


Agenda Item No:	7	
Committee:	Staff Committee	
Date:	18 May 2017	
Report Title:	Increase in Planning Service Resources	

1 Purpose / Summary

To request an increase in the resources available to support the Planning Service following the agreement to take up the government's offer of increasing planning fees by 20%.

2 Key Issues

- *Government has introduced new responsibilities* in relation to brownfield land registers, permission in principal and custom and self-build housing which will lead to increased work for the Planning Team;
- There has been an increase in the number of planning applications being submitted to the Council;
- Through the Streets Ahead project team work, Members have confirmed that planning enforcement is a key priority for the Council. There has also been an increase in the number of planning enforcement service requests;
- A reduced housing supply and landowners needing help to bring Broad Concept Plans (BCP) forward for the large site allocations in the Local Plan means additional staffing is required to support the BCP process;
- An increase in part time working by senior staff has resulted in an inability to offer full time hours to prospective candidates;
- The Council has recently accepted a 20% increase in planning fees from Government which must be reinvested in the Planning Service. This increase was due to be agreed by Parliament by July 2017 however this has now been delayed due to the General Election. Therefore it is expected that this legislation will be passed in early Autumn;
- Staff Committee is asked to agree the additional staffing and changes in salary bands subject to the additional fees being received from government.
- The Council has other reserves to support this proposal in addition to the additional planning fees income therefore, this proposal is cost neutral to the Council and in future years there will be an opportunity to invest the monies in other planning related activities.
- It is important to bring to the attention of the Committee that there is a risk if the planning fees reduce in future that the Council may be left with a revenue burden, however we safeguard against that through proactive budget monitoring.
- This proposal represents an opportunity to provide a more stable officer structure filled with permanent staff that can support the economic growth of the District.

3 Recommendations

To agree the following revisions to the establishment including:

Part 1 - To be implemented immediately:

a) to add 1 day per week to an existing vacant 4 day per week Senior Development Officer post to create a full time post - Band 7-9 (£10587 pa pro rata incl on costs);

b) to agree the uplift of the existing 1 FTE planning enforcement post from Band 6 to Band 7-8 and reset this role as a Senior Enforcement Officer position with line management responsibilities for the Assistant Enforcement Officer below (£11530 pa pro rata incl on costs);

c) to agree the existing 1 FTE planning enforcement post be reset to Assistant Enforcement Officer Band 5-6 (within existing budget);

d) to note the creation of a 1 year temporary (with option to extend by a further year) 1 FTE Senior Development Officer post to support the Broad Concept Plans process - Band 7-9 (up to £52937 incl on costs per annum).

Part 2 - To be implemented ONLY when the Government confirms the planning fee increase:

d) to create a 1 FTE Senior Development Officer post - Band 7-9 (up to £52937 incl on costs per annum).

e) to add an additional 0.35 FTE Technical Support Officer post - Band 3-5 (up to £10937 incl on costs per annum)

Wards Affected	All
Forward Plan Reference	
Portfolio Holder(s)	Councillor Will Sutton, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Planning
Report Originator(s)	Carol Pilson, Corporate Director Nick Harding, Head of Planning
Contact Officer(s)	Carol Pilson, Corporate Director Nick Harding, Head of Planning
Background Paper(s)	Statistics from Uniform

4 Introduction

On the 23rd July 2015, Fenland District Council agreed to join a Shared Planning Service arrangement with Peterborough City Council which went live on 1st January 2016. The shared service arrangement comprises of the following posts and saved £137,000:

- Sharing a single Head of Planning between both Councils
- Sharing a Technical Support Manager between both Councils
- Freezing an enforcement post
- The ability to buy and sell services between the Councils

Since the last restructure, the Planning service has been subject of a number of changes as set out in the key issues section of the report which means that it is timely to revisit the structure required to deliver the growth aspirations of the Council and the District.

5 Background

5.1 New Responsibilities

The Government has introduced a number of new initiatives to encourage the delivery of new homes and increase choice in the housing market. One of the measures is the introduction of the establishment and upkeep of a register of brownfield land and where relevant the establishment of permission in principal for residential development. Another measure is the establishment and upkeep of a register of people and organisations wishing to develop custom and self-build housing and make provision to meet demand in new developments. The Government has recognised that these two provisions will result in additional work for Planning teams and have therefore made available short term finance (3 years) to Councils. Government estimates that the additional duties will require an additional 1 FTE planning officer.

