

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL
REPORT TO POLICY AND FINANCE COMMITTEE

DECISION

Agenda Item No **8b**

meeting date: 19 JUNE 2018
title: REFERENCE FROM PERSONNEL COMMITTEE – APPOINTMENT OF FULL
TIME PRE-APPLICATION OFFICER
submitted by: DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES
principal author: LAWSON ODDIE

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To consider a reference from Personnel Committee with regard to a request for a supplementary estimate of £13,020 (full year amount) for the appointment of a full time pre-application officer. The post is currently part time, and included on that basis within the budget.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Service committees manage their services within the budgets agreed at the beginning of the financial year. The budget was approved by Special Policy and Finance Committee on 6 February 2018 and by Full Council on 6 March 2018.
- 2.2 Any revenue or capital expenditure over and above what has already been approved must be agreed by this Committee.

3 INCREASED REVENUE COSTS

- 3.1 The Pre-Application Officer post has been vacant since 18 February 2018 when the last incumbent was appointed to another post within the council.
- 3.2 As reported to Personnel Committee, the post has been advertised twice and on both occasions the applicants did not meet the required criteria to qualify for interview.
- 3.3 It is felt that advertising the post as a full time post will increase the likelihood of attracting the necessary candidates.
- 3.4 The increased cost will be met from increasing pre-application planning fees to gain extra income. Planning and Development Committee will therefore need to agree a revised fee structure.
- 3.5 The increased cost of £13,020 relates to all costs over and above that already budgeted for – and for a full financial year. Current year additional costs would therefore be less, and would be dependent on when the post is filled.

4 PERSONNEL COMMITTEE 13 JUNE 2018

- 4.1 Personnel Committee considered a report on the appointment of a full time pre-application officer and a copy of the committee report is attached at Annex 1.

4.2 At its meeting Personnel Committee resolved:

That Committee approve a change to the Establishment in respect of the hours for the part time Pre-Planning Advice Officer post from 22.5 hours to 37 hours

5 RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE

5.1 Consider the request for the supplementary estimate of £13,020 for a full year with the full amount to be financed from increases in pre-application planning fees. The financial impact for the current year to be brought in to the budget calculated based on the start date of the new post-holder.

HEAD OF FINANCIAL SERVICES

DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES

PF43-18/LO/AC

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

**RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL
REPORT TO PERSONNEL COMMITTEE**

DECISION

Agenda Item No.

meeting date: WEDNESDAY, 13 JUNE 2018
title: ESTABLISHMENT CHANGE IN THE PLANNING SECTION
submitted by: JOHN HEAP – DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES
principal author: ROBERT MAJOR – PRINCIPAL PLANNING OFFICER

1 PURPOSE

1.1 To ask Members to approve changes to the Establishment in respect of the Part Time Pre-Planning Advice Officer post in the Planning (Development Management) section.

1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities:

- Community Objectives – None.
- Corporate Priorities – The provision of adequate and effective staffing resources within Planning enables us to ensure that we are a well-managed Council providing efficient services based on identified customer needs.
- Other considerations – None.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) places great emphasis on “Pre-application engagement” stating (para 41) “*Local planning authorities have a key role to play in encouraging other parties to take maximum advantage of the pre-application stage...*” and “*...they (LPAs) should encourage take-up of any pre-application service they offer*”. As such national guidance within the NPPF is clear that the LPA should be providing a pre-planning application service.

2.2 The post of Part Time Pre-Planning Advice Officer was added to the Establishment following a Council re-structuring exercise in 2011 and has enabled the speedy determination of pre-application responses as detailed in a report that was submitted to Planning Committee in January 2018. The report demonstrated that the average target dates for pre-application responses were being met in all but one (Intermediate) of the application type categories resulting in a reduction in the number of complaints about the delay in replying to Pre-Planning applications.

3 ISSUES

3.1 The Pre-Application Advice Officer post has been vacant since 18 February 2018 when the last incumbent was appointed to another post within the Council.

3.2 The Council has twice advertised a vacancy to fill the post and on both occasions the applicants did not meet the required criteria to qualify for interview. The Council are seeking an experienced planner for the pre-application post as the position requires the occupant to deal with all levels of pre-application enquires and therefore the most suitable and likely candidates will be planning assistants or planning officers looking to make a “step-up” in their career.

3.3 On the two previous occasions that the Council have advertised this position the only applicants have had no planning experience and were seeking to start their planning career in this role. However for the reasons mentioned above this is not considered to be the position for an inexperienced officer.

3.4 It is considered unlikely that the current part time post as advertised will attract an experienced full time planner and is only likely to interest a part time assistant or planning officer from elsewhere, of which there are considered to be very few, thus significantly limiting the number of potential candidates.

3.5 In view of the above it is considered that advertising the position as a full time position is more likely to attract the necessary candidates.

4 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The Pre-Application Advice Officer post is currently self-funded with the fee income received exceeding the cost of a part time officer. The extra cost of employing a full time Pre-Application Advice Officer would be £13,020 per year and over the past four years the fee income generated from pre-applications would also cover this additional expense. However, the Council budgets for the additional money received from pre-application fees and therefore the additional £13,020 required for the full time post needs to be found, and the £13,020 represents approximately 30% of the expected budgeted income from pre-application fees (approximate average over past 4 years).

4.2 It is considered that there are potentially three ways which this additional £13,020 could be achieved:

- The full time post would hopefully provide a better and more efficient pre-application service encouraging more applicants to engage in pre-application discussion thus increasing fee income.
- Increasing pre-application planning fees to gain extra income – this would be justified through an improved service on offer.
- Altering the thresholds of the pre-application fee type categories to ensure more higher end fees are received.

5 RISK ASSESSMENT

5.1 The approval of this report may have the following implications:

- Resources – The creation of a full time Pre-Planning Advice Officer post at scale 6 will increase the budget by approximately £13,020 per annum including National Insurance and Superannuation and therefore this additional cost must be funded.
- At present all pre-application enquires are being distributed amongst existing officers and if continued this has the potential to have a damaging impact upon the fundamental role of the Planning Department to deal with planning applications within set deadlines, as well as impacting on the pre-application service itself.
- Technical, Environmental and Legal – No technical, environmental or legal implications have been identified.
- Political – No political implications have been identified.
- Reputation – The Council is currently operating without a Pre-Application Planning Advice Officer and to continue to do so risks the reputation of the Planning Department and the Council if the speed and quality of pre-application responses suffers.

- Equality & Diversity – None identified.

6 RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE

- 6.1 Approve a change to the Establishment in respect of the hours for the Part Time Pre-Planning Advice Officer post from 22.5 hours to 37 hours.
- 6.2 Approve the addition of a new post of Full Time Pre-Planning Advice Officer – scale 6 to the Establishment.

ROBERT MAJOR
PRINCIPAL PLANNING OFFICER

JOHN HEAP
DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

For further information please ask for Robert Major, extension 4516.