

Item: 18

Policy and Resources Committee: 20 April 2021.

Sustrans Embedded Senior Project Officer Resource.

Report by Executive Director of Development and Infrastructure.

1. Purpose of Report

To consider match funding for a Sustrans Embedded Senior Project Officer resource.

2. Recommendations

The Committee is invited to note:

2.1.

That, in October 2020, the Council submitted an application to Sustrans for an Embedded Senior Project Officer post, for a period of up to 3 years, which was subsequently accepted.

2.2.

That the role of the Embedded Senior Project Officer would be to deliver the Council's Sustainable Transport Project Development Plan.

2.3.

That the post would be fully funded by Sustrans in Year 1, with the Council required to make a 50% contribution towards costs in Years 2 and 3.

2.4.

That an annual review of the partnership will be carried out between Sustrans and the Council, with an option to discontinue by either party.

It is recommended:

2.5.

That 50% of the costs associated with the post of Sustrans Embedded Senior Project Officer in Years 2 and 3 of the partnership, estimated at a total cost of £54,000, be met from the Council's Crown Estate Fund.

3. Introduction

3.1.

At its meeting held on 2 April 2019, when considering the Sustainable Transport Project Development Plan, the Development and Infrastructure Committee noted:

- That, in July 2018, when considering the Sustainable Transport Project Development Plan, the Council approved a project list as the basis of a three year programme for potential applications to the Community Links Programme, operated by Sustrans.
- That, during 2018 to 2019, notable progress had been made with the following projects and plans:
 - Arcadia Community Park, Kirkwall.
 - Papdale East Park, Kirkwall.
 - Stromness Place Plan.
 - Kirkwall Townscape Heritage Initiative Places and Spaces.
 - World Heritage Site Active Travel Plan.
- That the projects referred to above had been progressed on a fully funded basis or at no additional cost to the Council.
- That Development and Marine Planning officers were committed to carrying out the necessary feasibility studies on projects identified in the project list, referred to above, to determine which projects were eligible for funding and achievable for delivery during the current financial year and beyond until 2021, with further projects also having been identified.
- The updated project list, attached as Appendix 1 to the report by the Executive Director of Development and Infrastructure, which would continue to be used as the basis for the remainder of the three year programme for potential applications to the Community Links Programme, and that further projects might be identified, with the possibility that not all projects would be delivered.
- That progressing the projects had been prioritised over core planning work, causing a strain on Development and Marine Planning staff resources.
- That funding of up to £50,000 had been awarded from the Smarter Choices Smarter Places fund towards creation of a temporary post of Programme Manager, for up to one year, to progress the Sustainable Transport Project Development Plan, subject to the Council contributing 25% of costs, as detailed in section 4 of the report by the Executive Director of Development and Infrastructure.

3.2.

The Committee recommended that a dedicated full-time temporary post of Programme Manager, for one year, be established to progress the Sustainable Transport Project Development Plan and associated marketing campaign, subject to the necessary funding being identified within existing Development and Infrastructure budgets.

4. Background

4.1.

The Council's Sustainable Transport Project Development Plan has been without officer resource since 2019, when the Council determined that the officer resource requirements be met from existing Development and Infrastructure budgets. This was due to there being no capacity within existing budgets.

4.2.

In September 2020, as part of an expansion of its Strategic Partnerships programme, Sustrans Partnerships Team invited local authorities to apply for one of three newly established posts of Senior Embedded Project Officer. The basis of this application would be the establishment of a three-year post, fully funded by Sustrans in year 1, with 50% investment from the Council in years 2 and 3.

4.3.

It was agreed in principle with Sustrans that the Council's contribution could come from indirect sources and that it could take the form of the Council's annual capital grant allocation from the Cycling, Walking and Safer Streets.

4.4.

On this basis, an application was subsequently made to Sustrans Partnerships Team in October 2020.

4.5.

In November 2020, Sustrans advised that the Council had been successful with its application.

4.6.

Approval to submit the application to Sustrans Partnerships Team was given on the basis that there would be no commitment on the Council to fund the project beyond the first year and that the post could be terminated at that point. There is a significant risk that the principle agreed with Sustrans, that the Council's contribution could come from indirect sources and that it could take the form of the Council's annual capital grant allocation from the Cycling, Walking and Safer Streets, may not be possible. To be able to capitalise the project costs in Years 2 and 3, there would have to be projects in the process of being delivered in those years to which the post holder was adding value through oversight and management. However, as many of the tasks required to be carried out by the post holder would be revenue in nature, utilising Cycling, Walking and Safer Streets capital grant funding is unlikely to be possible.

4.7.

Crown Estate Funding has been identified as a possible alternative match funding source in Years 2 and 3 to Cycling, Walking and Safer Streets capital grant, or to funding being identified within existing Development and Infrastructure budgets as recommended by the Development and Infrastructure Committee on 2 April 2019 when it approved that a dedicated full time temporary post of Programme Manager, for one year, be established to progress the Sustainable Transport Project Development Plan.

4.8.

The Sustrans offer will therefore deliver funding for the temporary post approved in 2019, but with a requirement on the Council to fund 50% of the post for a further two years, if the post is carried on for three years.

5. Embedded Senior Project Officer

5.1.

The role of the Embedded Senior Project Officer is to facilitate a strategic approach to active travel infrastructure development enabling efficient use of investment to increase walking, cycling and wheeling.

5.2.

It is proposed that Sustrans would employ and line manage the staff member, set objectives jointly with the Council, provide training, support and HR services. The Council would host and direct the Officer's work on a day to day basis.

5.3.

It is proposed that the Senior Embedded Project Officer would sit within the Development and Marine Planning team and will be task managed by the Planning Manager (Development and Marine Planning).

