

Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C-045-2009/10
Date of meeting: 16 November 2009



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Portfolio: Finance and Economic Development
Subject: Funding Issues - Conservation Officer and Town Centres Officer
Responsible Officer: John Preston (01992 564111).
Democratic Services Officer: Gary Woodhall (01992 564470).

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- (1) That Cabinet notes that Continuing Services Budget (CSB) funds have been found within existing budgets to meet the cost of the regrading of the Conservation Officer post;
- (2) That Cabinet agree that the recently received Local Authority Business Growth Incentive (LABGI) funds are allocated to the District Development Fund (DDF) Budget; and
- (3) That Cabinet agree that all those LABGI funds for 2009/2010 are allocated to fund the second and third year costs of the Town Centres Officer in 2010/11 and 2011/12.

Executive Summary:

The purpose of this report is to draw attention to two staffing/funding issues within the Planning Directorate, and to now seek to resolve them. CSB Funding has been found from existing resources for the one post, but further DDF funding is required for the other.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

This report follows what Cabinet have previously agreed; firstly that the Conservation post be regraded, but that some future funding would have to be secured, and, secondly, that in following what had been set out in a detailed report, concerning the Town Centres Officer post, that there is an issue of funding to be resolved.

Other Options for Action:

In these instances there are not considered to be any other meaningful options.

Report:

Conservation Officer PPC 14

1. The Cabinet agreed to the creation of this post at its meeting on 9 June 2008 when the previous 1 FTE Assistant post was re-graded from a range 6 to a range 8; funding was agreed for 2008/09, but with a requirement to report further on funding this from CSB for

future years. The post was successfully filled on a full time basis from 20 October 2008. There is no meaningful option other than to find funds.

2. As part of the last organisational restructuring some responsibilities transferred to Planning and Economic Development from Environment and Street Scene. This also involved a transfer of a member of staff and related budgets. Through integrating the work within the Planning and Economic Development Directorate, efficiencies have arisen that are sufficient to cover the post of PPC 14. Therefore the previous instruction from Members has been complied with and no CSB growth is required to fund the post.

Town Centres Officer PPC 07F

3. It had been understood that this DDF funded post was agreed during the consideration of reports which came to the Cabinet on 17 December 2007 and Council in February 2008. Paragraph 28 of the report to Cabinet explained that the post was envisaged for three years at a cost of £100,000, but the minute gave a one year cost of £35,000 (Minute 131(7b) refers). This was subsequently taken to mean that a three year post had been agreed, and that was the basis of the appointment being made with a three year contract. However, it has since been suggested that the way this was minuted, and then shown in the Council's accounts, was not to show the funding for years two and three of the contract. Further DDF funding therefore needs to be found for years two and three.

4. The Council is now in receipt of further Local Authority Business Growth Incentive (LABGI) funding in the sum of £72,000. That funding is not ring fenced, and has previously been allocated to the DDF budget, and bids have been made to that fund for projects that are seen to have an economic focus. The previous report to Cabinet reflected that approach. The Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) and others have encouraged Councils to use their LABGI funds for economic development purposes, rather than for other purposes, and the need for this role has become more important in the recession.

Rural Tourism Officer PPC 19

5. In the same cycle of meetings referred to concerning the Town Centres Officer, a suggestion had been made for such a DDF funded post. Officers had envisaged a similar three year basis and a three year contract. The post was not pursued as quickly (in part because of wanting to make sure that a similar role that ECC were understood to be creating did not amount to duplication) However, the minutes had a similar issue because they have been taken to suggest that only one years funding was agreed. (Minute 131(7c) refers). In considering workloads within Forward Planning consideration was being given with the Portfolio Holder to switching this post to be a Forward Planning Officer post, but the apparent funding being only for one year is a problem. It is suggested that the funds allocated for the one year are reallocated, probably in combination with other funding; this will be explained in a report that will be considered by the Local Development Framework Cabinet Committee, before coming to Cabinet shortly.

Resource Implications:

As explained in the individual sections of this report.

Legal and Governance Implications:

The Council has contractual obligations in respect of posts PPC 14 and PPC07F.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

Both these posts will work with colleagues who are dealing with those strategies of the Council, in particular to retain the Town Centres and Conservation Areas as safe, clean and green spaces.

Consultation Undertaken:

None.

Background Papers:

The previous reports to Cabinet and Council as indicated in the report.

Impact Assessments:Risk Management

The Council has statutory duties to preserve or enhance the appearance and character of Conservation Areas. A priority objective of the Council for 2009/2010 is to mitigate the impact of current economic conditions. The contractual obligations mentioned above are also a risk.

Equalities Assessment

It is not considered that there are any specific equalities issues arising from having these posts.