

Report title	Release of previously agreed funds to enable alteration to staffing structure in the Planning, Economy and Built Environment service
Report author	Ashley Smith – Corporate Head of Planning, Economy and Built Environment
Department	Development Management (Planning, Economy and Built Environment)
Exempt?	No
Exemption type	Not Applicable
Reasons for exemption	Not applicable

Purpose of report:

To resolve

Synopsis of report:

At the April 2023 Corporate Management Committee, the Council’s two Planning business units were merged to create a single business unit under a single Corporate Head of service.

As part of that process a sum of £20,000 was set aside to adjust some roles, responsibilities and salaries as a result of potential displaced work as a result of the reduction in size of the planning management team and additional functions taken on.

The paper seeks the release of part of this money to upgrade a post in the service to meet ongoing management need in the Planning team.

Recommendation(s):

(i) To resolve to release the sum of £9,844 from the £20,000 previously set aside at the CMC meeting of April 2023 to the Planning, Economy and Built Environment service for the purpose of upgrading a Career Grade Planner Post to an Assistant Development Manager Post.

1. Context and background of report

- 1.1 At the April 2023 Corporate Management Committee, it was resolved that the two Planning Business units of the Council were to be merged to create a single business unit under a single Corporate Head.
- 1.2 This generated a £70,000 saving from service budgets of which £50,000 was returned to the general fund and £20,000 was agreed to be set aside to adjust some roles, responsibilities and salaries as a result of potential displaced work and responsibilities as a result of the reduction in size of the planning, economy and built environment management team. The paper seeks to release part of this money to address this need.
- 1.3 The service wishes to upgrade a career grade planner post to an Assistant Development Manager post to ensure that it can continue to meet its statutory planning duties and alleviate potential pressure on a number of roles including the Development manager and Assistant Development Manager as a result of displaced work. The salary cost of the proposed upgrade is £9,844pa (inclusive of on-costs).

2. Report and, where applicable, options considered and recommended

- 2.1 The background to this item was set out in the CMC papers of April 2023. Following the decision of the committee at its April meeting, the Corporate Head of Development Management and Building Control took on a wider remit as the Corporate Head of Planning, Economy and Built Environment. Whilst this role still has significant oversight and involvement in Development Management activities, this is no longer the sole or primary focus of the role due to the wide portfolio now involved. It is identified that this has the potential to lead to displaced work and responsibilities in the current small Development Management service management team and if this is not addressed it has the potential to increase pressures on other staff members, in particular the Development Manager and Assistant Development Manager (DM). At the moment this situation has been manageable as the department is fortunate to have another Assistant Development Manager (ADM) on a fixed term basis until May 2024 who is paid for under a grant, however once this fixed term arrangement ends, the workload will become much less manageable and this may have a resultant impact on performance of the development management service and so needs to be addressed.

Option 1 – Upgrade a Career Grade Post to an Assistant Development Manager (The recommended option)

- 2.2 It is considered prudent to avoid this situation arising and so the preferred option is to upgrade a vacant career grade planner post to an ADM in order to avoid this management capacity problem arising. The cost of the grade increase on the post is £9,844pa (including uplift in on-costs). As set out previously this is not growth as the money had been set aside for this purpose out of savings previously provided by the service.
- 2.3 One of the Council's Principal Planning Officers left the Authority in August of this year (post F0060), and this vacant post is the one that would be upgraded to meet this need. An Assistant Development Manager's role is made up part of principal level case work and part of team and service management duties. This composite role of an ADM provides the best degree of capacity for management duties for the service without significantly impacting on casework capabilities or requiring additional growth in staffing numbers. As such this is the preferred option, compared to say recruiting to a purely management role or a Principal Planning Officer role. This option will ensure

that posts such as the Development Manager and existing ADM (DM) are not overloaded and maximizes the Council's chances of retaining team members in critical roles.

