

ITEM: OPERATION CLOSE PASS

Report Author: Gordon Oliver **Position:** Principal Transport Planner

1. Purpose of the Report

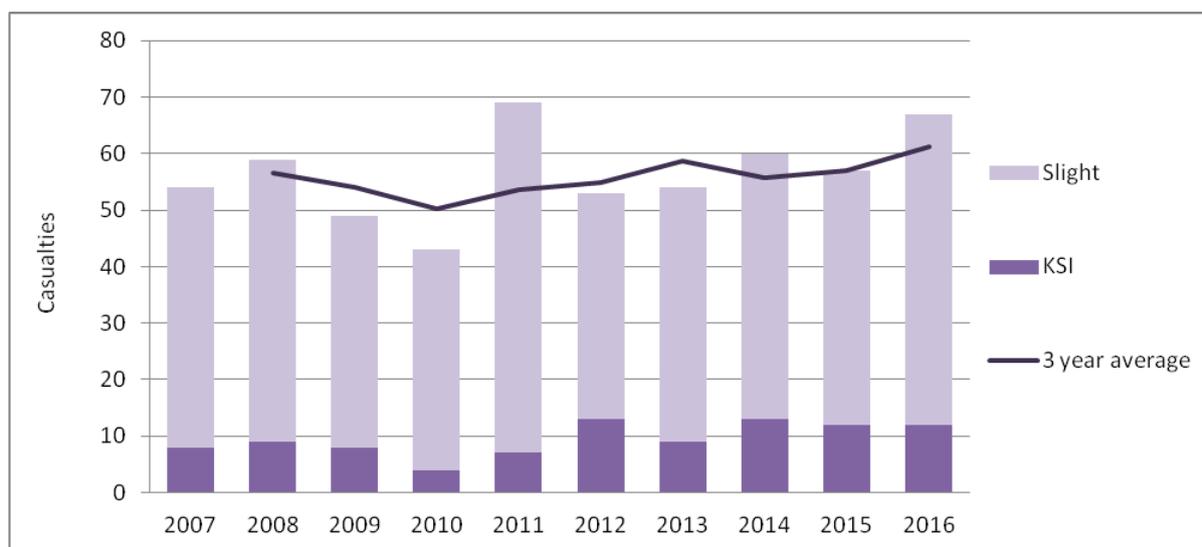
1.1 This report highlights the recent success of Operation Close Pass – a police initiative designed to highlight awareness of the dangers of motorists passing too close to cyclists – and considers the potential for this to be rolled out in the Royal Borough.

2. Supporting Information**Background**

- 2.1 Motorists giving cyclists insufficient room when overtaking is an increasingly common occurrence on the UK's road network, and according to Cycling UK, they account for a third of all threatening incidents between cyclists and motorists.
- 2.2 Close passes are intimidating for cyclists and can be a significant factor in discouraging people from cycling on the road, causing them to cycle illegally on the pavement or in some cases to give up cycling altogether.
- 2.3 The Highway Code states that motorists should give cyclists the same amount of room as a small car when overtaking. However, many drivers pass much closer, which presents a significant risk to cyclists' safety.
- 2.4 In 2016, West Midlands Police developed an initiative called Operation Close Pass to help tackle this issue and change driver behaviour. It involves a plain-clothes police officer riding a bike along a pre-determined route. Any vehicle that passes too closely is recorded on a camera mounted on the bike's handlebars. The officer riding the bike then makes radio contact with a colleague up ahead whose job it is to stop the driver.
- 2.5 Most drivers who watch the video footage accept that their driving was sub-standard. They are then offered the choice of a 10 minute educational session, or a £100 fine and three points added to their licence.
- 2.6 The educational session uses a road layout printed on a large, gray mat. A bike is positioned on the mat 75cm from the painted kerb to represent where cyclists typically ride. A further 1.5m out, another line shows what is considered to be the minimum acceptable passing distance.
- 2.7 A year after launching the initiative, West Midlands Police have reported a 20% reduction in the number of cyclists killed or seriously injured on local roads and reports of close passes have fallen by half.
- 2.8 More than 200 drivers have been stopped and have received the educational input. Over the same period, they have prosecuted more than 350 drivers by using video evidence supplied by victims or third parties.

- 2.9 In a further development, West Midlands Fire Service has been engaged to provide the training. Although there is no difference in the way the training is delivered, the Police believe that the training is more effective because people have more positive associations with the Fire Service who are generally linked with saving lives.
- 2.10 Similar operations have since been deployed by police forces across England and have achieved similar benefits. In some cases the educational sessions have been supported by wider communications programmes with radio interviews, newspaper articles, social media campaigns and sticker giveaways, which are designed to raise awareness and amplify the benefits.
- 2.11 Members of the Cycling Action Plan Task and Finish Group have indicated that they would like this initiative to be deployed within the Royal Borough, which has seen a significant increase in cyclist casualties within the last few years as illustrated in Figure 1 below.

Figure1: Pedal Cycle Casualties on Roads in the Royal Borough



3. Recommendation

- 3.1 It is recommended that: Thames Valley Police be approached to see if they would be willing to work with the Council to develop and deliver Operation Close Pass within the Royal Borough; and for this to be supported by a comprehensive joint communications programme.**