

**PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

**TITLE OF REPORT: ACTIVE NORTH HERTS STRATEGY**

REPORT OF: THE SERVICE DIRECTOR - PLACE

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: ENVIRONMENT & LEISURE: CLLR STEVE JARVIS

COUNCIL PRIORITY: A BRIGHTER FUTURE TOGETHER

**1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

1.1 This report seeks Cabinet's approval to adopt the new Active North Herts Strategy, attached as Appendix 1.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

2.1 That Cabinet approve and adopt the Active North Herts Strategy attached as Appendix 1.

2.2 To recommend to Council that a budget of £50k be approved from 2025/26 onwards, to enable the delivery of a new Active Communities programme run by the leisure operator.

**3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

3.1 To ensure the Council and its stakeholder partners have a clear policy position on its approach to the future delivery of sport, leisure, physical activity and wellbeing services across the district.

**4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

4.1. None

**5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS**

5.1. A public engagement exercise was undertaken via an online survey. The survey was live for three weeks in February 2023 and promoted through the Council's social media channels, press release and website.

5.2. The survey was designed to understand more about:

- current activity levels of North Herts residents
- the barriers to being active and what would help to overcome these
- what activities people would like to take part in
- how often they use Council sports, leisure and physical activity facilities and what would encourage increased use of these in the future
- what the Council's future priorities should be.

5.3. Key findings from the public engagement can be found in Appendix 1, page 25.

- 5.4. The Sport, Leisure and Culture Consultancy (SLC) facilitated an Active North Herts workshop with key Council officers, cross party Members and representatives from the Herts Sports Partnership and Stevenage Leisure Ltd (SLL) on 3 March 2023. The virtual workshop with key stakeholders was to review the findings of the consultation and to explore:
- the current challenges faced by the Council's leisure, sport and physical activity facilities and services and;
  - the future opportunities to support a more active place
  - to identify the key emerging strategic themes for the new Strategy
- 5.5. A second virtual workshop was held on 17 May 2023 to review the emerging Strategic themes.

## **6. FORWARD PLAN**

- 6.1 This report contains a recommendation on a key Executive decision that was first notified to the public in the Forward Plan on 26 May 2023.

## **7. BACKGROUND**

- 7.1. In March 2022, the Council appointed Consultants SLC to carry out a bespoke diagnostic review, based on Sport England's Strategic Outcomes Planning Guidance, to support the Council's immediate strategic needs.
- 7.2. This included a review of available key strategic documents to understand the strategic context and ambition of the Council and identify the potential contribution sport, physical activity and wellbeing could make towards wider local strategic outcomes in North Herts.
- 7.3. The diagnostic work undertaken, supported by a strategic review of documentation and consultation exercise identified the following key workstreams;
- Sport and Physical Activity Strategy
  - Leisure Investment Strategy
  - Procurement Strategy
- 7.4. The Procurement Strategy was developed to support the leisure procurement project. However, the Leisure Investment Strategy was not progressed as Building and Mechanical and Electrical Surveys have recently been completed and therefore an investment plan will be produced based on the findings of the surveys.
- 7.5. The analysis identified that although the Council Plan makes reference to the Council's intentions for sport, leisure and physical activity, there is no overarching strategy that clearly sets out the Council's strategic approach, outcomes and objectives for sport and physical activity or its leisure services.
- 7.6. As a result of the review, a new Active North Herts Strategy has been developed which provides the Council and its stakeholder partners a clear policy position on its approach to the future delivery of sport, leisure, physical activity and wellbeing services across the district.
- 7.7. The key aims of the new Strategy include:
- Providing a clear policy position for the Council moving forwards

- Strengthening links with key internal and external strategic stakeholders in the district
- Identifying the resources required to oversee the Strategy
- Providing a policy steer to support the focus of future investment decisions
- Providing clear strategic outcomes and objectives to support the new leisure management contract
- Providing a framework of actions for the Council and its partners to deliver over the next 5 years.

7.8. The Active North Herts Strategy has been developed within a framework that includes a series of agreed Strategic Outcomes, Objectives and Enabling Actions:

- **Strategic Outcomes** – These describe the intended results and demonstrate the impact and success of the Active North Herts Strategy.
- **Strategic Objectives** – These describe the things that the Council and its partners are working to achieve that will contribute to the Strategic Outcomes.
- **Enabling Actions** – These describe the headline actions which will support delivery of the Strategic Objectives and subsequently contribute to the Strategic Outcomes.

7.9. The full Active North Herts Strategy Report is attached as Appendix 1.

## 8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1 The development of the new Strategy sits alongside the procurement of a new leisure management contract, which is currently underway. This provides a unique opportunity to rethink the design and delivery of the service. It sets out the role of the leisure operator partner in delivering a more outward facing service in support of the overarching Strategy.

