

AGENDA ITEM 5

POLICY, FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE

28TH SEPTEMBER 2016

REPORT OF HEAD OF REGULATORY SERVICES

RESOURCE ALLOCATION IN REGULATORY SERVICES

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek funding for arrangements put in place to support the Local Plan towards submission stage and to agree amendments to staffing establishment elsewhere within Regulatory Services

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 It is recommended that:

- i) the expenditure of £43,500 to support the Local Plan described at paras 3.2 and 3.3 - 3.5 below is agreed and funded as a virement from surplus fee income accrued within the Development Control budget (340);
- ii) to amend the permanent staffing establishment to delete the post 0.6 FTE of 'Applications and Advice Manager' and replace with a new, full time, post of 'Lead Planning Officer', in accordance with para 3.6 below;
- iii) to amend the staffing establishment by reducing the posts of Business Advisors (Licensing) from 1.5 FTE to 1.0 FTE, as set out in para 3.13 below;
- iv) that the efficiencies derived from (iii) above are used to support the proposal at (ii) above, and the residual sum (approx. £4, 000 p.a.) secured as an efficiency saving.

3.0 KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 Members will be aware that the Local Plan is progressing to 'submission version' stage and subsequently it is intended to submit it for Examination to the Planning Inspectorate in February 2017.

- 3.2 Developing the Plan to submission stage has required intensive work and this will continue as progress is made. This period has coincided with the departure of the previous Local Plan Manager and as a result several short term measures have been put in place to achieve the necessary timetable. These comprise:

- Dedicated Project Management professional who is able to take an overview of the programme to submission and identify where further

resource pressures are needed to achieve this.

- Consultancy support for a series of short term 'task and finish' activities such as site appraisal to enable us to make site allocations.
- A partnership approach with North Lincolnshire Council, who have kindly 'leased' two experienced officers, each dedicating 2 days per week, on key tasks associated with the submission process.

These inputs have been effective to maintain our momentum and we are on track to consider a Submission Version of the Local Plan in October 2016 and to submit it in February 2017.

- 3.3 It is also proposed to procure specialist digital engagement services to assist with the presentation of the Plan to the public at the next round of consultation and on digital platforms more generally. The aim is to:
- Ensure information is eye catching and visual
 - Present the content in a way the general public will understand
 - Allow for 2 way communication and interaction with the public on local plan options/information
- 3.4 It is proposed that a temporary post is created to work with the existing Digital Engagement Officer and also work with the local plan team to produce the new website and manage the social media communication around the local plan. The post is to be put in place for 6 months with an aim to review the effectiveness of this new approach to managing digital communications.
- 3.5 This temporary arrangement is also considered to be an opportunity to pilot a new way of managing digital communications where the digital and media skills are recruited to without specific service knowledge and the service knowledge is developed (rather than professional teams seeking to develop digital skills to complement their core skills and knowledge required for their principal duties). The review will consider if the current role of the Digital Champions is the best way forward for the Council in managing its online presence/services.
- 3.6 Following the departure of the Applications and Advice Manager (0.6 FTE) in July, Management Team have considered the options regarding replacement.
- 3.7 The key pressure on the team arises from medium to large scale applications, within Melton and the villages, which are often quite complex and almost always controversial. They generate a large and disproportionate amount of workload principally arising from the numbers of interested parties. Such applications are also probably our most important, as they represent how the main way the Borough will meet its housing supply and address its 5 year land supply shortage. In Melton Mowbray they are the principal tool by which we aim to deliver the distributor road either by provision on the ground or through developer contributions (nb the road is not just about convenience for residents, it's also about unlocking the economic growth potential of the Borough which is currently 'choked' by the traffic conditions).
- 3.8 Delivery of housing is amongst the foremost objectives that the Government has set for the planning system, and Members will be fully aware of the implications for New Homes Bonus and Council Tax. Ensuring that applications of this nature 'navigate' the planning system has perhaps never been more important.