5.4.

The Senior Embedded Project Officer would be part of Sustrans Strategic Partnerships programme. Its aim is to work with partner organisations to understand the local barriers to active travel delivery and work together to develop and deliver a strategic approach to overcome these barriers, building momentum for local implementation.

5.5.

Senior Embedded Project Officers work in five key ways, as follows:

- Facilitating a strategic approach: Development of active travel strategies/ development plans/project delivery processes to direct Council investment into active travel (e.g. network development and prioritisation).

- Adding capacity to plan and deliver high quality active travel projects: Initiating and supporting delivery of new/improved infrastructure.
- Identifying and developing funding opportunities: Officers can liaise with funders to discuss potential projects and submit funding applications on behalf of their host organisation, including to Sustrans.
- Building connections to ensure a collaborative approach with stakeholders and through community engagement: Developing dynamic partnerships, bringing together the expertise and experience of a diverse range of partners to improve active travel infrastructure. Working across Council services and in partnership with external organisations to identify opportunities to align policy aims and increase investment in active travel.
- Influencing through sharing knowledge, expertise and evidence: Officers can facilitate access to multiple support teams from Sustrans including design and engineering, behaviour change, communications and Research and Monitoring Unit. A range of training and knowledge sharing opportunities can also be accessed through the partnership.

5.6.

Sustrans understands that each local authority is unique with different challenges and opportunities, so they would work with the Council to agree a flexible programme of work to meet the Council's needs. This may involve some or all of the above components.

5.7.

With reference to the bullet points at section 4.5 above, much work has already been done to develop the Council's strategic approach to delivering active travel infrastructure and it is considered that where the Officer resource could add most value is by adding capacity to plan and deliver projects, identifying funding opportunities and by influencing through the sharing of knowledge and best practice. Through these means, it is intended that the Embedded Officer will oversee a significant upscaling in delivery of the Sustainable Transport Project Development Plan.

5.8.

Prior to 12 months a review of the Partnership will take place. The purpose is to evidence the value of the role and successes (or otherwise) and to help make the case for Council match funding to extend the contract of employment into years 2 and 3.

6. Human Resource Implications

There are no human resource implications arising from this report as the post holder will be employed by Sustrans, the partnership organisation.

7. Corporate Governance

This report relates to governance and procedural issues and therefore does not directly support and contribute to improved outcomes for communities as outlined in the Council Plan and the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan.

8. Financial Implications

8.1.

The proposal is for the role to be part funded by Sustrans and the Council as below:

8.1.1.

Year 1 (12 months from the start date of the Senior Project Officer) – Sustrans will meet 100% of employment costs directly themselves, with no financial contribution from the Council.

8.1.2.

Year 2 – Sustrans will continue to meet 100% of employment costs directly themselves, but the Council would be expected to reimburse them for 50% of these costs (circa £27,000).

8.1.3.

Year 3 – As above, Sustrans will continue to meet 100% of the costs, with the Council expected to reimburse them for 50% of cost (circa £27,000).

8.2.

The Council's annual capital grant allocation for Cycling, Walking and Safer Streets had initially been identified as an "indirect" funding source for the Council's contribution to this arrangement. However, it was determined that there were a number of risks with this proposal in that the Council would need to be able to vouch the expenditure as being capital in nature and forming part of the delivery phase of an approved capital project. This may have been challenging to achieve given that the lead in time to get capital projects to this stage can vary. Also, the remit of the Senior Embedded Project Officer, as set out in section 4.5 above, would suggest that this role includes a range of activities that would not normally be capitalised.

8.3.

As a consequence it would not be safe to assume that the Council's contribution to the costs of the post in Years 2 and 3 could be capitalised and charged against the capital grant allocation for Cycling, Walking and Safer Streets. There is also a possibly smaller risk that there could be no specific capital grant funding provided in those years.

8.4.

It is anticipated that the partnership will run for up to three years, however, this is dependent on ongoing funding from both parties. The partnership will be subject to annual review with the option to discontinue if sufficient funding is not available.

8.5.

An allocation of funding from the Crown Estate Fund would meet the Government's desired outcome that this funding provides coastal community benefit. It would also be consistent with the Council's guiding principles of:

- Supporting investment in the infrastructure required for coastal communities across all of Orkney to thrive.
- Supporting and empowering coastal communities across all of Orkney to deliver projects to realise sustainable social, economic and environmental benefits.
- Supporting measures that mitigate the effects of climate change, adapt to climate change and build greater resilience to the effects of climate change.

8.6.

In September 2019, the Council received an allocation of £773,673.43 from Crown Estate Scotland, being its share of the total net revenues for 2017/18 and in July 2020 the Council received an allocation of £1,042,993.65 being its share of the total net revenues for 2018/19. The allocation received in 2019 has been fully allocated while the allocation of £1,042,993.65 received on 2020 has been partially allocated as follows:

Housing project in St Margaret's Hope	£25,000
Shapinsay Development Trust	£15,000
Point of Ness Campsite	£97,075
Total Allocated to date	£137,075
Total Unallocated	£905,919

8.7.

The report recommendation is that a grant, of up to £27,000, should be awarded towards the Embedded Officer costs in Years 2 and 3 (2022/23 and 2023/24). This would represent an additional commitment of £54,000 against the Crown Estate allocation of £1,042,993.65 received in 2020.

9. Legal Aspects

As this is an employee of Sustrans working for the Council but the Council is contributing to the costs and is responsible for complying with some of the duties normally placed on the employer, a legally binding agreement will require to be entered into setting out the terms on which such employee will be engaged and ensuring that the obligations accepted by the Council are not disproportionate.

10. Contact Officers

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