

**REPORT TO THE STRATEGY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE – 28<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2019  
AGENDA ITEM 11**

**RESOURCING REPORT – PLANNING**

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Purpose of Report:	To seek Member's approval to carry out the recommendations highlighted in this report.
Publication status:	Unrestricted
Recommendations:	<p>That, in accordance with its delegated powers, the Committee approves the following recommendations:</p> <p>A. To increase the current staff establishment forthwith by 3x planning officers and 1x planning enforcement officer as set out in the report.</p> <p>B. The position be reviewed within the next six months, including the possibility of a further increase in the planning staffing establishment by 2 additional officers should this be deemed necessary.</p> <p>C. To approve an interim arrangement preventing incoming calls to officers' direct dials from 1pm daily, until 31 March 2020.</p> <p>D. To approve the proposal to suspend the daily duty service on an interim basis until 31 March 2020, at which time a review of the future of service will be conducted.</p> <p>E. To approve the proposal to suspend the receipt of pre-apps for major and minor developments on an interim basis until 31 March 2020 and to approve a review and relaunch of the service from April 2020.</p> <p>F. To approve the changes of job title as set out in this report.</p>
Appendices:	None
Background papers defined by the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985	None

## 1. Background

- 1.1 The new operating model was launched on 25 February 2019 and has been operating for nine months. The limited roll out of Salesforce has yet to realise any efficiencies and the continued reliance on legacy systems that are not integrated or interfaced to Salesforce has, in many areas, generated additional work and more complex processes. Some efficiencies have been gained following process reviews and taking back in-house of the validation service. An IT project is currently underway to generate further efficiencies.
- 1.2 It is apparent that resourcing levels delivered through the approved establishment are not sufficient to deliver the current case work and associated activity across the service areas of planning and planning enforcement. Front line services are being affected, people are resigning, recruitment is challenging, and we are experiencing high levels of sickness absence being attributed to work related stress. There is a reliance on supernumerary temporary staff and contractors to maintain core services and it has proved extremely difficult to generate capacity for the cross training required to deliver the resilience promised under the Customer First model.

## 2. Current Position

- 2.1 There are currently 88 applications out of time of which 21 are discharge of condition applications. While the number of applications out of time has reduced in recent weeks, there is still a risk that this number will increase due to escalating officer caseloads and the concern that 56 applications are yet to be reallocated from officers who have left the organisation.
- 2.2 The team have recently benefited from an officer being seconded from another area of the business. This is, however, a short-term measure and will end shortly. The team have further benefited from the decision to extend the five current contractors in the team until 31 January 2020.
- 2.3 At the Planning Policy Committee in September, Members requested that a Planning Working Group be set up, including Councillors Black, Botten and Jecks, together with relevant officers from within the business. This group was tasked to “*investigate how the performance of the planning service might be improved and how its budget could be applied to best effect*”. At the group’s first meeting, a number of recommendations were discussed. Officer proposals arising from that meeting, and following subsequent analysis, are detailed in this report.

## 3. Regulatory (Planning) – Development Management

### 3.1 Current Case Load

	<b>Open Cases @ 15/11/19</b>	<b>Forecast (year)</b>
Applications	323	2600
Pre – Apps	77	n/a
Planning condition - compliance	51	n/a

- In October 2019 – 76 decisions issued
- In October 2019 – 105 applications were received
- Pre-apps are an indication of future case load – 77 is high and is increasing
- Duty service – Monday to Friday 9:00am to 13:00pm

### 3.2 Current Establishment Development Management

<b>Post</b>	<b>Case Load</b>
Lead Regulatory Specialist	6 – Major 8 – Pre- Apps
Regulatory Specialist (Vacant)	Vacant Post – Capacity for 15 - 20 Major/Minor applications
Regulatory Specialist	33 - TPOs 250 – Tree Planning consultations
Regulatory Specialist	23 –Major/minors 8 – Pre-apps
Case Officer	48 – Householder/ Other 8 – Pre-apps
Case Officer	44– Householder / Other 3 – Pre-apps
Case Officer	44– Householder / Other 11– Pre-app

### 3.3 Current Contractors Development Management

<b>Position</b>	<b>Case Load</b>
Regulatory Specialist	24 - Major/Minor 10 - Pre-app
Regulatory Specialist	18 - Major/Minor
Regulatory Specialist	8 – Major/Minor (20 overall capacity)
Regulatory Specialist	8 – Traveller site apps
Interim Lead Regulatory Specialist (secondment)	11 -Major/Minor

### 3.4 Case Services – additional responsibilities

3.4.1 There are a further 4.5 junior grade Case Officers within the establishment to deliver:

- Validation
- Consultation
- Administration
- Events
- Parish Council paper plan printing

3.4.2 These figures include the two additional posts agreed by Planning Policy Committee to bring the validation service back in house.

