



**Report to: Health and Wellbeing Committee, 7<sup>th</sup> February 2022**

**Report of: Corporate Director - Operations, Homes & Communities**

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**Subject: ACTIVE TRAVEL PROJECT**

**1. Recommendation**

**That the Committee:**

**1.1 Recommend to Policy & Resources Committee, the allocation of £100,000 of revenue funding, to recruit an Active Travel Officer on a 3-year fixed term contract.**

**2. Background**

2.1 At its November 2021 meeting, this Committee approved further work to be undertaken to develop a business case for the recruitment of a dedicated Active Travel Officer.

2.2 This report provides a summary of existing work activity carried out in this area and a proposal for an Active Travel Officer to be employed by the Council.

**2.3 Worcester City Council**

2.4 A final draft of a refreshed City Plan was approved by Policy and Resources Committee on 14<sup>th</sup> December for recommendation to Council. The themes and targets relevant to active travel include:

2.4.1 A healthy and active city

- i. Transportation is improved, reducing congestion and improving air quality, with an increased provision and use of cycle / walking routes and enhancements to the city's ring routes and radial routes.
- ii. Healthy walking routes around the city are enhanced to achieve a '15-minute city' where facilities are accessible to all.

2.4.2 Enhancing and sustaining our beautiful city for future generations

- i. Combatting the climate change emergency by leading city-wide measures to reduce carbon emissions
- ii. Increasing opportunities to walk, run and cycle alongside and across the river, including the building of a new bridge linking Gheluvelt and Kepax parks.

2.5 Following the declaration of a Climate Emergency at full Council in July 2019, the Council created and recruited to a new post of Environmental Sustainability Officer. This role developed the Environmental Sustainability Strategy 2020-2030 approved by Council in November 2020 and has produced and coordinates delivery of the

Environmental Sustainability Action Plan. The Plan was approved by Environment Committee which received a progress report on the plan at its November 2021 meeting.

- 2.6 The Sustainability Action Plan includes three projects specific to active travel, namely ESS-03 Low emission business travel (for staff), ESS-04 Low emission commuting (for staff), and ESS-08 Active Travel (£4.5M Town Investment Plan project).
- 2.7 At its December 2021 meeting, Personnel & General Purposes Sub-Committee agreed to provide and improve facilities to support staff to cycle to work. The approved report details how a £50,000 capital spend (subject to Council approval) will provide or enhance existing secure cycle parking and changing facilities at The Guildhall, Museum and Art Gallery, Astwood Crematorium and Sixways Depot.
- 2.8 Worcester City Council has a number of current projects aimed at supporting its staff to cycle and walk instead of using a car. These are a Cycle to Work Scheme, e-bikes, Sustainability and Health in Future Transport (SHIFT) scheme, Bikeability training and new facilities at council buildings.
- 2.9 The council also looks to support future secure cycle storage when opportunities arise to expand on the existing popular provision within the Crowngate Shopping Centre.
- 2.10 The Worcester Town Investment Plan includes an allocation of £4.5M for an Active Travel project with a total value of £9M which will link new and enhanced routes with existing network and provide a new bike hire scheme. It is particularly focussed on providing routes to link deprived communities with employment, educational and leisure opportunities. The project includes a new walking and cycling bridge across the Severn between Kepax and Gheluvelt Parks, enhancing the canal towpath between Diglis and Sixways, extending the riverside route south towards the Ketch, and new routes serving Ronkswood.
- 2.11 The business case for the Town Investment Plan Active Travel project is due to be considered at Policy and Resources Committee in March 2022, at which point the ongoing revenue implications, including any requirement for staff resource to manage a contract with a scheme provider, will be fully considered.
- 2.12 **Worcestershire County Council**
- 2.13 The Worcestershire County Council Highways Transport Infrastructure and Commissioning Project Manager has identified the following opportunities for partnership working.
  - Infrastructure works include:
  - Department for Transport Emergency Active Travel Fund (£150k) for the Worcester and Birmingham canal tow path to be spent on signage, surfacing and waymarking by March 2022. This will be complemented by Home Office Safer Streets funding which looks to improve visibility and access to the canal for the section between Westbury Street and Sidbury and has to be completed by March 2022.
  - Active travel corridor from Worcester to Kempsey, linking with the Town Investment Plan project, delivering first phase by July with further phases dependant on future funding bids.
  - Junction of Midland Road and Newtown Road pedestrian crossing.

- Worcester to Malvern (from cycle bridge to Powick) design and feasibility study planned to make sure schemes are ready when funding opportunities arise.

2.14 Alternative to car transport plans and projects include:

- Town Investment Plan Bike hire scheme for Worcester.
- National Standard Bikeability Cycle Training to schools within Worcestershire.
- Sustainable Travel Officer leading on Local Cycling Walking and Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPS), in line with the duties and responsibilities within the Gear Change Strategy and LTN1/20 guidance.

