

**Subject:** Community Area Transport Group Review

**Cabinet Member:** Councillor Mark McClelland –  
Transport, Waste, Street Scene and Flooding

**Key Decision:** No

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## **Executive Summary**

The Community Area Transport Groups (CATGs) were formed as sub-groups of the Area Boards to consider transport issues in more detail and report back to the Area Boards with recommendations for schemes and initiatives which support the transport aims of the Council.

The CATGs have been operating since 2011 and have been involved in 1,545 schemes of which 1038 (67.2%) were constructed and 218 (14.1%) are currently in progress. They have successfully delivered a large range of schemes to improve road safety and encourage walking and cycling.

As part of the review of the operation of the CATGs a survey has been undertaken of the Wiltshire Councillors and Town and Parish Councillors. There were 105 responses to the survey which was a response rate of about 30%.

A majority (81%) thought that the CATGs were an effective way of attracting and prioritising highways and transport investment. The majority thought that CATGs were effective because they have delivered improvements to the highways in a local area, through schemes such as increased signage, dropped kerbs and yellow lines.

The governance arrangements, with the CATGs as sub-groups of the Area Boards, were considered appropriate by most respondents (84%), and most (81%) thought that the frequency of meetings was about right.

It was considered that the CATGs had helped members, the public and town and parish councils to raise concerns that have been progressed more quickly than through the more traditional processes. There were suggestions in some of the survey responses that the funding for the CATGs should be increased.

The officers involved in the CATGs considered that there had been improved working relationships with councillors (at all levels – Wiltshire, Town and Parish) and with other organisations and the public. Communities now have a better understanding and knowledge of the costs associated with highway works, and the constraints and guidelines within which the highways authority must operate.

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## Proposals

It is recommended that the Committee should:

- (i) Welcome the results of the survey of the Wiltshire Councillors and Town and Parish Councillors, which indicates a high level of support and satisfaction with the operation of the CATGs.
- (ii) Acknowledge the success of the CATGs in engaging with the local communities and delivering a wide range of successful schemes.
- (iii) Recommend that the Council continues to encourage the operation of the CATGs in view of their success, popularity and effectiveness.
- (iv) Confirm that the terms of reference and current operating procedures of the CATGs are appropriate.
- (v) Request the Cabinet Member for Transport, Waste, Street Scene and Flooding to consider the possibility of increasing funding for CATGs should the opportunity arise.
- (vi) Thank all the elected members and officers involved for making the CATGs such a successful example of community engagement.

### Reason for Proposals

The CATGs have successfully operated for over ten years, and during that time they have delivered a large number of schemes to address local traffic concerns and related problems and delivered improved facilities for pedestrians, cyclists and other road users.

The CATGs have clearly been an effective way of attracting and prioritising local highways and transport investment. They have facilitated community engagement and helped communities understand the potential for safety improvements on the highway network and the limitations because of legal, funding or other factors.

**Sam Fox**  
**Corporate Director Place**

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### **Purpose of Report**

1. To review the operation of the Community Area Transport Groups (CATG) that have now been operating for since 2011.

### **Relevance to the Council's Business Plan**

2. The [Business Plan 2017-2027](#) sets out Wiltshire Council's priorities for the next ten years:
  - Growing the local economy
  - Protecting the vulnerable
  - Creating strong communities

There is a commitment to make the council carbon neutral by 2030.

The Local Transport Plan (LTP) sets out policies to help address these priorities in respect of transport. The CATGs have helped implement schemes that deliver the priorities in the Business Plan and the LTP.

### **Background**

3. The LTP is a statutory document and provides the context for achieving the transport related aims of the Wiltshire Core Strategy and the Strategic Economic Plan.
4. The annual financial settlement from the Department of Transport (DfT) provides capital funding for investment in transport infrastructure and facilities. The Integrated Transport Block Allocation part of the LTP funding is currently the primary source of capital funding that Wiltshire Council has available to finance integrated transport measures.
5. This funding is aimed principally at stimulating economic development and combatting climate change, as well as improving safety, reducing road accident casualties, easing traffic congestion, increasing accessibility, managing the highway network effectively, and promoting sustainable transport.
6. Continued investment in these areas of transport is necessary to enable the Council to support economic growth and make progress towards meeting local and national objectives and targets in respect of transport, road safety and climate change.