5.2 Increase in Planning Applications and Enforcement Service Requests

There has been an increase in the number of planning applications received by the planning service. Consequently the workload on the existing team has increased which has in turn impacted on the resilience of the team in terms of holiday and sickness cover and gaps during staff changes.

Table 1 - No of valid applications received and number of enforcement service requests

Team	PI	2016/17	2015/16
Development Management	Number of Valid applications received	1400	1338
Planning Compliance	Number of Planning compliance enquiries received	363	246

5.3 The table above shows that the Council received more valid applications than in the same period the year before and also significantly more planning compliance service requests. This demonstrates the additional workload that is being serviced by the team since the restructure of the service prior to the shared service being entered into with Peterborough City Council. The increase in valid planning applications represents 79% of the annual caseload of a Senior Development Officer. Whilst the additional work does not represent 100% of 1 FTE, it should be noted that the Government in allowing Councils to increase planning fees is requiring them to provide a more responsive service. The reduced case load of Senior Officers will allow this to be provided for. As a service we also want to be more proactive in terms of supporting economic development and inward investment working with other service teams. Some capacity will enable us to better respond to this agenda.

5.4 The rise in the number of applications has reduced the resilience and capacity of both development management and the technical support teams and made them less able to deal with service interruptions and events. This has been evidenced by fluctuations in performance

by the team validating planning applications when there have been interruptions caused by technical IT upgrades, vacancy periods and sudden increases in application volumes. For this reason it is proposed to increase the capacity of the Technical Support team from 4.65 FTE to 5 FTE.

5.5 Enforcement is a key priority for Members and for the Council and is a key focus for us through the Streets Ahead project. As a consequence of past fluctuating resources in enforcement and recruitment difficulties, there are in excess of 300 pending cases which risks unacceptable unauthorised development gaining permission through the passage of time. In the previous restructure, 1 FTE enforcement officer was frozen to leave 1 FTE operational. The remaining 1 FTE has been filled by agency staff as there have been two unsuccessful recruitment attempts. Due to the increasing workload and backlog, it is proposed to unfreeze 1 FTE enforcement officer. To make the role more attractive and to provide management oversight to the other role, it is proposed to create a senior enforcement officer post (Grade 7-8) with an assistant post below that (Grade 5-6).

5.6 Assistance with bringing Broad Concept Plans forward

The Council's Local Plan has allocated a number of large development sites around the Market Towns of the District. To bring these forward for development, the landowners / developers need to prepare Broad Concept Plans and have these approved by the Council before planning applications will be considered. This process is designed to ensure as far as possible that the developments are brought forward in a co-ordinated way. Officers have established that the landowners require a higher level of support than was anticipated which cannot be currently supported. The delivery of the development is important for the Council not least for council tax and business rates income reasons but also to provide homes and jobs for the community.

5.7 The Council is only just achieving the required 5 year supply of land for housing (this is not for want of granting planning permission but rather because housebuilders are not implementing the permissions at a fast enough rate). By bringing forward the BCP sites, this improves the prospects of an improved land supply and delivery position and will reduce the risk of unplanned housing sites gaining planning permission and impacting upon the Council's spatial planning policy. In addition getting more BCPs in place will result in more planning permissions coming forward and hence improve the 5 year land supply. Therefore, it is proposed to create a temporary BCP position within the structure to accommodate this work.

5.8 Additional Planning Fee Income & Government support for new burdens

The additional planning fee income (based on income in 2016/17) expected to be received in future years is £140k (as the fee increase will not take effect until the Autumn 2017 some £60k is estimated to be received in 2017/18). Given that future levels of planning income are influenced by many factors including the economy in general, the income beyond 2-3 years is going to have a degree of uncertainty. Consideration was given to advertising for a temporary Senior Development Officer, however, due to previous difficulties in recruiting to senior positions, a permanent change to the establishment is sought. The Government has also advised Councils that to cover a 3 year period a total grant of £90K is to be paid to cover the additional burdens placed on authorities as a consequence of work required under the self and custom build requirements. Also, the Council has a dedicated Local Plan Reserve which can make up any shortfall for 2017/18.