### **3. West Mercia Police**

- 3.1 West Mercia Police & Crime Commissioner's Road Safety Strategy was published in 2021. Since 2017 12 cyclists have been killed and 185 injured in collisions across West Mercia and a lot of these incidents could have been avoided if road users shared the highway more responsibly. The Road Safety team within West Mercia Police aim to reduce collisions and casualties on the roads through speed enforcement, engineering, road safety education, training courses and awareness raising campaigns.
- 3.2 Operation SNAP is an awareness raising and reporting campaign where members of the public are encouraged to submit digital footage showing potential traffic offences. This can range from driving dangerously or carelessly, using a mobile phone whilst driving to overtaking on solid white lines and or not providing sufficient distance to cyclists when passing. All submissions are dealt with proactively to help reduce risk taking and poor driving on the highway.
- 3.3 Operation Close Pass was launched in September 2020 to clampdown on those motorists not giving enough space when overtaking cyclists. The operation consists of police officers and PCSOs riding cycles equipped with video cameras on roads in Worcester. Motorists who do not leave enough space when overtaking will be recorded and the offence dealt with. Drivers can be prosecuted for careless driving with 3 points on their licence and a £100 fine.

### **4. Proposed Active Travel Officer Post**

- 4.1 On 14<sup>th</sup> September 2020 Licensing and Environmental Health Committee noted a report on pre-COVID19 pandemic air pollution. This report identified 3 locations in Worcester where levels breached the National Objective for the Annual Average of Nitrogen Dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) and associated this with volume of road traffic and street canyons. The World Health Organisation set this as a safe limit to protect public health. In 2017 Worcester City Council approved the declaration of the entire District as an Air Quality Management Area following exceedances of the national air quality objective.
- 4.2 Activity to increase the number of commuters traveling by foot, cycle and public transport will help reduce congestion and reduce lost time in travel and pollution.
- 4.3 The Canal & River Trust welcome recreational use of the Worcester & Birmingham Canal but at times there can be conflict between users on what can be narrow stretches of towpath. In response CRT launched a 'Stay Kind, Slow Down' campaign to urge everyone using canal towpaths, especially those who cycle, to be thoughtful, stay kind and slow down. With the increase in investment and promotion of the Worcester & Birmingham canal as an active travel route, additional resource to run

joint events, activities, provide information and promotion would help people with the transition and long-term success of the route.

- 4.4 The Worcestershire County Council Health and Wellbeing Board's number 1 priority which applies to all ages is keeping the population active. The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment Briefing on Physical Activity presented to the board in June 2019 identified that Physical activity is an important component in health and well-being across all ages and being inactive is a major cause of ill-health throughout life. Physical inactivity is the fourth largest cause of disease and disability in the UK and is responsible for 1 in 6 deaths.
- 4.5 Achieving the Chief Medical Officer's recommended physical activity levels reduces a person's risk of a range of diseases including type 2 diabetes, colon cancer, coronary heart disease, stroke, falls, high blood pressure, Alzheimer's, osteoarthritis, hip fractures and depression. For an adult over the period of a week, activity should add up to at least 150 minutes (2½ hours) of moderate intensity activity in bouts of 10 minutes or more. This equates to 30 minutes on at least 5 days a week.
- 4.6 The rates of adults walking and cycling for travel on at least three days a week are worse in Worcestershire when compared nationally. Of all the county districts, Worcester had the lowest proportion of 35- to 54-year-olds participating in sport or activity at 23.5%. 2 key public health performance measures for the county are:
- i. 65.4% of adults (aged 18+) are classified as overweight or obese 2019/20
  - ii. 20.6% are physically inactive adults (aged 19+) 2019/20

## **5. Preferred Option**

- 5.1 As outlined within para 1.1 of this report, Committee are asked to recommend to Policy & Resources Committee the allocation of £100,000 of revenue funding to be able to recruit a dedicated Active Travel Officer for a 3-year fixed term period.
- 5.2 A search of current and recent vacancies has informed officers that a competitive grade for such a post should be set at PTA SCP 15-20 (£23,990 - £26,400). Over three years the salary plus pension, NI contributions, annual increment and % salary increase would equate to £91,515. Set up costs for the role such as mobile phone, laptop, home working kit and materials equates to £2,000. Most of the materials and equipment needed for the project are available within the council, but a project review budget of £2,000 a year would help cover venue hire, bespoke materials and equipment. The Total project cost over 3 years is therefore estimated to be £99,515.
- 5.3 The functions of the role would be to:
- Engage with businesses, schools and communities to adopt Modeshift STARS accreditation (<https://www.modeshiftstars.org>) or a similar system that provides an easy-to-use framework to create travel plans, monitor participation and recognises and rewards best practice.
  - Champion the Worcester City Council staff incentive schemes like SHIFT, e-bikes, active business travel and bike to work, contributing to delivery of the sustainability strategy performance measure ESS-03 Low emission business travel (for staff).
  - Champion the Worcester City Council staff bike purchase scheme and improved office facilities, contributing to delivery of the sustainability strategy performance measure of ESS-04 Low emission commuting (for staff).