7. The schemes funded by the Integrated Transport Block Allocation reflect four generic categories which align with the Council's LTP goals and objectives:
  - Local Safety Schemes
  - School travel plan improvements
  - Projects that support economic growth, promote accessibility and safety, and improve the environment
  - Traffic management
8. The funding is used to:
  - Implement schemes that safeguard vulnerable road users and improve accessibility for those people without access to a car;
  - Stimulate economic development and growth across the county; and
  - Provide a discretionary highways budget for the 18 Area Boards so that their CATGs can identify and deliver local solutions to local highway and transport problems.
9. The CATGs have now been operating for just over ten years and as requested by the Environment Select Committee it would be appropriate to review their operation.

## **Main Considerations for the Council**

### Community Area Transport Groups – Terms of Reference

10. The formation of the Area Boards, following the creation of Wiltshire Council in 2009, provided the opportunity to involve elected members, town and parish councils, the public and other organisations in identifying and resolving local transport problems and issues.
11. The CATGs were formed as sub-groups of the Area Boards to consider transport issues in more detail, set priorities and report back to the Area Boards with recommendations for schemes and initiatives which support the transport aims of the LTP.
12. The CATG is normally made up of not more than 10 members from the following groups:
  - Members of the Area Board
  - Town and Parish council representatives
  - Community representatives
13. Meetings are attended by relevant officers from Wiltshire Council, usually including a senior transport planner, a senior traffic engineer and a local highway maintenance engineer as necessary. The officers key purpose is to offer advice and support to the CATG but they do not vote on the issues raised.
14. The CATG may also invite representatives from local organisations to its meetings to give technical advice or to share pertinent local knowledge. It should be noted that the CATG is an advisory body, it does not exercise delegated decision making powers.

15. A discretionary highways budget has been allocated to each Area Board by the Cabinet Member for Transport, Waste, Street Scene and Flooding (and previously the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport), which is based on the geographical size and population of each community area. The funding is capital funding and can only be used to provide new and improved highway infrastructure.
16. The funding is available for small scale schemes that improve safety, increase accessibility and sustainability by promoting walking; cycling and public transport and improve traffic management. It cannot be used to fund revenue functions such as maintenance schemes or the provision of passenger transport services.
17. Typically, individuals raise highway issues through their respective local Parish or Town Council. It would be for a Parish or Town Council representative to attend the group and endorse the highways concerns or suggestions being made.
18. The CATG has no formal decision making authority on operational matters or budget expenditure but acts as an informal discussion forum making recommendations to the Area Board. With only a limited funding allocation, each group looks carefully at all of the issues raised. Where a solution has been identified it will be prioritised along with all other received requests
19. If the estimated cost of an identified CATG scheme is found to be excess of the total discretionary amount available, the group can consider submitting a bid for funding from the centrally held funds for larger substantive schemes. Bids from the respective groups are considered annually. Each bid for a substantive scheme is subject to a full assessment appraisal and scored against set criteria before funding is allocated.

#### Operation of the CATGs

20. The CATGs have now been operating for 11 years and the Environment Select Committee requested this review of their operation, including a survey of members of the CATGs and those involved in them. It also has also provided the opportunity to consider whether their remit and function are still relevant.
21. Due to the Covid pandemic the operation of the CATGs was suspended in May 2020 in order to allow officers time to respond to the demand for Social Distancing measures and central governments Emergency Active Travel requirements. The CATG's were reactivated in September 2020 and have recovered well with meetings being held virtually rather than face to face.
22. The impact of the suspension has meant that a reduced number of schemes was delivered in 2020/21 and this has created greater demand in the current year, 2021/22, with subsequently greater waiting times for scheme design and delivery.
23. It should be noted that the survey of members of the CATGs and those involved with them as requested by the Environment Select Committee took place in February 2020 and therefore reflects the views prior to the Covid pandemic and

