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**From:** Bryan Sweetland, Cabinet Member – Environment, Highways & Waste  
John Burr - Director of Highways & Transportation

**To:** Environment, Highways & Waste Cabinet Committee

**Date:** 11 May 2012

**Subject:** Member Highway Fund Update

**Classification:** Unrestricted

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**Summary:**

This report updates the Committee on the recent Member Highway Fund (MHF) IMG group meetings which took place on 27 March and 27 April 2012. A number of recommendations have been put forward to tackle the areas for improvement as identified in the report to the EHW Policy Overview & Scrutiny Committee (POSC) held on 14 March 2012.

**Recommendation:**

Members consider and endorse the outcomes of the two Informal Member Group meetings on 27 March and 27 April, specifically that:

- (i) Delegated authority is given to the Director of Highways and Transportation for the approval of expenditure on MHF schemes.
  - (ii) Expenditure on those schemes not in accordance with current Highways & Transportation policies, procedures and practice will be referred to the Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste.
  - (iii) Members should complete their spend within the 2012/13 financial year in view of the County Council elections in May 2013.
  - (iv) Officers provide a list of scheme types with typical costs and timescales, that they continue to develop the online scheme information system, and that they implement the “walk, talk and build” and Member sign-off for completed improvements as soon as possible.
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**1. Introduction**

This report gives an update on the two IMG meetings held on 27 March and 27 April which were set up as a result of the POSC meeting held on 14 March. The report details items discussed at these meetings and puts forward recommendations for approval.

## **2. Summary of decision at POSC 14 March 2012**

The report submitted to the POSC on 14 March 2012 outlined the performance to date of the Member Highway Fund initiative. In summary the key points raised were:

- £5.8 million had been committed to highway schemes and projects, half of which was committed in the last 12 months of the scheme.
- A total of 1,197 schemes had been designed; a majority of the committed sums were spent on new or improved pedestrian crossings (£874k).
- The existing team consists of 12.5 FTE staff supported by 3 full time temporary staff. There are 6 area engineers who deal with approximately 14 members each. Each engineer has to deal with an average of 64 applications per year. This allows on average an engineer to spend less than 3 working days per application from inception to delivery.
- As of the end of January 2012, nearly £700k of works had been ordered through the term contractor Enterprise; approximately £270k works had been completed.
- The delivery time (from inception) for a typical scheme can take on average 10 to 12 months following the current procedures. Contributions can take between 4 to 6 months.
- 17% of applications were aborted, resulting in over 3 years worth of lost staff hours.

POSC resolved to form an Informal Members Group to discuss the issues raised and report back to the Cabinet Member with suggested improvements on how the MHF operates.

## **3 Summary of discussion at IMG 27 March 2012**

The first IMG consisted of County Councillors Nigel Collor and Malcolm Robertson, and Officers Tim Read, Andy Corcoran, Kirstie Williams from Transportation. Dean Benson (Contract Director from Enterprise) also attended.

The original purpose of the scheme was reviewed and the performance to date as highlighted at the POSC meeting was outlined. The existing arrangements for communication and the current process were discussed. The key areas for action were identified as improved communication with Members, reducing compression of workload for the team, returning Member forms to the team more promptly, reducing the amount of abortive work for the team, and speeding up delivery on simple schemes.

#### **4. Summary of discussion at IMG 27 April 2012**

The second IMG group consisted of County Councillors Michael Northey, Nigel Collor, Steve Manion, Richard Parry and Malcolm Robertson and officers Tim Read, David Hall, Andy Corcoran, Kirstie Williams and Dean Benson Contract Director from Enterprise. The summary of the previous IMG group 27 March was discussed and a very positive and constructive debate was held with the following outcomes agreed.

##### Communication

- Members supported the idea of a new on line database/system which allowed electronic approvals to speed up the MHF process.
- It is essential the information contained within the database is accurate and up to date.
- The MHF team will need to tailor the report to individual Members' needs as some Members will prefer to not use an online system.
- The online system should be tested by a few members prior to its formal introduction.
- Members would welcome a note on what the new system is proposed to do.

##### Process Improvement

- Delegated authority be given to the Director of Highways and Transportation for the approval of all expenditure on MHF schemes.
- The principle of self-regulation of the whole MHF initiative be adopted in the interests of speeding up the process, smoothing workload for officers and ensuring value for money. A list of suggested scheme types for Director approval and those which may require referral to the Cabinet Member was circulated at the meeting for consideration and agreement at a later date.
- Members should complete their spend within the 2012/13 financial year in view of the County Council elections in May 2013.
- A list of typical costs and timescales for scheme delivery should be produced to help Members manage their constituents' expectations and plan the use of the MHF better. These should be supplemented by presentations to the various political group meetings.
- To reduce abortive work officers will not carry out design work on those schemes for which it is clear there is insufficient funding to implement.
- Members fully supported the proposal for the Contractor to keep a stock of regularly used materials especially signs and promote more use of "walk, talk and build" to speed up the delivery of schemes.

- When “walk, talk and build” was to be used, Members will be sent photographs of the setting out proposals for agreement prior to the start of works.
- Enterprise and the MHF team would work closely together to reduce the cost of schemes by ordering similar materials for different schemes together, thus achieving an economy of scale.
- While Enterprise will still be the preferred contractor for scheme delivery and they will continue to work to obtain the best possible price for schemes there is an option to utilise other local contractors where a cheaper like for like quote is available.
- Members will be invited to a final scheme walk through with the MHF team and Enterprise to sign off the scheme as complete.
- It would be beneficial for Members if a reminder was circulated informing them that they receive four free applications. Any additional applications submitted will be liable for an investigation fee which is determined on a sliding scale subject to the complexity of the scheme.
- Members need to be informed that the whole MHF process must be largely self financing and this is why their £25k fund is top sliced by 15%.

## **5. Conclusions**

Members were pleased with the progress made in both IMG's and welcomed the ideas for improvements to the process. They agreed to seek endorsement from the Cabinet Committee for these, most notably the delegation of authority to the Director of Highways & Transportation for schemes and the principle of self-regulation to improve the whole MHF process.

## **6. Recommendations**

Members consider and endorse the outcomes of the two Informal Member Group meetings on 27 March and 27 April, specifically that:

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- (ii) Expenditure on those schemes not in accordance with current Highways & Transportation policies, procedures and practice will be referred to the Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste.
- (iii) Members should complete their spend within the 2012/13 financial year in view of the County Council elections in May 2013.
- (iv) Officers provide a list of scheme types with typical costs and timescales, that they continue to develop the online scheme information system, and that they implement the “walk, talk and build” and Member sign-off for completed improvements as soon as possible.

**Background Documents:**

POSC report dated 14 March 2012.

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