

## **THIS ITEM IS FOR INFORMATION ONLY**

**(Please note that "Information Only" reports do not require Integrated Impact Assessments, Legal or Finance Comments as no decision is being taken)**

<b>Title of meeting:</b>	Climate Change & Environment
<b>Subject:</b>	Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund
<b>Date of meeting:</b>	Thursday 24 <sup>th</sup> November 2022
<b>Report by:</b>	Zoe White - Public Health development manager - Green & Healthy City Coordinator
<b>Wards affected:</b>	All

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1. **Requested by-** the Cabinet member for Climate Change and Environment to provide detail of the Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund and the progress of the council's application.

### **2. Information Requested**

- a. To update the Cabinet member for Climate Change and the Environment on the detail of the Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund including the three primary criteria of the grant: Evidence of need, commitment to planting by 2025 and a deliverability assessment.
- b. To brief the Cabinet member on the outcome of the grant application funded by the Forestry Commission and the financial award made to the Council.
- c. To provide an update on the recruitment progress made and detail of the two new posts that will be funded from the Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund.

### **3. Background**

- 3.1 The Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund (WCAF) is designed to provide financial support to increase the capacity of specialist skills within local authorities, enabling them in turn to accelerate the delivery of tree planting and woodland creation commitments. The key aim of the fund is to enable more trees to be planted, particularly in winter seasons 2023/24 and 2024/25. Authorities across England have identified tree and woodland planting as a key part of their response to the climate change and biodiversity crises. A lack of capacity to develop and design planting proposals, to consult widely, apply for capital grants and organise planting have been identified as key barriers to progress.

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- 3.2 The WCAF is a revenue-only fund (funding new staff and / or consultants). It is designed to be simple and flexible. Individual authorities can apply for up to £150,000 in total – split over two financial years (this funding is based on the typical salary costs of two suitably qualified FTEs).
- 3.3 Following submission of an Expression of Interest, assessments were made against three primary criteria:
- a. evidence of need
  - b. commitment to planting by 2025
  - c. a deliverability assessment
- 3.4 Portsmouth is the most densely populated Local Authority in the Southeast. It is the UK's only island city and occupies a land area of approximately ten square miles with a population of 208,100. The city only has around 9.8% tree canopy cover, compared to an average 16% in most English towns and cities. It also has a lower proportion of canopy cover than comparable cities such as Southampton and Plymouth or compared to London boroughs. There is a clear correlation between inequality and access to green space in the city. Figures from the Office for National Statistics show that in some of the poorest areas of the city 43% of dwellings have no outdoor space, and for those that do, a median garden size of 61m<sup>2</sup>.
- 3.5 Portsmouth Greening Strategy sets a clear ambition to increase green infrastructure and accelerate the planting of trees in the city. Councillors and officers are committed to this strategy and are working hard to achieve our goals with 788 standard trees planted during 2020/21 and a further 200 standard trees and 4200 whips on Housing Estates during winter 2022. Through land ownership and statutory functions, the Council holds the potential for significant greening opportunities across its estate, while also being able to influence across partnerships to create opportunities to enhance the greening of land in private ownership.
- 3.6 With additional resource there is scope to deliver:
- 2023/24 - 660 standard trees and 2900 whips on confirmed planting sites.
  - 2024/25 - 481 standards and 16188 whips on confirmed planting sites.
- Increasing overall canopy cover by 14%.
- 3.7 Planting estimates have been reached by discussing with stakeholders what would be manageable if we had the resource to engage the community, project manage, and support with funding opportunities and grant applications.

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3.9 We have applied for a further grant through the Urban Tree Challenge Fund to match fund capital costs for tree planting on four of the listed sites (see appendix A) with delivery due 2023/24 and have visited all listed sites to confirm suitability. Therefore, we are confident in our planting number assumptions.

### **4. Outcome**

- 4.1 On 10<sup>th</sup> October 2022, DEFRA e-tendering portal sent communication to confirm that evaluation of applications was complete, and Portsmouth City Council was successful with a funding award of £147,116.00 for a fixed term two-year recruitment of two full time posts.
- 4.2 The Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transport (ADEPT) is supporting Defra and the Forestry Commission in project managing the fund. ADEPT will be chairing regular progress and reporting meetings with the first session being held on Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2022. During this session recruitment guidance will be provided to enable the council's recruitment process to begin after 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2022.
- 4.3 Portsmouth City Council will aim to recruit two posts supporting the work of accelerating tree planting in the city. Post one: Green & Healthy City - Engagement Officer (See appendix B for full detail and Job description). Post two: Green & Healthy City Project officer - Community Engagement (see appendix C for full detail & job description).

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Signed by (Director)

### **Appendices:**

#### **Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972**

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

<b>Title of document</b>	<b>Location</b>
Appendix A - Planting commitment	
Appendix B - Engagement officer - Role profile	
Appendix C - Project officer - Role profile	