the temporary suspension of the CATGs

### Scheme Delivery by the CATGs

24. Since 2011 the CATGs have been involved in 1,545 schemes of which 1038 (67.2%) were constructed and 218 (14.1%) are currently in progress (See **Appendix 1**). There were 116 schemes (7.5%) which did not proceed to construction for various reasons. Some of the other projects were for surveys, designs or assessments only, which did not involve construction.
25. The types of schemes varied enormously from single road signs to junction alterations or pedestrian crossings. The value and complexity of the schemes have also varied considerably, and the number of schemes does not necessarily represent the scope or scale of the activity and work undertaken, however it does show how the number of CATG schemes being progressed has increased over the years.
26. Since 2011 the number of schemes the CATGs have been involved in have more than doubled from 107 to 229 per year, and the number of schemes which did not proceed to construction have halved from 23 to 12 per year. This suggests that the CATGs have become better at identifying and implementing suitable proposals.
27. The reasons why schemes have not proceeded to construction have varied. They include reconsideration of the original issue, the options not being acceptable for various reasons, and no practical or affordable options being available.
28. There has been concern that resources are not being used efficiently if design work and assessments are being undertaken on impractical schemes. The CATGs do need to ensure that best use is made of the limited resources available. The indications are that on the whole care is being taken to use the resources and funding effectively.
29. As well as the budget for the individual CATGs there is also £150,000 funding available annually for larger schemes that they can bid for. There have been 54 substantive CATG schemes funded since 2013 when this funding was first made available, with at least one successful bid from each CATG during that period.

### Survey of Members, Town and Parish Councils

30. In order to understand the effectiveness of the CATGs a survey was undertaken of Wiltshire Councillors and Town and Parish Councillors. There were 105 responses which indicated a response rate of about 30%. The survey provided a good opportunity for those involved regularly in the operation of the CATGs to give their views (See **Appendix 2**).
31. A majority (81%) thought that the CATGs had been an effective way of attracting and prioritising highways and transport investment. The majority of respondents stated that, primarily, CATGs are effective because they have delivered improvements to the highways in a local area, through schemes such as increased signage, dropped kerbs and yellow lines.

32. It was considered that CATGs have ensured that more decisions have local-level input and they have facilitated improved partnership working between the key stakeholders involved in highways matters.
33. A minority of individuals stated that CATGs were not able to be effective because they did not have adequate funding, or the process for implementing highway improvements was too lengthy.
34. A majority of respondents (68%) thought that CATGs had produced a clearer understanding of Council policies and the application of regulations at a local level. It was also thought that CATGs are a good way to assess and manage requests for highways improvements by local residents (80%).
35. The comment sections indicated that the key benefits of CATGs are that they facilitate better partnership working, ensure that decisions are made at a local-level and enable residents to understand the processes for bringing about change. Most respondents (81%) thought that the frequency of meetings was about right. Those that disagreed mainly thought that they should meet more often. The majority (83%) agreed with how the membership of the CATG is organised.
36. On the matter of funding there is less agreement, with almost equal numbers of respondents agreeing (52%) and disagreeing (48%) with how the funding is allocated for CATGs. The comments received suggested that more funding was required.
37. There was generally a good understanding of how CATG funds can be spent (64%). The comments indicated there was a view that greater publicity of the CATGs and how they work would be beneficial.
38. The governance arrangements, with the CATGs as sub-groups of the Area Boards, was agreed with by the majority of respondents (84%). There were suggestions that the having the CATGs report to the Area Boards was unnecessary.
39. The opportunity was provided to identify issues that the CATGs have faced in resolving small-scale local highways matters. The majority of issues reported were largely to do with funding.
40. This was followed by many stating that the process for delivering the highway improvement was too slow and, although officers were praised for their contribution, respondents stated that the capacity of support for CATGs had resulted in some difficulties in the past.
41. When asked, respondents commented that these issues could be resolved by more funding being provided to the CATG, or that more information should be provided about where and how local areas can access delegated sources of funding. Others suggested that greater resources were needed to support the CATG.

