

**SUBJECT: RE-ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES WITHIN
DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT**

MEETING: Individual Cabinet Member Decision

DATE: 29 June 2016

DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: All

1. PURPOSE:

To seek approval to increase the staff head-count within the Development Management (DM) service by 1.6FTE on a permanent basis and to extend an existing 1.0FTE fixed term post until 31 December 2016, to better reflect current and future service needs.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the following amendments to the existing establishment be approved:

- 2.1 Create additional permanent 1.1FTE Development Management Officer posts. This will in part replace an existing part-time (0.6FTE) temporary fixed term post;
- 2.2 Create an additional permanent 0.5FTE Development Management Support Officer (SO) post;
- 2.3 Extend an existing temporary Support Officer post to 31 December 2016 to cover for maternity leave arrangements and a workload peak while a new back-office IT system is being created and installed.

3. KEY ISSUES:

- 3.1 The present work demands on the Development Management team are increasing, especially having regard to the more systematic method of dealing with pre-application advice, discharge of planning conditions, non-material amendments and minor material amendments. These issues arise from a combination of new legislation, increased workload, service improvements and customer feedback. Consequently, the current arrangement is no longer fit for purpose and needs adjustment.
- 3.2 In terms of workload, the number of planning applications registered has steadily increased over recent years:
2013/14 – 983 applications registered
2014/15 – 1173 applications registered; and
2015/16 – 1416 applications registered.

This represents additional workload for both Development Management Officers and the Support Team. As part of the Systems Thinking approach, Support Officers not only assist with providing technical support to the team, such as mapping, scanning, indexing, logging and registering, but also deal with minor planning applications, such as household extensions and certificates of lawfulness. This in turn allows the Development Management Officers to focus on more complex cases.

- 3.3 In addition, the service deals with formal pre-application requests (a fee-earning service) and general enquiries, as well as planning enforcement complaints. The pre-application advice service has attracted a greater fee income than anticipated (£44k compared to £36k budget income line) and recently approved changes to pre-application advice fees predict a further increase in income of £6k per annum. However, in order to ensure this service remains attractive to customers, it must be delivered in a timely fashion. The proposed extra resource will assist with this.
- 3.4 It should also be noted that recent legislative changes allow applicants to be refunded their planning application fee if their planning application is not determined within specified timescales. While the legislation allows Officers to negotiate an extended deadline, customers are more likely to agree to such a request if they can see that good progress is being made on their application, and are less likely to agree the request if they feel like their application or previous pre-application advice was not provided in a timely fashion. Ensuring the team is properly resourced will minimise the likelihood of refunds being payable.
- 3.5 Owing to the significant work associated with the setting-up of the new IDOX (Uniform) planning application processing system, combined with maternity leave arrangements, there is also a need to provide cover in the DM Support team. This would require extending a temporary Support Officer to 31 December 2016 at Pay Band D (scp 17-21). Recruitment to this post would be done on a flexible basis to reflect workload pressures: it is unlikely that a full time member of staff will be required for the whole period and part-time, short-term contracts will be used as required. The IT project is being supported by a project team, all of whom are committing one day per week to the project, resulting in an additional workload pressure for other colleagues. This should come to an end in Autumn 2016.
- 3.6 The proposals would be fully funded within existing budgets. The proposals provide an opportunity to retain existing temporary staff and provide career development.

4. REASONS:

Additional 1.1FTE Development Management Officers and 0.5FTE Support Officer

- 4.1 These additional posts are required to:
- Maintain levels of customer service, including dealing with pre-application advice and planning applications in a timely manner;

- Deal with an increasing workload due in part to legislative changes;
- Ensure continued customer satisfaction to sustain customer demand for the pre-application advice service and to avoid requests for application fee refunds;
- Provide an opportunity to retain existing staff on temporary contracts and provide career development.

Extend 1.0FTE temporary Support Officer (SO) to 31/12/16

- 4.2 The retention of this post for an extended period is required to:
- Provide maternity leave cover;
 - Provide additional support during a temporary workload peak resulting from the introduction of a new back-office IT system.
- 4.3 This post will be filled in a flexible manner according to workload pressures: it is unlikely that a full time officer is required for the full period. However, this has been budgeted for as a 'worst case' scenario.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

Budget

- 5.1 Any costs arising from these adjustments will be fully met from within the overall DM budget, which has been re-balanced to provide additional resource in the DM salaries budget, while reducing some of the funds in the Professional & Specialist Fees budget. Therefore these proposed changes are regarded as cost neutral to the overall budget. These costs have been discussed with the service's accountant.
- 5.2 The costs of the proposal are as follows (including on-costs):
- | | |
|---|----------|
| 1.1FTE Development Management Officers (Band F): | £38,400* |
| 0.5FTE Support Officer (Band E): | £13,000* |
| Fixed term 1.0FTE Support Officer to 31/12/16 (Band D): | £13,400 |

* The costs of these posts are already fully included in the 2016/17 service budget. The remaining £13,400 will be fully funded within the existing budget by reducing spend under other sub-codes, in particular professional services.

- 5.3 The Welsh Minister wrote to all Chief Executives and Heads of Planning in 2015 explicitly stating an expectation that increased income resulting from a Wales-wide 15% increase in statutory planning application fees should be reinvested in the planning service to benefit customers. As part of Budget Mandate B9 for 2016/17, £40k of the projected £69.5k income increase has been offered as a saving to reduce the net cost to the Council's budget of the planning service. The remaining £29.5k was set aside as part of the approved Mandate to fund service improvements. The proposals set out in this report are part-funded by this budget commitment: the remainder is funded by realigning the existing budget. There is no net cost increase to the Council.

Management

- 5.2 The proposed posts would all fit within the existing team without the need for any other changes to the service structure or line management arrangements.

6. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

There is neutral impact on Equality and there are no discrimination issues. An updated EqlA/Future Generations Assessment has been produced.

7. CONSULTEES:

Members of Cabinet
Strategic Leadership Team
Head of Planning
Head of Legal Services
Employee Services Manager
Accountant
Development Management colleagues

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

None

9. AUTHOR:

Philip Thomas – Development Services Manager

10. CONTACT DETAILS:

Tel: 01633 644809
E-mail: philipthomas@monmouthshire.gov.uk