- 3.9 It is therefore proposed to remould the team in order to create capacity at a level appropriate for the work involved in such applications – i.e. relatively senior and experienced.
- 3.10 In the most recent recruitment exercise we had aimed to appoint ‘towards the top of the grade’ in response to these pressures. However, despite attracting several candidates, they were generally inexperienced and already commanded salaries close to the top of our grades (Band 6- 10). It is therefore proposed to create a separate, more senior, post by reassigning the costs of the Manager post, and supplementing it to create a full time position (please see ‘financial implications’ below). As a new post this would be subject to Job Evaluation, but it is anticipated would be graded at Band 11 or 12.
- 3.11 Similarly, Members may be aware that one of the officers who occupied the post of Business Advisor (Licensing) vacated the post in June. A management decision was taken to consider the priorities in the Licensing function and to use the vacancy as an opportunity to reshape the team if necessary.
- 3.12 Various factors have led to the conclusion that whilst there is scope to reduce the resource allocation in Licensing, it cannot be achieved by deciding to simply not the replace the departed officer (0.8 FTE), leaving an 0.7FTE post in the staffing establishment. Such a level has created significant issues of capacity and also of provision of service to customers during periods of unavailability.
- 3.13 It is therefore proposed to reduce the resource allocation to Licensing to 1 FTE – a reduction of 0.5 FTE. The financial implications of this are set out below.

4.0 POLICY AND CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 These posts are considered important to deliver the Council’s Economic Development ambitions and make a major contribution to the “Promoting a vibrant and sustainable economy, focused on growth and prosperity” corporate priority.
- 4.2 As described above, planning and the delivery of houses is directly linked to New Homes Bonus both in terms of direct quantity (no of houses built) but also delivery via applications within our jurisdiction, as opposed to arising from permissions granted on appeal which the government proposes to discount from NHB.
- 4.3 The Digital Engagement proposal would represent a new approach for the Council to improve its digital ‘presence’ and develop better communication through digital channels. It would be a pilot to establish whether this approach can produce a better presence and more responsive engagement which, upon completion, would be the subject of evaluation as an approach for other service areas. In this event further proposals would be made for wider corporate roll out.

5.0 FINANCIAL AND OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Costs have been calculated for the one off payments required to support the Local Plan.

These non-recurring costs are as follows:

- Project Management : £15,000
- Consultant Support: £5,000
- Partnership with North Lincs Council: : £ 13,500
- Digital Engagement: £10,000

5.2 The proposed amendments to the Applications and Advice Manager would create an annual additional cost (recurring) of between £10,000 and £13,000 per annum, depending on the grades involved, and would require additional resources.

5.3 At the end of P5 (31.8.2016) Planning Application fees received were £138,000 higher than anticipated in the budget. If this trajectory was to continue it suggests a 'surplus' at year end in excess of £200,000. However the surplus on this budget needs to be taken in the context of the Council's overall financial position as set out elsewhere on this agenda.

5.4 The reduction of resources in Licensing would result in annual savings (recurring) of £17,750 per annum.

6.0 **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS/POWERS**

6.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report. The staffing and resource levels proposed by this report would ensure we satisfy legal responsibilities in an efficient manner.

7.0 **COMMUNITY SAFETY**

7.1 This report has no impact on Community Safety implications.

8.0 **EQUALITIES**

8.1 This report has no impact on Equalities implications.

9.0 **RISKS**

9.1

L I K E L I H O O D	A	Very High				
	B	High				
	C	Significant		1, 2		
	D	Low				
	E	Very Low				
	F	Almost Impossible				
			Negligible 1	Marginal 2	Critical 3	Catastrophic 4

IMPACT

Risk No	Risk Description
1	<i>Failure to meet local plan timetables</i>
2	<i>Failure to cope with pressure associated with more demanding planning applications</i>

10.0 CLIMATE CHANGE

10.1 There are no climate change implications as a result of the proposed new scheme

11.0 CONSULTATION

11.1 No consultation has taken place with these proposals. The Digital Engagement officer would have a key role in enhancing consultation on the Local Plan and particularly assist engaging groups who would not naturally be attracted to traditional forms of consultation.

12.0 WARDS AFFECTED

12.1 No wards are affected by this scheme

Contact Officer J Worley

Date: 12th Sept 16

Appendices : None

Background Papers: None

Reference : X : Committees\PFA