

Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C-060-2014/15
Date of meeting: 11 January 2016



Portfolio: Governance and Development Management

Subject: Trainee Planning Officers & Trainee Contaminated Land Officer -
Development Management

Responsible Officer: Nigel Richardson (01992 564110).

Democratic Services: Gary Woodhall (01992 564470).

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- (1) That authority be granted to create two trainee Planning Officers and a trainee Contaminated Land Officer for a duration of two years at a total cost of £144,690; and
- (2) That the funding for these posts of £144,690 be provided from the District Development Fund, sourced as direct result of the additional planning income received (over budget) for 2015/16.

Executive Summary:

Development Management intends to address workforce improvement in the 2016/17 Business Plan with the implementation of succession planning by 'growing' our own talent as a key element of this. As at April 2015, 37% of employees within the Governance Directorate were aged 55 and over and there is a need to ensure that there is in place plans to address the risks of key professional staff either retiring or moving to other authorities. It is proposed to support the development of our Workforce Plan by recommending the funding and appointment of three important traineeship posts - a Trainee Contaminated Land Officer and two Trainee Planning Officers to address identified skills gaps within Development Management.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

There is a general difficulty in recruiting and retaining Planning Officers and other specialists within Development Management across Essex and the East of England, such that we are taking part in a project to help address the planning skills shortage across the region. This recruitment difficulty is now being experienced in this Council and has become more pronounced due to the increase in planning applications and competition from the private planning sector, who are recruiting with more competitive job opportunities and salaries. This is supported by a recent advertising process in national and local media for a Senior Planning Officer which elicited one response and the need to further advertise in other publications at an additional financial cost to the service.

Other Options for Action:

To do nothing may result in the Development Management being subject to vulnerability and weakness in key areas of planning and contaminated land.

Report:

Trainee Contaminated Land Officer

1. The establishment of a Trainee Contaminated Land Officer has been identified as a key appointment to aid business continuity for Development Management's Contaminated Land responsibilities, workload of which has increased and is causing delays to the advice given on planning applications and the clearing of details submitted to discharge related conditions on planning applications.

2. The reason is that planning applications have increased by over 20% in 2015/16 accompanied by increases in work in three other areas that have had a direct impact on the Senior Contaminated Land Officers workload;

- Changes to Permitted development rights for the use of agricultural buildings;
- Pre-application enquiries; and
- A general increase in commercial applications most of which are on brownfield sites that have contaminated land implications.

3. Furthermore, as the Senior Contaminated Land Officer is over 60 years of age, there is a need to establish a succession plan to ensure continuity of service provision. The budgeted cost for this will be year one at Grade 4 and year two at Grade 5 and will be £48,230. On completion of the two year period it is the intention that the post holder will be assimilated into the Contaminated Land Section within Development Management at Grade 5 or higher.

Trainee Planning Officers

4. In respect of creating two new trainee posts, in April 2013, a Trainee Planner was appointed and during the two year period of appointment made good progress in obtaining a Masters in Town Planning from Southbank University in London. As a result of this traineeship, the post holder was successfully appointed as a Planning Officer. Due to the success of this it is recommended that this is repeated for two trainee planning officers.

5. This forms an important part of the policy of staff retention and succession planning. It is recommended that the two trainee planner posts for the period August 2016 to August 2018 are created at a cost of £96,460. During this period the post holders will be expected to gain a two year part time Masters degree in Town Planning. On gaining the University qualification the post holder will be tied to the council for a further two years and funding for this will be arranged either by assimilation into a planning officer post or the post holder will be offered a post equivalent or higher than Grade 5.

6. Within Development Management we currently have two fixed term administrative staff members who both joined to gain work experience in planning. One is due to complete their Geography Degree and the other is completing a Masters Degree qualification in Planning, with both due for completion in the summer of 2016. Both are suitable for appointment as Trainee Planners with the added benefit that we would be required to fund only one staff member to attend the twelve months masters' degree course.

Funding

7. The case for funding these three posts stems from the increase in planning applications in recent years. This includes a significant increase in Development Control income which was £298 000 over their original budget in 2014/15. Indications are that the current 2015/16 year will be just as successful as the previous year and as at 9 December 2015 Development Control had already matched their full year's income budget commitment.

8. Planning pre-application advice income before 2013/14 was around £10,000 and the income from this in 2014/15 was £105 000 with indications that Pre-Application Income will be 10% higher than 2015/16. Overall the income for Development Control in 2014/15 was £400 000 over budget. This comprises the increase in both planning/building control applications and additional revenue received as a result of providing income generating pre-application advice.

9. The funding requirement detailed below will be provided by DDF funding, directly linked to the increase in planning income over budget for 2015/16.

DETAIL	GRADE	SCP	FTE	COST
Trainee Contaminated Land Officer (Two years)	4/5	16 & 21	1.00	£48 230
Trainee Planning Officer (Two years)	4/5	16 & 21	2.00	£96 460
NET STAFF RESOURCE COSTS				£144 690

10. In summary, the three new fixed term trainee posts can be sourced from the budget surplus of planning income. The appointment of three important traineeship posts - a Trainee Contaminated Land Officer and two Trainee Planning Officers, will address identified skills gaps within Development Management and add resources to cope with the high work level created by pre-application and planning application submissions.

Resource Implications:

The cost of £144 690 is proposed to be financed from DDF funding, sourced as direct result of the additional planning income received (over budget) for 2015/16

Legal and Governance Implications:

The legal & governance implications have been taken into account by integrating this with actions as part of the Business Plan 2015/16 and 2016/17.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

The creation of the Trainee Contaminated Land Officer will assist in the organised development of brownfield sites and two Trainee Planners will assist in professional planning support across Development Management. The three posts will provide significant indirect assistance in protecting the green and rural character of the district as part of the sustainable and carbon friendly policies of the Local Plan.

Consultation Undertaken:

Finance (PM)
 Management Board 16th December 2015

Background Papers:

None

Risk Management:

The following risks are recorded in the Governance Business Plan 2015/16 (updated June 2015) Appendix Six and Seven and are linked to the creation of two trainee posts to improve Development Management performance.

Risk One and Two

- Not meeting Development Management Performance Targets
- Inability or failure to provide current and ongoing planning records/applications on corporate website

Risk Eleven

Loss of expertise and detailed local knowledge – Contaminated Land

Due Regard Record

This page shows **which groups of people are affected** by the subject of this report. It sets out **how they are affected** and how any **unlawful discrimination** they experience can be eliminated. It also includes information about how **access to the service(s)** subject to this report can be improved for the different groups of people; and how they can be assisted to **understand each other better** as a result of the subject of this report.

S149 Equality Act 2010 requires that due regard must be paid to this information when considering the subject of this report.

The appointment of two trainee Planning Officers and a trainee Contaminated Land Officer will indirectly support all vulnerable groups within the community who are usually be reliant on the provision of accurate planning information via iPlan which may be compromised due to a combination of the current increase in planning applications and resultant shortage of specialist support from both planning and contaminated land sections.

In addition these appointments will also support the provision of timely advice particularly in supporting community aspirations for greenbelt protection and regulated brownfields development which in turn will result in better service delivery for all protected groups within the community and add value to the EFDC Local Plan.