### 3.5 Current Caseload Planning Enforcement

3.5.1 The Customer First model expected that Regulatory Specialists and Case Officers would manage both DM and Planning Enforcement caseloads. In practice, this has proved not to be a practical way of working due to the volume of cases and conflicting priorities for officers.

3.5.2 Planning professionals tend to concentrate/specialise in DM or enforcement, not both. This view has been reinforced by both permanent and contract staff as well as specialist recruitment agencies. Locality have, so far, not been able to pick up the volume of case work originally anticipated. This is due to not having capacity to deliver the cross training required and the need for the team to oversee the roll out of the new waste management service

3.5.3 At 15 November 2019, there were at total of 189 open enforcement cases.

### 3.6 Current Establishment - Planning Enforcement

Post	Case Load
Lead Regulatory Specialist – DM & Enforcement	0 Cases
Regulatory Specialist	62 Cases
Case Officer	26 Cases

### 3.7 Current Contractors - Planning Enforcement

Position	Case Load
Regulatory Specialist	51 cases
Regulatory Specialist	50 cases

3.8 Following the departure of a Locality Officer with planning enforcement knowledge, 27 cases that would, in the model, sit within Locality, have been transferred back to Regulatory Specialists. Most of this case load is low level but has further increased the demand on the two establishment posts and two contractors within the team.

3.9 Both contractors are contracted until the 31 January 2020 and are focusing on closing and seeing through as many cases as possible. However, it should be recognised that, on average, 40 new cases/ breaches of planning control are received each month.

## 4. Recommended posts and financial Implications

Directorate	Theme	Service Area	Post	Grade	Annual Cost*
People	Regulatory	Planning (DM)	Specialist	M4	£62,668
People	Regulatory	Planning (DM)	Specialist	M2	£46,929
People	Regulatory	Planning (DM - Trees)	Case Officer	TA2	£34,005
People	Regulatory	Planning Enforcement	Specialist	M2	£46,929
*Annual cost assumes 3 <sup>rd</sup> SCP in grade and includes 28% on cost					<b>£190,531</b>

4.1 The above posts are costed at the 3<sup>rd</sup> scale point within each grade. It should be noted that, in line with the Council's Pay Policy, appointments will be offered at the lowest scale point within each grade.

## 4.2 Comparison of cost of permanent and contractor costs

Permanent Staff			Contractor	
	Hourly *top of grade	Annual	Hourly	Annual (x 37hrs x 48wks)
M4	£27.05	£52,180	£50	£88,800
M3	£23.71	£45,739	£45	£79,920
M2	£20.38	£39,321	£40	£71,040
M1	£17.63	£34,007		
TA2	£14.87	£28,693		

4.3 The table below details the current 19/20 budget for both establishment and contract staff carrying out all planning activity.

	Budget	Outturn/forecast
2017/18 Planning Staffing Budget	£1,077,100	£1,030,273
2019/20 Establishment Budget *excluding vacancy drag		
• Specialist	£298,811	
• Case Officer (Planning Officer)	£163,110	
• Case Officer Support	£31,620	
<b>Total = £493,541</b>		
2019/20 contractor costs	£404,040	£897,581
2019/20 replacement with permanent staff	£190,531	£684,072

**Proposed total saving of £213,509 (£897,581 - £684,072)**

5. Income and future opportunities

Fee	Budget	YTD Actual
Planning Fees	£584,600	£324,901
Planning Conditions	£6,5000	£914
Pre-App fees (Major)	£63,800	£31,320
Pre-App fees (Householder)	£9,200	£19,625

## 5.1 Opportunities to generate additional income:

- Review pre-app service charges
- Introduction of Planning Performance Agreements
- Introduction of a dropped kerb application fee
- Grant - £50k - application pending Central Government – Greenbelt status
- £13k – Enforcement Appeal Fees collected year to date

## 6 Interim Suspension of officer phone availability

- 6.1 Officers are currently managing high and varied caseloads and are continuously being redirected to answer calls from the public, applicants, agents and developers. In the current climate, it is believed that this is counter-productive and is not best use of officer time.
- 6.2 An interim arrangement until 31 March 2020 is therefore recommended whereby officers will be able to log off direct dial phones to prevent incoming calls from 1pm daily. This will allow officers sufficient report writing time to clear the current backlog, manage their caseload more efficiently and allow for cross training within the team.
- 6.3 Officers will, where necessary, make outgoing calls to members of the public, applicants, agents and developers. All members of the public will be able to request a call back via the customer service centre during this interim arrangement. All call backs will be made within the timescales set out in the Councils service standards.