- Support the development of the Town Investment Plan Active Travel project and potentially manage any ongoing contracts.
- Develop new and existing multi-agency partnerships to explore and promote new approaches to delivery and engagement, working with agencies such as the County Council, Sustrans, Canal & River Trust, National Health Service, Worcester Primary Care Network, West Mercia Police and transport providers.
- As part of the Integrated Care System, work with and support partner agencies to identify, map and promote cycle, walking and healthy walking routes around the city; contributing to the City Plan objective to achieve a '15 minute city'.
- Support interest groups like BikeWorcester, Transition Worcester and Healthy Walks to encourage activity and run events programmes and attend events to promote cycling and walking. To inclusively engage with communities and co-design new routes, ways for all residents to access and use the information both physically and virtually. This may include led rides, led walks, cycle maintenance, bike marking, advice sessions, training sessions, presentations / assemblies, and awareness campaigns.
- Organise workshops, events, webinars and face to face consultation with businesses, stakeholders and schools to identify barriers to increase levels of active travel.
- Ensure that identified active travel routes are monitored and evaluated for evidence of the project and case studies.

5.4 The post would be part of the Environmental Sustainability function that includes the existing Environmental Sustainability Officer post, reporting to the Deputy Director, Corporate Policy and Strategy. This will provide peer support and resilience to this work.

5.5 Performance would be monitored against measures such as:

- i. Number of businesses, schools and communities participating in Modeshift accreditation.
- ii. Sustainability action plan performance indicators ESS-03 and ESS-04.
- iii. INRIX Global Traffic Scorecard – reduction in peak commuter time (hours)
- iv. Public Health - Decrease in percentage of physically inactive adults (aged 19+)
- v. Participation and engagement in events and activities promoting active travel
- vi. Increased use of identified active travel routes and case studies.

## **6. Alternative Options Considered**

- 6.1 There are other agencies and organisations providing similar services across wider boundaries. The Council could commission additional work from these organisations, where particular gaps are identified. However there remains a need to co-ordinate activities at the local level and it is therefore considered that the role is needed.
- 6.2 Apart from Wychavon District Council, no other District Councils within Worcestershire employ an Active Travel officer. One alternative would be a part-time resource based on 18.5 hours per week. Over three years the salary plus pension, NI contributions, annual increment and % salary increase would equate to £45,758. With additional equipment as outlined above this would equate to £53,758 over three years.

- 6.3 If no funding is available then then the Environmental Sustainability Officer post could reprioritise time (subject to relevant Member approval) to support and influence third party voluntary community sector (including through use of community grants), and other agencies to deliver schemes in Worcester.

## **7. Implications**

### **7.1 Financial and Budgetary Implications**

The financial implications are set out in the report. As this is a fixed term post then it can be funded from reserves as a one-off contribution with no impact on the revenue budget for 2022/23 or Medium-Term Financial Plan. As the post is designed to support City Plan objectives this would be taken from the City Plan Fund but the Fund is currently fully allocated to other schemes.

If there are no opportunities to transfer funding from other City Plan Fund schemes, the proposal would be funded from a transfer from the Business Rates Risk Reserve which has a projected balance at 31 March 2022 of £7.548m, of which £4.131m is required for business rates deficit recovery. This leaves a total of £3.417 available, subject to other items presented to Policy and Resources Committee at its February meeting and the requirement to retain £1.4m for business rates risks.

### **7.2 Legal and Governance Implications**

There are no legal or governance implications related to this report.

### **7.3 Risk Implications**

There is a risk that the Council will be unable to fulfil its commitments to Environmental improvements and biodiversity if opportunities to promote active travel are missed.

### **7.4 Corporate/Policy Implications**

The draft City Plan 2021-26 includes the following themes and targets relevant to active travel:

- A healthy and active city
- Transportation is improved, reducing congestion and improving air quality, with an increased provision and use of cycle / walking routes and enhancements to the city's ring routes and radial routes.
- Healthy walking routes around the city are enhanced to achieve a '15 minute city' where facilities are accessible to all.
- Enhancing and sustaining our beautiful city for future generations
- Combatting the climate change emergency by leading city-wide measures to reduce carbon emissions
- Increasing opportunities to walk, run and cycle alongside and across the river, including the building of a new bridge linking Gheluvelt and Kepax parks

### **7.5 Equality Implications**

The report has been written without reference to any public consultation or statistics identifying protected characteristic statistics. However, from officer experience,

expectations and some assumption that this project would have not detrimental impact on any protected characteristics.

Meeting recommended physical activity levels will positively benefit younger ages with better health outcomes in later life.

Meeting recommended physical activity levels will positively improve health outcomes for those ages and ethnicities more at risk of diseases including type 2 diabetes, colon cancer, coronary heart disease, stroke, falls, high blood pressure, Alzheimer's, osteoarthritis, hip fractures and depression.

#### 7.6 Human Resources Implications

The line management and support services for the additional member of staff will be absorbed within existing revenue budgets.

#### 7.7 Health and Safety Implications

There are no health and safety implications associated with this report.

#### 7.8 Social, Environmental and Economic Implications

The existing Worcester City Council Environmental Sustainability Action Plan contains significant opportunities to benefit residents and local businesses.

The areas of focus for an Active Travel officer will provide opportunities for residents to increase their activity giving them improved health outcomes, reduce the cost of travel and reduce air pollution.

**Ward(s):** All Wards  
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**Background Papers:** None