8.2 A key focus of the strategy is in delivering an outreach programme to encourage inactive or less active residents to become more active. Our current leisure operator, SLL have recently appointed an active communities manager to enable more of this work to be carried out, funded through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund until March 2025. To ensure the outcomes of the strategy can be delivered, it is intended to provide an Active communities programme as part of the new leisure contract and therefore, Cabinet are asked to consider the budgetary implications of this at paragraph 10.3

## 9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1. Under the Terms of Reference 5.7.28 Cabinet can approve any strategy which is not reserved to Council and in circumstances where one does not exist. The Active North Herts Strategy falls within Cabinet's remit.

9.2. Supporting the Active North Herts Strategy neither imposes nor infers any specific legal implications.

## 10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. The cost of producing the strategy was approximately £17k. A revenue budget of approximately £7k was allocated in 2022/23 alongside £10k grant funding which was awarded by Sport England.
- 10.2. In December 2022, grant funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund was approved to employ an Active Communities Officer to increase participation and implement outreach programmes for key target groups. The post is employed by the leisure operator, currently SLL, and is grant funded until March 2025. After this time, it is anticipated that the post will be fully funded by the leisure operator, under the new Leisure and Active Communities contract.
- 10.3. At paragraph 2.2. Cabinet are asked to recommend to Council to approve an ongoing revenue budget of £50k for the new Active Communities service, so that the Active communities service can be included in the new leisure contract. This is based on the continuation of an officer post (as detailed in p10.2 above). Contractors may choose a different delivery model but are required to cap their costs at a maximum of £50k. The new contract will include an option to enable the Council to withdraw the funding at year 5 of the contract, subject to review of anticipated outcomes and of budgetary constraints. The Council will look for external funding to off-set the cost of this service (e.g., Public Health or Government funding) but will need to set aside budget in case this is not forthcoming. It would not be reasonable to let a contract where an element was only delivered based on uncertain funding. Council approval is sought as there is not currently any funding available from April 2025 onwards, and therefore this would be outside the budgetary control framework. Whilst there is not a short-term need for the funding, there is an immediate need to specify what will be required from the new contract.

## **11. RISK IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 There is a risk that if the strategy is not adopted, the Council's strategic approach, outcomes and objectives for sport and physical activity and its leisure services will not be clear and will impact the new Leisure and Active Communities Contract.

## **12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 12.2 The Strategy has a key focus on the reduction of health inequalities and recognises that certain groups, including those who are disabled or have a long-term health condition, those from minority ethnic groups, and those on lower incomes are typically less active. Tackling these inequalities is a core theme of the Strategy. One of the key Strategic Outputs is Physical activity making a greater contribution to the reduction of health inequalities, while enabling actions include developing a diverse and inclusive programme of targeted activities that are co-designed with local people; supporting our partners to deliver physical activity opportunities particularly for those from less active groups; enhancing opportunities for active play through youth provision and digital tools; and working with our partners to develop and deliver activities that appeal to a wider audience. The Strategy will therefore contribute towards efforts to reduce health inequalities across the district. An Equality Impact Assessment has been conducted to highlight the groups that are most likely to be positively impacted.

### **13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS**

- 13.1 The Social Value Act and “go local” requirements do not apply to this report as this does not deal with a procurement exercise or contract.

### **14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 14.1. The strategy includes an enabling action, which recognises the environmental impact of the council’s leisure facilities. The relevant enabling action states: ‘Support the Council’s wider climate change strategy through effective environmental management of the Council’s leisure assets and by identifying ‘invest to save’ opportunities to reduce their carbon footprint.’

### **15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 15.1 The new Leisure and Active Communities Contract includes the provision of an Active Communities service to assist with the delivery of the Active North Herts strategy. However, there will also be resource implications for the North Herts leisure team and wider teams in delivering the strategy and this will need consideration during the action planning process.

### **16. APPENDICES**

- 16.1 Appendix 1 - Active North Herts Strategy Report - Final Draft Ver 1.0

### **17. CONTACT OFFICERS**

- 17.1 Sarah Kingsley, Service Director – Place  
[sarah.kingsley@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:sarah.kingsley@north-herts.gov.uk) Ext 4552
- 17.2. Louise Randall, Leisure Manager  
[Louise.randall@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:Louise.randall@north-herts.gov.uk) Ext 4387
- 17.4. Ian Couper, Service Director - Resources  
[ian.couper@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:ian.couper@north-herts.gov.uk) Ext 4243
- 17.5. Isabelle Alajooz - Legal Commercial Team Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer  
[Isabelle.Alajooz@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:Isabelle.Alajooz@north-herts.gov.uk) Ext 4346
- 17.6. Georgina Chapman - Policy & Strategy Team Leader  
[georgina.chapman@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:georgina.chapman@north-herts.gov.uk) Ext 4121
- 17.7. Rebecca Webb - HR Services Manager  
[Rebecca.Webb@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:Rebecca.Webb@north-herts.gov.uk) Ext 4481

### **18. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 18.1 None.