- 2.4 The Local Government Association Workforce survey 2022 found that Planners were by far the hardest occupation to retain and recruit to out of all Local Government occupations, with 63% of districts reporting difficulties recruiting planners and 48% difficulties retaining them.
- 2.5 As well as alleviating current pressures and pressures resulting from the merger, this ADM post will assist from both a recruitment and retention perspective and so has dual benefit, this post helps create a broader potential planning career path to planning staff at the Council. As a route in to planning management it creates the potential 'grow your own' opportunities for staff to develop the skills to move into more senior management posts in the organization in the future. The post is considered an attractive first step in to planning management both for our existing staff and for any staff who might be considering joining the Council.

Option 2 – Do nothing (Not the recommend option)

- 2.6 The other option available to the Committee is to not agree to the release of the funds, this may allow a further modest budgetary saving, however, would not realize the benefits set out above. The risks associated with this would be that there would not be sufficient capacity to meet the Council's needs, stress may arise in key posts and the Council may experience retention issues. If this arose this could have a significant impact upon the Council's planning performance and delivery ambitions. As such this is not the recommended option.

3. Policy framework implications

- 3.1 The recommendation allows the Council's planning services to meet their statutory and non- statutory objectives including the determination of planning applications and other similar functions.
- 3.2 The original merger was subject to a staff consultation in conjunction with HR. The post to be upgraded is currently vacant career grade post and as such no risk of redundancy or similar HR issues arise as a result of this proposed change. The post will be externally advertised and any individual either internal or external will be able to apply for the post.

4 Resource implications/Value for Money

- 4.1 As set out early in this report a sum of £20,000 has been set aside by CMC from the £70,000 saving provided by the service for this purpose. As a result, the proposal does not constitute growth and has been budgeted for out of savings previously provided.
- 4.2 The total cost of this proposal is £9,844pa and so is within the budget of £20,000pa set aside. Whether or not the remaining budget is required to meet the impacts on the wider services will continue to be assessed and considered as the new service continues to bed in, if it is needed a further paper will follow, if it is not required it would be released by the service to the general fund.
- 4.3 The benefits of this recommendation are set out in option 1 above as well as the risks that this mitigates.

5. Legal implications

- 5.1 The Committee has the authority to make variations to the establishment and release funds in accordance with its previous resolution.
- 5.2 Under the provisions of section 112 Local Government Act 1972 (LGA 1972) a local authority can appoint such officers as they think necessary for the proper discharge by the authority of such of their authority's functions as fall to be discharged by them. An officer appointed under the powers granted under section 112 LGA 1972 shall hold office on such reasonable terms and conditions, including conditions as to remuneration, as the authority appointing them think fit.

6. Equality implications

- 6.1 The vacancy would be advertised in accordance with the Council's usual procedures. Runnymede Borough Council is an equal opportunities employer that welcomes applications from all sections of the community.

7. Environmental/Sustainability/Biodiversity implications

- 7.1 The Council's Planning, Economy and Built Environment service is a critical service in assisting with meeting these objectives. The proposal will ensure that the service has capacity in determining planning applications and its other functions, which includes the assessment of applications on environmental, sustainability and biodiversity grounds and upholding the relevant local and national policies in these areas.

8. Other implications (where applicable)

- 8.1 None

9. Timetable for Implementation

- 9.1 The post will be advertised at the start of January 2024 with a view ideally to having a candidate in place around the start of the new financial year. The salary budget for the post will be released by finance to the service on advertisement of the post. The paper seeks to have the budget released by CMC for this purpose, the formal alteration to the establishment list and the exact timing of when this occurs will be undertaken by the Chief Executive and Corporate Head in accordance with relevant Delegated Authority.

10. Conclusions

- 10.1 It is recommended that the sum of £9,844p.a. from the budgeted £20,000p.a. is released to the Planning, Economy and Built Environment Service for the reasons set out in the report.

11. Background papers

- CMC papers of April 2023.

12. Appendices

- N/A