5.9 Increases in Part Time Working

There are a number of staff that have worked part time for a number of years or will be starting to work part time having previously occupied full time positions. We therefore have two part time posts vacant each offering 2 days per week (i.e. 4 days in total). A 4 day per week Senior Development Officer post is likely to have a limited market and hence the proposal is to add an additional day to the two existing 2 day per week vacant posts to make 1 FTE position.

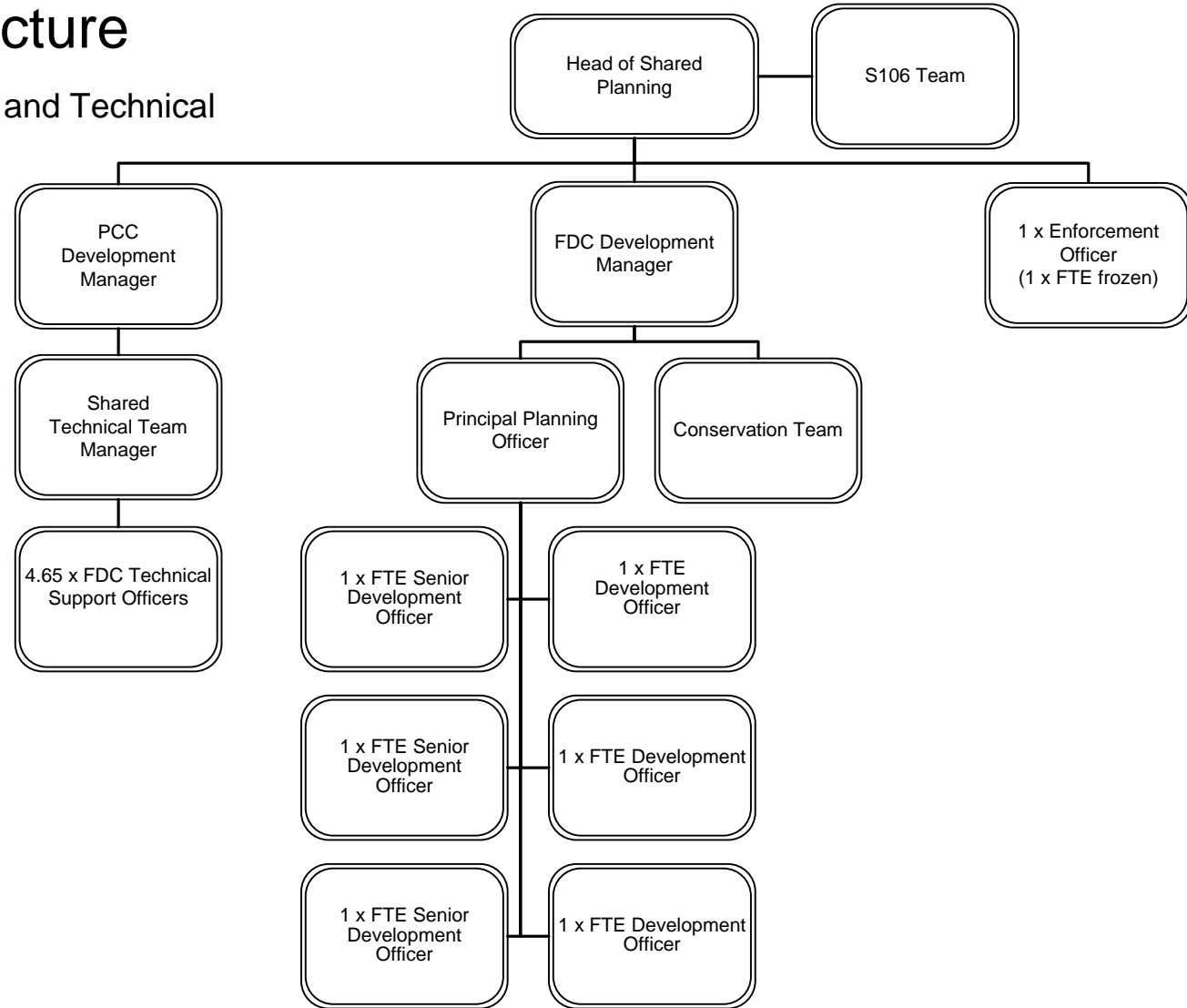
6. Overview and Scrutiny Recommendations

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel scrutinised the Shared Planning arrangement in place with Peterborough City Council on 6th March 2017. Some of the recommendations from the panel were in relation to recruitment of staff as set out below which will be implemented as part of the recruitment process if agreed.

