

Report of the Chief Executive

ADDITIONAL PLANNING OFFICER1. Purpose of report

To request the appointment of an additional Planning Officer to be added to the establishment of the Planning Department. This is to provide urgent ongoing support to the current team with day to day work duties.

2. Background

The planning workload has been steadily increasing for some time, particularly in Development Management, to the point where the existing situation is unsustainable. Over the last 12 months two planning policy officers have been working full time in Development Management, to assist with workload, in the hope that workload would ease, alas the opposite has occurred. From December 2020 up to 16 May 2021 we have had 141 more applications (all types) than in the same timeframe for the previous year. Currently, Planning Officers are running an average caseload of 48 cases each (with some as high as 58), to put this in context we usually aim for 25-30. This would be far higher if the Policy Officers weren't assisting, but with planning policy work pressures not relenting, this is unsustainable.

The department has received approximately £59k more in planning fees in the period of 2020-21, when compared with 2019-2020. It is proposed that a portion of this revenue be used to create a post for a Planning Officer at Grade 8 with a salary of £27,068, which with on costs equates to £34,450. The established trend is for planning fees to go up, along with the number of applications, which are continuing to rise.

The Planning Department has benefited recently from some temporary agency staff, but is looking for a more sustainable solution moving forward. Moreover, the existing adverts and staff we are recruiting to in planning are to replace existing positions either vacant or soon to be vacant, and will not make any significant inroads into the work, rather maintain the current status quo.

3. Financial implications

This would be a new post, proposed to assist the growing workload in the Planning Department. As outlined above the planning fees received in the period 2020-21 are approximately £59k higher than the same period the previous year, and are likely to increase. Therefore, it can be reasonably argued that there are sufficient funds generated by the application fees that more than cover the cost of this post.

4. Union Comments

Union comments are attached in appendix 1.

Recommendations

Committee is asked to RESOLVE that the role of an additional planning officer be approved.

Background papers Nil