

Spaces for People

Summary and Recommendations

This report provides Leaders with an update on the Spaces for People programme and ongoing COSLA engagement at both officer and political level.

This paper invites Leaders to:

- i. Note the update provided; and
- ii. Agree that COSLA seeks to make the best of the Spaces for People initiative for Local Government by continuing to engage with Transport Scotland and Sustrans with professional support provided by SCOTS.

References

Previous reports:

- Leaders – Spaces for People – 15 May 2020

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Spaces for People

Purpose

1. The purpose of this report is to provide Leaders with an update on the Spaces for People programme and ongoing COSLA engagement at both officer and political level.

Current COSLA Position

2. COSLA Leaders agreed at their meeting on 15 May 2020 that COSLA should continue to work with Local Authorities and Transport Scotland to establish further detail on Spaces for People and ensure it meets the needs of Local Authorities.
3. Whilst Leaders agreed that the intent of the initiative was laudable and aligns with COSLA's support of active travel policy, concerns were expressed in relation to the manner of its announcement, the mechanics of allocating this funding through Sustrans and the potential for uneven take-up at a local level.

What is changing?

4. Subsequent discussions with Transport Scotland and SCOTS focussed on developing a better understanding of the programme and looking for ways to improve its uptake and mitigate potential challenges arising at a local level. The need for ongoing communication and joint working is recognised by all partners with regular dialogue now well-established.
5. COSLA officers were informed as part of these meetings that demand for funding from Local Authorities had exceeded the initial £10m made available and, for that reason, a further £20m was to be repurposed from existing uncommitted active travel funding to the Spaces for People fund. This would be announced by the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity as part of his Transport Statement to the Scottish Parliament on 26 May 2020.
6. The Environment and Economy Spokesperson wrote to Mr Matheson seeking an urgent meeting prior to 26 May to discuss the detail of the announcement. A phone call was arranged on 25 May and there was a constructive discussion where the following messages were conveyed to the Cabinet Secretary:
 - While it was critical not to lose sight of the important purpose that Spaces for People serves, clarity was required on the source of the funding and its impact on Sustrans initiatives where spend had already been committed, as well as for future rounds;
 - The need to minimise as much as possible the need for competition between local authorities with potentially differing levels of capacity and varied local pressures. The Cabinet Secretary was asked to ensure that as many authorities as wanted access to it, benefited from the fund;
 - The point was made that, beyond its focus on active travel, the fund should also be framed as enabling place-making more broadly at a local level. Local authorities should have the flexibility to explore using Spaces for People to create safe spaces

for local businesses as well as safe spaces for people to return to town centres as lockdown measures are eased;

- The need for a joint political review of active travel once the immediate crisis is over in recognition of an existing body of concern within Local Government over aspects of the current arrangements was highlighted. In addition to considering the mechanics of active travel funding, this would also explore any gaps and issues faced locally and steps needed nationally and locally to ensure that active travel policy and funding adapts and responds to the challenges we will face beyond the initial Covid-19 crisis.

7. The Cabinet Secretary was alive to the issues raised and made the following points:

- Spaces for People is a re-allocation of existing Sustrans budget as part of this year's settlement to fund Places for Everyone permanent infrastructure projects. This funding was re-purposed on the basis that projects would not be able to be implemented this year due to Covid-19. This would not impact Places for Everyone projects where spend has already been committed, and adequate funding would be made available going forward for Places for Everyone;
- He agreed that consistent uptake across Scotland is important and to that end he would seek for that message to be conveyed during his parliamentary statement. He confirmed that Sustrans have been directed by Transport Scotland to make sure that every local authority was given the opportunity to participate regardless of geography and current capacity. Sustrans are also able to provide support and guidance where needed as he is keen that as many authorities as possible access the funding;
- While he did not give a political commitment to a review of active travel, he did commit to ongoing dialogue with COSLA on the issue. He acknowledged that Local Government should be better involved in developing active travel schemes, and while he would not commit to altering existing structures for the time being, he was open to further discussions and evidence provided by COSLA.
- He agreed to further early meetings on this and other transport matters with COSLA.

8. The reassurances offered by the Cabinet Secretary on Spaces for People have been echoed in officer discussions between COSLA and Sustrans. Sustrans have stressed that no hard deadlines will be set on applications to the Fund and that they are keen to work in partnership with COSLA and SCOTS to gauge interest at a local level and support as wide an uptake as possible, facilitating knowledge and capacity sharing among local authorities.

9. Sustrans have also committed to providing regular updates to COSLA on level of demand and uptake of the Fund.

Next Steps

10. Leaders are asked to agree that COSLA seeks to make the best of the Spaces for People initiative for Local Government by continuing to engage with Transport Scotland and Sustrans with professional support provided by SCOTS. Further COSLA will develop a detailed rationale and gather evidence to inform a political review of active travel funding to take place once the immediate Covid-19 crisis is over in recognition of the existing body of concern within Local Government over aspects of the current structures as well as its ability to adapt to the expected shift in transport behaviour following Covid-19.

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