- Utilising opportunities further in the district to promote the area for more engaging recruitment campaigns;
- To further explore opportunities to grow our own staff, around specific schemes, in relation to training and development and career opportunities and ensuring they are transparent so that people know what their progress might be once they are employed with us;
- To understand the reasons for staff leaving us and to build that into schemes so that we are learning potential lessons;

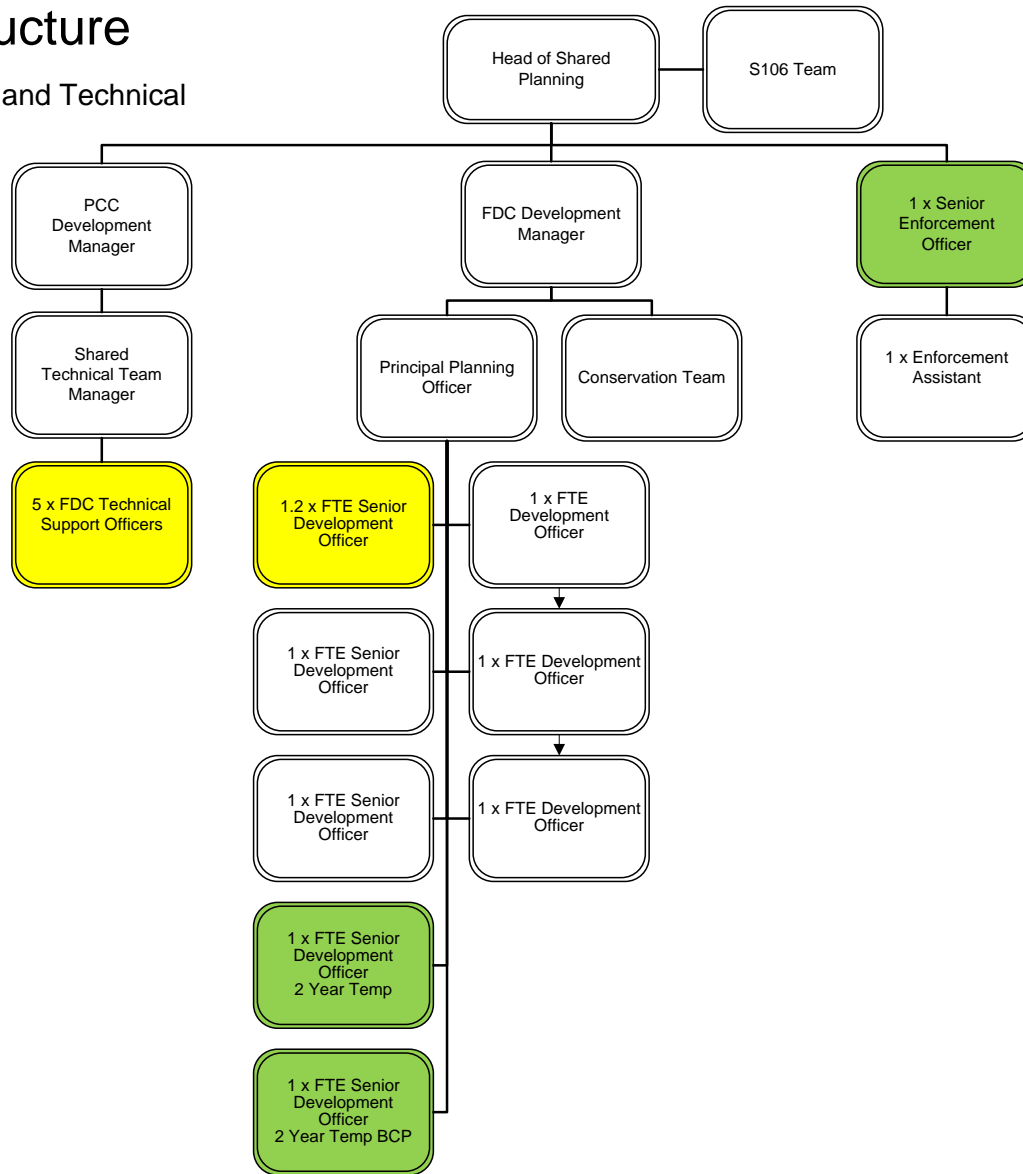
Existing Structure

Development Management and Technical



Proposed Structure

Development Management and Technical



Key:

