

# **Report to the Resources Select Committee**



**Epping Forest  
District Council**

***Date of meeting: 2 April 2019***

**Portfolio: Business Support Services**

**Subject: Agency Staff and Consultancy**

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## **Recommendations**

**That members note the report and comment as appropriate**

## **Executive Summary**

The report provides information on the Cost of Consultants and Agency staff for both 2017/18 and up to the end of February for 2018/19. The schedules show the areas where they have worked and how much has been spent in those areas. Within the report there is some further detail and information to provide some context where possible.

## **Reasons for proposed action**

Members are asked to note the report and comment as appropriate

## **Other options for action**

No other options applicable.

## **Report**

1. The Council on occasions needs employ people either on a temporary basis or for a particular project. The former situation can be for peaks in workload or to cover maternity and longer term sickness. The latter is for short term specific projects when the expertise do not exist in house and to employ someone for such a short term is impractical.
2. Such expenditure is recorded on the Council's finance system such that it is easily identifiable. However a reasonableness check has also been carried out to make sure that as far as possible the amounts recorded meet either the definition of an Agency worker or a consultant. Some commentary is provided below on a directorate by directorate basis and attached are two appendices with more detail on the areas where such costs have been charged.
3. Expenditure in recent years has increased significantly in 2015/16 overall expenditure was just short of £1.5m whereas in 2017/18 expenditure was double that at nearly £3m and in this year currently stands at a little over £2.5m with a month to go so the outturn position will be similar to last year. The reasons for the levels of expenditure are explored below but quite clearly the Local Plan and costs within the estates division have had a significant impact.

## **Business Support**

4. Expenditure in 2017/18 was £228,000 and in 2018/19 is currently £308,000. The two areas that saw the most significant increases were Legal and People Team. The latter includes some consultancy relating to the people strategy.

## **Commercial & Regulatory**

5. Expenditure in 2017/18 was £461,000 and in 2018/19 is currently £317,000. The most significant area relates to Estates as it has proved difficult to attract and retain suitably qualified staff. A revised structure has now been put in place and whilst the reliance on Agency staff and consultancy is still there expenditure in 2018/19 will be lower than 2017/18. Other areas include Building Control and Licensing the former has seen an increase this year but the service needs to be quite flexible to meet peaks and troughs in work load and temporary staffing arrangements enable this flexibility to be maintained.

## **Communities & Partnerships**

6. Expenditure in 2017/18 was £21,000 and in 2018/19 is £90,000. The main area is Economic Development and relates to the digital innovation strategy which is largely funded by external partners.

## **Contract and Technical**

7. Expenditure in 2017/18 was £193,000 and in 2018/19 is currently £155,000. The areas include Waste Management, Land drainage, Contaminated Land and Grounds Maintenance. Expenditure on Waste Management relates to recycling and in 2017/18 was somewhat higher than this year This expenditure was funded from grant provided by Central Government for a recycling promotion scheme. Grounds maintenance use agency staff to cover the significant summer workload peaks as this is more cost effective than employing permanent staff all year round.

## **Customer Services**

8. Expenditure in 2017/18 was £153,000 and in 2018/19 is currently £159,000. The two main areas relate to Housing Benefits and Revenues, expenditure being similar in both years. Both areas have specific agency budgets as it is important to maintain service levels during periods of staff sickness and to plug gaps in resources due to staff turnover. Also within revenues some temporary collection staff are employed using resources provided by major preceptors through the additional income sharing agreement that is in place.
9. There have been some consultancy costs on Public Relations this year related to the creation of the new website which were funded from salary savings.

## **Housing and Property**

10. Expenditure in 2017/18 was £415,000 and in 2018/19 is currently £423,000. The areas are mostly related to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and are generally agency costs rather than consultants particularly within Housing Maintenance and Repairs. Consultancy costs relate to Right to buy Valuations, House building and Housing Finance including the 30 year HRA Business Plan.

## **Planning Services**

11. Expenditure in 2017/18 was £1,379,000 and in 2018/19 is currently £990,000. Expenditure was particularly high on the Local Plan in 2017/18 at £1.18m but given the nature and type of work involved this is perhaps not surprising. This years figure is

significantly lower at the moment but there are a number of payments still outstanding some going back a number of months so further significant expenditure in 2018/19 is still likely. There are now costs relating to the Strategic Implementation team and higher costs on the Garden Town and Development Control than in 2017/18. In relation to the Garden Town project this is now gaining momentum and significant Government funding has been committed to the project to pay for the work currently being undertaken. With regard to Development Control, retaining staff is proving difficult and the employment of agency staff has been necessary to plug gaps and maintain application turnaround times.

### **Chief Executive**

12. Expenditure in 2017/18 was £133,000 and in 2018/19 is currently £93,000. This expenditure relates to Transformation projects with more being spent in 2017/18.

### **Conclusion**

13. Consultants and agency staff are used for a number of reasons and in most cases are either for short term cover arrangements or specific projects which are short term in nature and require expertise that the Council does not have in house.

### **Consultations Undertaken**

Nothing specific in relation to this report but the recent budget consultations would take account of this spend and ascertain where funding was coming from.

### **Resource Implications**

The report refers to the cost of agency staff and Consultants in some cases specific budget is provided in other cases costs of agency staff have to be funded from salary savings.

### **Legal and Governance Implications**

Nothing specifically identified.

### **Safer, Cleaner, Greener Implications**

Nothing specifically identified.

### **Background Papers**

Various working papers held in Accountancy.

### **Impact Assessments**

#### Risk Management

The risks involved in each area would be assessed and taken into account when deciding whether or not to deploy temporary staff or consultants. Clearly where specific expertise is needed to complete a piece of work and they are not available in house a consultant would normally be engaged to ensure the work is carried out to the required standard.

#### Equality and Diversity:

Did the initial assessment of the proposals contained in this report for relevance to the Council's general equality duties, reveal any potentially adverse equality implications?

No

Where equality implications were identified through the initial assessment process, has a formal Equality Impact Assessment been undertaken? No

What equality implications were identified through the Equality Impact Assessment process? None

How have the equality implications identified through the Equality Impact Assessment been addressed in this report in order to avoid discrimination against any particular group? N/A