#### Views of the officers involved in the CATGs

42. The opportunity was taken to seek the views of the officers who attend the CATG meetings and implement the schemes (see **Appendix 3**), many of whom have been involved since the inception of the groups.
43. It was apparent that the CATGs have successfully delivered an impressive number of small and medium highway schemes since 2011. They have helped members, the public and town and parish councils to raise concerns that have been progressed quicker than may have been the case through the more traditional processes.
44. There have been improved working relationships between officers with councillors (at all levels – Wiltshire, Town and Parish) and the public. They now appear to have a better understanding and knowledge of the costs associated with highway works, and the constraints and guidelines in which a highway authority must operate. CATGs can provide an opportunity to meet officers face to face who can then discuss and advise on the most practicable solution to particular problems.
45. There was a concern that some matters referred to the CATG can be outside their scope or be beyond their budgets and may not always be consistent with the longer term transport objectives of the Council. It was noted that the technical input, design work and administrative support for the CATG can on occasion involve considerable officer time.
46. The frequency of meetings was considered to be about right. Whilst there may be opportunities to broaden the remit of the CATGs to include for example more highway maintenance issues, it should be noted that existing staff resources may be inadequate to provide the level of support this would require.
47. Some CATGs 'roll forward' some funding each year, which can make it difficult to provide continuity of workload for design staff and contractors. It has been suggested that there may be benefits in redistributing some of the unspent funding each year if this continues to occur.

### Summary

48. It is clear from the schemes delivered, survey results, and from the consultations with the officers involved, that the CATGs have been a great success. Most respondents believe CATGs have brought about benefits for Wiltshire's communities and have implemented successful and needed schemes.
49. The CATGs have facilitated enhanced partnership working and have established communication channels between all the key stakeholders. There has been increased community engagement as a direct result of the CATGs.
50. The governance of the CATGs as sub-groups of the Area Boards has generally worked well and has a high level of support.
51. Suggestions have been made for increasing the funding available to CATGs, although some respondents recognised the difficulties associated with this. Overall, respondents felt that if the CATGs had more support resources available



then they would be able to deliver an even better service.

## **Overview and Scrutiny Engagement**

52. This review of the CATGs was carried out at the request of the Environment Select Committee. The operation of the highways service and its contractors is reported annually to this Committee and includes information on the Integrated Transport schemes and the CATG schemes implemented each year.

## **Safeguarding Implications**

53. None.

## **Public Health Implications**

54. The schemes implemented by the CATGs can make a significant contribution to reducing collisions, especially those resulting in killed and seriously injured. As the highway authority, Wiltshire Council is responsible for monitoring and reducing collisions and accident casualties on its roads, and the LTP provides funding to undertake engineering solutions at identified collision cluster sites. The CATG schemes often also improve road safety. One of the aims of Wiltshire's LTP is to improve air quality and reduce air and noise pollution caused by transport. The LTP contains policies that set out to reduce dependence on car-borne travel and increase cycling, walking and public transport. These policies aim to reduce the rate of traffic growth in the county and improve the environment by reducing air and noise pollution. The CATG schemes can support walking and cycling and contribute to helping communities adopt a healthy lifestyle.

## **Environmental and Climate Change Considerations**

55. The LTP was subject to a Strategic Environmental Assessment when it was prepared. One of the priority goals is to reduce carbon emissions from transport and the LTP sets out policies that aim to reduce dependence on travel by private car and promote cycling, walking and the use of public transport. The objective of these policies is to reduce the rate of traffic growth in the county and bring about an improved environment by reducing CO2 emissions, as well as addressing community severance and air and noise pollution. The CATG schemes have potential to support this aim.
56. The effects of climate change are likely to be significant for the highway network. There was considerable damage to the roads, footways and drainage systems during the flooding in 2013/14, and in 2018 road surfaces were damaged by high temperatures during the summer. Such events are likely to be repeated, and it is important to ensure that new infrastructure is robust and helps build resilience into the highway network. This is taken into account in the development of CATG schemes.
57. The highway service recycles a large proportion of the waste material generated by its highway operations and takes specific measures to protect the environment when carrying out maintenance and construction work. The nature and small size of many of the CATG schemes can make recycling less efficient,

but opportunities are taken to recycle waste material where feasible.

58. Schemes to encourage walking and cycling and the use of public transport are likely to have a central role in reducing the carbon footprint of the local communities in Wiltshire. The CATGs are likely to have a key role in promoting walking and cycling opportunities in the future.

### **Equalities Impact of the Proposal**

59. The types of scheme implemented by the CATGs usually benefit all road users, including users of public transport, and particularly vulnerable road users such as cyclists, pedestrians and the less able. The provision of dropped kerbs at road crossing points are often provided through the CATG process.

