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A review of the 'Smarter Choices, Smarter Places' Programme

SUMMARY





Purpose

Smarter Choices Smarter Places (SCSP) is Paths for All's grants programme to encourage people to travel more sustainably and is funded by Transport Scotland. The Improvement Service were asked to engage with four local authorities to assess if the Smarter Choices, Smarter Places Local Authority Fund was delivering its intended outcomes, supporting local and national strategic priorities and offering value for money.

Process

Smarter Choices, Smarter Places requires successful applicants to provide the following documentation: an application form ; a monitoring and evaluation plan and a final completion report. These formed the basis of a desktop review for five local authorities which were selected to reflect the differences that exist Scotland- wide in relation to rurality and population size. In addition, one to one interviews were undertaken with four of the five local authority leads. A further two interviews took place with local authorities in which there was evidence of good practice that it was felt could be shared as case studies.

Key findings

The Smarter Choices, Smarter Places Programme has adapted and evolved to reflect developments in policy and practice in relation to active and sustainable travel. One of the real strengths of the programme is its flexibility, both in relation to funding a wide range of activities that will deliver its outcomes, and also in allowing changes to be made to funded activities to take account of what is happening on the ground.

This review of the programme, although focussing on five local authorities, has identified that there are no causes for concern with the current 'light touch' reporting process however, potential improvement areas have been highlighted. These include:

- Reviewing guidance and induction processes.
- Ensuring that agreements are in place in advance of changes to initiatives.
- Providing additional support to enhance impact measurement.
- Analysing and assessing the benefits and practicality of requiring match funding / or a contribution in kind for all funded activities.
- Sharing lessons learned.

Smarter Choices, Smarter Places funding has been instrumental in developing and sustaining local cross sectoral partnerships.

In relation to influencing local policies, Smarter Choices, Smarter Places funding has produced useful data and intelligence and contributed toward establishing, or reviewing, local active and sustainable travel strategies.

The availability of resources to support active and sustainable travel has increased as grants awarded have been used to lever additional resources at local level either internally or from external funders.

It is increasingly being recognised that a larger proportion of Smarter Choices, Smarter Places funding should be targeted at those experiencing social and economic disadvantage.

One of the effects of COVID -19 has been a significant reduction in the use of public transport. The challenge will be in sustaining the current interest in cycling and, particularly, walking, and extending its use for short journeys and travelling to work.

Read the full report at:

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