the future of the scheme, from the end of year 3. If the decision is made to end the EMG programme at this point, a 12 month notice period should be given.

**v. Annual value of the funding programme**

The annual value of the programme should be £75,000. There will be no increase to this amount.

**vi. Value of individual grants**

The maximum value of individual grants should be £1500 p.a. There should be no increase to this amount.

**vii. Application criteria, guidance notes and monitoring.**

The guidance notes accompanying the application process should be reviewed and rewritten to ensure that there is absolute clarity about the design and delivery of the grant funded activity. There should be a particular focus on health and safety. This should also include a more robust approach to monitoring the funded activity through the completion and submission of an annual report from each recipient, and a process for this should be designed and implemented. A process should be put in place to ensure appropriate signing off of the annual reports.

**viii. Consultation on proposed changes to the EMG programme**

A recommendation should be made to Cabinet that it approves the delivery of a 6 week consultation period in early 2018 on the recommended changes to the EMG programme based on previous Committee Overview Committee reports.

**ix. Delegated authority**

A recommendation should be made to Cabinet to delegate authority to the Head of Infrastructure and Communities in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport to implement the revised EMG programme detailed specification following the consultation.

These recommendations will be made to the meeting of the Communities Overview Committee on 27<sup>th</sup> November 2017.

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