

Committee: Cabinet

Agenda Item

Date: 25 June 2014

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Title: Strategic Initiatives Fund

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Chambers

Key decision: **No**

Summary

1. As part of the 2014 budget setting process the council allocated a sum of £1m for Strategic Initiatives.
2. This report summarises the situation at the moment and seeks Members authority to proceed with the identified projects.

Recommendations

3. The Cabinet is recommended to approve, subject to the costs identified in the Part II report accompanying this item, that the following projects are funded from the Strategic Initiatives Fund
 - a. Economic Development Officer on a two year fixed term basis.
 - b. Business Workspace Review
 - c. Swan Meadow Car Park capacity enhancement
 - d. A review of the potential for the extension of Catons Lane Car Park
 - e. Funding for the further roll out of Superfast broadband within Uttlesford
 - f. Matched Highways funding
 - g. Discretionary Rate Relief

Financial Implications

4. All of the projects are to be funded from the Strategic Initiatives Fund. Specific amounts are set out in the Part II paper

Background Papers

None.

Impact

Communication/Consultation	Consultation on economic development priorities has been undertaken. This is set in Appendix 1 of the Strategy: principally Business Conference held 8 January 2014 supplemented by feedback from local businesses, agencies and partners
Community Safety	No specific implications
Equalities	An EqIA for each project will be developed prior to the project commencing
Health and Safety	No specific implications
Human Rights/Legal Implications	No specific implications
Sustainability	No specific implications
Ward-specific impacts	Swan Meadow and Catons Lane car parks are located in Saffron Walden and primarily impact on those three Wards. All other projects are cross district.
Workforce/Workplace	No specific implications that are not covered by other policies such as the Discretionary Rate Relief Policy

Risk Analysis

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
The fund is insufficient to cover the identified projects	1 (the projects have been fully costed)	3 (the Council would have to prioritise the projects and potentially delay some)	The cost of the projects have been identified

1 = Little or no risk or impact

2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary.

3 = Significant risk or impact – action required

4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.

Situation

5. The stated purposes of the Strategic Initiatives Fund are
 - a. Support for the local economy
 - b. Partnership working with voluntary sector organisations
 - c. Community initiatives and services in rural locations
 - d. “Spend to save” projects to make the Council more efficient and more resilient to funding changes in future years
 - e. Putting some Council services onto a more commercial footing.
6. There are four key criteria that each project must meet to be considered for funding from the Strategic Initiatives Fund. The four criteria are
 - a. The project demonstrably supports the Council’s corporate priorities, as set out in the Corporate Plan
 - b. The project fulfils at least one of the five suggested uses for the Fund, as set out above
 - c. The project results in tangible financial benefit to the Council, either by reducing future cost pressures, efficiency savings, or income generation
 - d. The project does not give the Council any additional ongoing revenue budget commitments beyond the 2016/17 financial year

Economic Development Officer

7. This would be a two year fixed term appointment with the grade to be determined through the job evaluation scheme.
8. The role would
 - a. help to deliver the Economic Development Strategy
 - b. provide a dedicated resource to help develop the Town Teams and their projects
 - c. create and deliver an action plan to achieve sustainable resourcing of the Town Team projects beyond 2016-17
 - i. one example of sustainable resourcing can be seen in over 200 towns & cities across the UK who are delivering projects to maintain the vitality and viability of their centres by becoming a Business Improvement District
 - d. grow the number of businesses on the corporate business database
 - e. identify business needs and develop solutions – these solutions are likely to include referring businesses to third party suppliers (e.g. accountants, web site designers, etc) and the District Council could receive referral fees.

Business Workspace review

9. The review will look at the availability of suitable workspace. This is important in enabling economic growth in the District. In particular
 - a. the project will commission a market report of the existing and forecast demand for and supply of the various types of business workspace in the district e.g. managed office workspace, light industrial workspace
 - b. the report will:
 - i. assess if there are any significant gaps between demand and supply
 - ii. recommend how any gaps that do exist might be filled i.e. private sector, public and private joint venture
 - c. identify the role if any of the public sector i.e. District Council

Swan Meadow Car Park capacity enhancement

10. In order to help address future need for car parking spaces in Saffron Walden work has been undertaken to review the layout of the existing Swan meadow Car Park.
11. It has been identified that by redesigning the layout it would be possible to provide an additional number of spaces, up to 40. The final number of additional spaces would be established through the preparation of a specification for a works procurement process. An indicative layout is appended. Alterations would be made on a phased basis to maintain the availability of some capacity during the works period, which would be during the autumn this year.

Catons Lane Car Park review

12. Subject to the assessment of future demand for parking in Saffron Walden in terms of quantity and quality, there is an opportunity to extend the Catons Lane Car Park to include the area currently used as parking by the football club.
13. It has been identified that in the region of an additional 70 spaces could be provided.
14. There are a number of challenges still to be resolved primarily around ownership and rights of way and charging policy. The review will also take account of the potential implementation of residents parking in Catons Lane.
15. A separate report will be brought to Cabinet once the challenges and possible solutions have been identified.

Superfast Broadband in Uttlesford

16. Essex County Council is rolling out a Superfast Broadband service across the county, working in partnership with BT. This project will take a couple of years to complete.
17. It is anticipated that at the end of the project 93% of Uttlesford residents will have access to the BT service. This will leave around 2,500 premises still without access to superfast broadband
18. In 2010 Uttlesford provided a grant to Buzcom to provide radio broadband to Uttlesford. To date Buzcom has in excess of 900 customers. Feedback from customers is that this is a good and reliable service.
19. In order to cover as much of the remaining 7% as possible it is proposed to issue a tender to seek a partner to deliver an enhanced radio broadband service.

Matched Highways funding

20. Essex County Council (ECC) has, subject to matched funding, provided an additional £50,000 funding for each Local Highways Panels (LHP) for the 2014/15 year. Although not specific as to which projects should be funded by this money verge maintenance has been identified by ECC as one suitable area. The district council's match funding would be put into the Uttlesford LHP budget. The final decision on the spending of this money rests with the LHP.
21. Discussions are on-going with Essex County Council as to the best use of this fund. Current options include the purchase of a tractor and flail to assist with verge maintenance.

Discretionary Rate Relief

22. A report earlier on the agenda proposed alongside the Economic Development Strategy a new Discretionary Rate Relief policy.
23. It is proposed that, subject to the Discretionary Rate Relief policy being approved, the cost incurred is funded from the Strategic Initiatives Fund.