## 7. Suspension of daily Duty Officer

- 7.1 Currently, officers provide a free daily duty officer service between 09:00 and 13:00 Monday to Friday providing planning advice for householders and members of the public. This is not a statutory service and is highly resource intensive.
- 7.2 Householders should be encouraged to liaise and seek advice from the Council by using the paid for pre-app service. This will not only generate additional income to the Council but will also allow officers to manage their caseload more proactively. Suspending this service will gain officers the equivalent of one day per week, allowing more time to write reports and put forward recommendations for decision within the statutory timeframes.
- 7.3 It is a recommendation to suspend this service until 31 March 2020, with a view to withdrawing the service permanently following a review nearer the time.

## 8 Interim Suspension of the Minor and Major Pre-App service

- 8.1 As of 15 November 2019, a total of 77 pre-applications remain outstanding, the majority of which are for proposed minor or major developments.
- 8.2 Pre-apps are an indication of the number of future planning applications to be received and as a Local Planning Authority the benefits of the service are understood. However, at present 25 of the 77 out of time applications are unallocated. Before accepting new applications, there is an urgent need to reduce the backlog to enable sufficient future administration and management of new applications in the future.
- 8.3 It should be noted that during the period in which the suspension is in place, a review of the pre-app service will be instigated which will assess the current process and the information available to the public on the Councils website.
- 8.4 It is a recommendation to suspend this service until 31 March 2020, with a view to relaunching the service after this date.

## 9 Review of job titles

- 9.1 Following the new job titles introduced via Customer First, Officers have raised concern that they are spending a lot of time explaining to customers what they do as the title does not necessarily relate to the activity they undertake. Officers in the case of planning have studied and obtained relevant qualifications to carry out their duties and believe that this should be reflected in their job title.
- 9.2 Officers have therefore been consulted on the job titles and the following changes will be made in due course:

<b>Current Job title</b>	<b>Proposed Job title</b>
Lead Regulatory Specialist	Lead Planning Specialist
Regulatory Specialist (DM)	Planning Specialist
Regulatory Specialist (Trees)	Tree Specialist
Regulatory Specialist (Enforcement)	Enforcement Specialist
Case Officer (Regulatory)	Case Officer (Planning)
Case Officer (Regulatory)	Case Officer (Enforcement)

## 10 Financial / risk Implications

- 10.1 The estimated costs of the proposals recommended in this report are a saving resulting from the elimination of the cost of current contractors and replacement with permanent posts:

- Current Contractors                      £404,040
- Proposed additional staff                £190,531
- Saving in staffing costs                 £213,509

\* The additional staff costs include 28% on costs

- 10.2 There is no provision in the 2019/20 budget for these staff but, provision has been made for these staff in the 2020/21 draft budget.
- 10.3 There is potential for income generation through the implementation of planning performance agreements, however this will depend on demand.

## 11 Legal Implications

- 11.1 Under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 the Council has a statutory duty to provide a planning service. The Council therefore needs to ensure that it has sufficient staff to enable it to provide that service in an efficient and cost-effective manner.

12 Equality Impacts

Consideration of impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty are as follows:

Questions	Answer
Do the proposals within this report have the potential to disadvantage or discriminate against different groups on the community?	No
What steps can be taken to mitigate any potential negative impact referred to above?	Not Applicable

13 Data Protection impacts

Following the completion of a Data Protection Impact Assessment, consideration of potential data protection implications arising from this report are as follows:

Questions	Answer
Do the proposals within this report have the potential to contravene the Council's Privacy Notice?	No
Is so, what steps will be taken to mitigate the risks referred to above?	Not Applicable

14. Conclusion

- 14.1 The recommendations outlined in this report form part of the planning service recovery plan. The recovery plan consists of recommendations that require Member approval as highlighted in this report and actions that the Council can carry out at its discretion.

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