### **Risk Assessment**

60. There are considerable risks associated with the highway network, particularly in terms of safety, environmental, financial and reputational risks. There are risk management processes in place to manage the risks associated with the implementation of works on the highway, which include regular liaison with service suppliers and the effective management of resources.
61. No specific decision is required at this time, but it should be noted that there is a risk of increased accidents, claims and public dissatisfaction if some of the schemes currently promoted through the CATG process are not implemented.

### **Risks that may arise if the proposed decision is taken and actions that will be taken to manage these risks**

62. No decision is required. Processes are currently in place to reduce risks associated with the construction of highway schemes, with delivery managed through the Council's highway team working with the Council's consultant and contractors. These Service Delivery Teams are the appropriate groups to continue to manage the associated risks. The teams include representatives from the Council, consultants and contractors involved in delivering the services, and they report to the Contract Management Meeting comprising senior managers from those organisations.

### **Financial Implications**

63. The funding for CATG schemes is currently provided through the LTP Integrated Transport Block funding allocation, which provides capital funding for investment in transport infrastructure and facilities. The funding has recently been £2,181,000 annually, which enables improvements to be made to the Council's transport system.
64. It should be noted that the LTP grant settlement provides no additional revenue funding to assist with the future maintenance of this new infrastructure and this will inevitably increase the Council's future maintenance liabilities.
65. The funding for CATG schemes has been £250,000 annually which has been

divided between the Area Boards based on population. There is an additional £150,000 which forms the Substantive Highways Scheme Fund that CATGs can bid for to help fund larger schemes.

66. The CATGs are encouraged to seek local funding of at least 25% of the scheme cost, and in many cases can obtain substantially more, with some schemes being funded entirely by town or parish councils.
67. As well as funding the CATGs, there are many calls on the Integrated Transport block funding, including for road safety schemes, air quality improvements, cycling schemes, junction improvements, traffic management, parking schemes, journey to school improvements and transport scheme development.
68. The funding for the Integrated Transport block has not changed significantly in recent years and increasing the CATG funding may not be feasible in view of these other priorities. Some CATGs do not spend their annual allocation and are able to roll forward funding into the following year. It would be possible to consider redistributing this money, but this is unlikely to be welcomed by those CATGs affected.

### **Corporate Procurement Implications**

69. There are no procurement implications. Most of the work for implementing CATG schemes is undertaken by the Council's term consultant, Atkins, or term contractor, Ringway or other suppliers through existing specialist contracts. These contracts were all awarded in accordance with the corporate procurement strategy.

### **Legal Implications**

70. The Council has a duty under the Highways Act to maintain the county's roads and has powers to carry out improvements. There is various other legislation, including the traffic signs regulations, which are relevant to the types of schemes implemented by the CATGs. The correct procedures need to be followed to ensure that valid legal orders are in place when schemes are implemented.
71. The use of road signs and markings are governed by regulations and specific guidance which must be followed to ensure that the Council's actions are legal and do not create additional hazards and liabilities. The procedures and consultations to be followed may sometimes appear to be time consuming, and limit the options available to the CATGs, but it is important that they are complied with or the Council could be liable to claims or legal challenges.
72. The CATGs are advised by officers who are very experienced in the delivery of these types of scheme and have access to specialist legal advice if required.

### **Options Considered**

73. It would be possible for many of the schemes implemented by the CATGs to be delivered without their involvement. Many other authorities do not operate using the equivalent of the CATGs, but they do not appear to achieve the same levels

of community engagement that has been possible in Wiltshire with the Area Boards and CATGs.

74. Other systems of identifying and resolving local issues are likely to be less effective and more time consuming and would be unlikely to have the same level of community support and involvement.

## **Conclusions**

75. The CATGs have been successfully operating for over ten years and in that time have delivered a large number of schemes to address local problems and to deliver improved facilities for pedestrians, cyclists and other road users.
76. A survey of Wiltshire Council members, town and parish councils showed that a majority (81%) thought that the CATGs had been an effective way of attracting and prioritising highways and transport investment.
77. They have enabled community engagement and helped communities understand the potential for improvements on the highway network and the limitations because of legal, funding and other factors.

**Parvis Khansari**

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**The following unpublished documents have been relied on in the preparation of this report:**

None

## **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Schemes delivered by CATGs

Appendix 2 – Wiltshire Councillors and Town and Parish Councillors

Appendix 3 – Wiltshire Officers comments on CATGs.