

HAMBLETON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Report To: Cabinet
10 October 2017

Subject: **PLANNING IMPROVEMENTS**

All Wards
Portfolio Holder for Planning: Councillor D Webster

1.0 PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND:

- 1.1 Planning has been under increased pressure from an upturn in development applications and issues relating to staff absence and resignations; these have contributed to a backlog of cases in enforcement, validation and development control, which impacts on the ability to deliver emerging workloads.
- 1.2 Whilst work has commenced on resolving system issues it is unlikely these will deliver an impact until the early part of 2018; and recent resignations of both temporary and permanent staff will have a significant impact on the workloads of the remaining team and undoubtedly hamper efforts to improve quality of service.
- 1.3 The Development Manager roles are still very much based in the detail of operational delivery with high personal caseloads. This has impacted upon their time to mentor/coach the Planning Officers reporting to them and to make improvements to the Technical Support and Enforcement units.
- 1.4 A Government Whitepaper ‘Fixing our broken housing market’ was published in February 2017 and stated an intention to allow Councils to raise planning fees by 20% ‘if they commit to invest the additional fee income in their planning department’. The annual additional income from such an increase is estimated at £159,449 based on 2016/17 figures; a proportional element of which would be used to fund increased resources with the remainder being utilised to support ongoing system upgrades. It must be noted, however, that planning fee income is variable.
- 1.5 Increasing resources within the establishment will lower officer workloads to the County average, improve validation rates and strengthen the duty officer provision. Creating more resilience and capacity will allow the section to respond to the expectation of a higher quality service and greater customer and stakeholder engagement; addressing issues with pre-application advice, and customer access.
- 1.6 Additional resources will also allow the section to change the method of working, enabling officers to become engaged with applications earlier in the process. This approach has been viewed as successful in other planning authority areas as it builds local confidence in the authority and allows concerns in applications to be addressed at an earlier stage, prior to becoming major issues in the local community.
- 1.7 The posts to support these improvements include an additional Planning Officer, two Planning Information Assistants and a Technical Support Officer who will support appeal administration.
- 1.8 Restructuring the section to allow for an additional Development Manager with a clearer focus on more direct and robust enforcement and dedicated management of the support and enforcement teams would improve delivery in these areas.

- 1.9 It has become increasingly difficult to recruit professional planning officers into permanent roles; this is a sector issue which is compounded by the geography of Hambleton. One solution would be to 'home-grow' our own officers through the appointment of Graduate Planners within the section. To develop graduates in professional roles takes dedicated support and investment from the organisation and its officers.
- 1.10 The proposed additional resources equate to seven full-time posts and are shown in Annex A.

2.0 LINK TO COUNCIL PRIORITIES:

- 2.1 Improved Planning services will support the delivery of the Council's priority: Providing a Special Place to Live through maintaining a minimum five year supply of deliverable housing sites; delivering affordable homes and publishing a new Local Plan.
- 2.2 Improvements in the delivery of planning will also support the Council's priority: Driving Economic Vitality through increasing the number of planning applications determined within agreed timescales and successfully defending appeals where major developments are refused planning permission.

3.0 RISK ASSESSMENT:

- 3.1 The key risk is in not approving the recommendation as shown below:-

Risk	Implication	Prob*	Imp*	Total	Preventative action
Insufficient levels of staff to deliver quality services in validation, development control and enforcement.	Negative impact on the reputation of the Council; increased likelihood of legal challenge.	4	3	12	Increase resources and re-align structure to provide clear management focus.

Prob = Probability, Imp = Impact, Score range is Low = 1, High = 5

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

- 4.1 Overall the revenue effects of additional resources for Planning will be as follows:-

	<u>2017/18</u>	<u>2018/19</u>	<u>2019/20</u>	<u>2020/21</u>	<u>2021/22</u>	<u>2022/23</u>
COST OF DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT						
Increased establishment cost	58,460	204,870	205,760	207,820	209,900	212,000
Increase 2 x Graduates cost	0	52,640	53,170	53,700	54,240	54,780
TOTAL COST	58,460	257,510	258,930	261,520	264,140	266,780
FUNDING BUDGET FOR PLANNING						
Increase 20% Planning Fee Income	43,545	99,740	100,740	101,750	102,770	103,800
DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT BUDGET REQUIRED EACH YEAR	14,915	157,770	158,190	159,770	161,370	162,980

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS:

5.1 There are no legal implications.

6.0 EQUALITY/DIVERSITY ISSUES

6.1 Equality and Diversity Issues have been considered however there are no issues associated with this report.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS:

7.1 That Cabinet approves the increases to the establishment for Planning.

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DIRECTOR OF ECONOMY AND PLANNING

Background papers: None

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