



1. **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To seek agreement for the provision of a supplementary budget to fund support to process planning applications.

2. **RECOMMENDATION**

1. That Executive approves the provision of a supplementary budget of £40,000 to fund consultancy support for the processing of planning applications.

3. **BACKGROUND TO THE REPORT**

Issues have been raised by Planning Officers in respect of workload and discussions have been held between the Deputy Chief Executive (Community Direction), the Development Control Manager, Principal Planning Officers and Planning Officers to understand the issues and identify an interim solution to assist with the high number of planning applications and appeals within the team at the moment.

Earlier this year the team had a vacant post and an officer on maternity leave. Whilst the maternity cover post was being covered the covering officer was dealing with only householder applications and not the whole range of applications the post holder would normally deal with. This has resulted in more complex applications being spread amongst the team who are dealing with a higher number of complex applications than they would normally be.

The Development Control Manager and Principal Planning Officers, who directly manage the team, have to deal with some of the major applications, such as MIRA and the Bus Station at the same time as providing interim cover for the vacant Head of Planning post. This is having a significant impact on their ability to offer support, advice and management to the team as well as delaying allocations of applications and signing of decision notices. This will have implications for performance.

The officer on maternity leave returned in May on reduced hours due to the need to take leave. However the maternity cover ended upon her return. The post holder has now returned to full working hours.

A new officer was appointed to the vacant post on 25th March. The new officer has a mixed caseload but will obviously need time to settle in.

Two consultants were appointed in March as follows:-

- The first to process householder applications only at a cost of £60 per application
- The second to process major and complex applications at a daily rate of £250 working 3 days per week.

The consultant processing householder applications was only with the authority until June, since which time the householder applications have been redistributed to the employed planning officers.

The first month, March 2013, was financed utilising salary savings. Since then the consultants have been financed from the earmarked LDF reserve of £20,000 which was approved by SLB in June 2012. The total supplementary budget requested is £40,000 to fund the costs of the consultants.

Planning application numbers are still high with officers each having a caseload of over 30 applications of various complexities and there are currently 19 lodged planning appeals. Furthermore, the recently introduced paid pre-application service increases officer workload further.

It is anticipated that application numbers will continue for the foreseeable future and due to the number of contentious housing schemes it is further anticipated that appeal numbers will continue to rise.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS (DMe)

A supplementary budget of £40,000 is required to fund the cost of consultants.

The balance of this reserve as at 31/03/2013 was £479,631. During 2013/2014 expenditure of £90,000 has been funded from the reserve to finance Barwell SUE and Site Allocations studies and a further £20,000 was approved by SLB in June 2013 to fund the costs of the consultants noted above. Taking into account approved carry forwards of £131,760, the balance on the reserve at present is £237,871. This is deemed sufficient for future costs identified in the MTFS.

If the £40,000 supplementary is approved the balance on the LDF reserve would be £217,871 (on the basis that £20,000 has already been funded). The LDF reserve is an earmarked reserve allocated to the implementation of the Local Plan and therefore use of this reserve for this purpose is deemed appropriate.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS (EC)

Any legal implications there may be are contained within the body of the report.

6. CORPORATE PLAN IMPLICATIONS

This will contribute to all the aims of the Corporate Plan

7. CONSULTATION

None

8. RISK IMPLICATIONS

Management of significant (Net Red) Risks		
Risk Description	Mitigating actions	Owner
The Development Control Section is under significant pressure through the submission of an exceptional number of planning applications and appeals. The lack of sufficient officers, and the ability to effectively manage the team, will limit the ability to deal with these effectively and ensure the quality of decision making in conjunction with maintaining performance targets.	Ensure adequate resources are available	TM

9. **KNOWING YOUR COMMUNITY – EQUALITY AND RURAL IMPLICATIONS**

Potential Impact on local area if issues are not properly considered and addressed.

10. **CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS**

By submitting this report, the report author has taken the following into account:

- Community Safety implications
- Environmental implications
- ICT implications
- Asset Management implications
- Human Resources implications
- Planning Implications
- Voluntary Sector

Background papers: None

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