

Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C-047-2009/10
Date of meeting: 16 November 2009



Portfolio: Environment
Subject: Staffing in the Directorate of Planning
Responsible Officer: John Preston (01992 564111).
Democratic Services Officer: Gary Woodhall (01992 564470).

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- (1) That posts PEF06 and PST02 be deleted from the Establishment;
- (2) That the hours for post PPC16F be increased from 0.8 FTE to 1.0 FTE; and
- (3) That a new Senior Enforcement Officer post be added to the Establishment.

Executive Summary:

These proposals seek, within existing CSB budgets, to make some changes to staffing within Planning, in particular to enhance the Enforcement team and to make provision to preserve protected trees.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

Some changes are suggested, reflecting on points made by Councillors at previous meetings. The proposals are within existing budgets, and make a small saving.

Other Options for Action:

Not to make any changes to the Establishment.

Report:

1. The Panel have considered whether to replace the Compliance Officer post within the Planning Enforcement team, and various options for doing that, in particular an option for a new Senior Officer post within the Enforcement Team. The Panel had considered various options to replace that position, but also the desirability of adding to the professional planning expertise within the team to enhance the skills within the team. A new Senior Officer could have the same job description and person specification as the existing senior position in the team.
2. The Panel wanted to understand how such a post could be funded from within existing budgets, rather than as a CSB growth item.
3. The table below shows how this could be achieved:

DIRECTORATE OF PLANNING PROPOSALS FOR SCRUTINY

<u>POST TITLE</u>	<u>NUMBER</u>	<u>FTE</u>	<u>GRADE</u>	<u>2009/10 SALARY MIDPOINT</u>	<u>MIDPOINT x FTE</u>	<u>PROPOSAL</u>	<u>CSB SAVING</u>	<u>CSB ADDITION</u>
Compliance Officer	PEF06	0.5	5	24,930	12,465	Delete	12,465	
Senior Enforcement Officer		1	8	38,930	38,930	New post		38,930
Technical Officer (Landscape)	PPC16F	0.8	5	24,930	19,944	Funding for extra hours needed to create 1 FTE		4,990
Admin Supervisor	PST02	1	7	34,200	34,200	Delete	34,200	
							NET SAVINGS POSITION	2,745

4. This proposal will thus achieve what the Panel were seeking within the Enforcement team, and it also allows for an increase in the hours of one post within the Trees and Landscape team.

Technical Officer (Landscape) PPC16F

5. This post is on the present establishment as 0.8 FTE; predecessor posts have variously been at 1FTE or 0.8. The workload of the team presently suggests that 1 FTE is required, partly because of work associated with the reprovision of Tree Preservation Orders in advance of Essex County Council rescinding such orders. The decision of the County Council, and consideration by this Council was at Cabinet on 8 October 2007; those reports are attached as background. At Appendix A. Councillors had made it clear that they did not expect to see trees left unprotected when Essex complete the rescinding of orders made by them. The Essex orders are all intended to be rescinded by the end of March 2010. This post has been involved in justifying the case for new replacement orders by EFDC. Some measure of the scale of that work can be seen by comparing the numbers of Tree Preservation Orders issued by EFDC in recent years, as shown in the following table;

Tree Preservation Order Data

Year	Total Orders Made	EFDC Orders	Essex Re-Survey Orders	Notes
2006	22	22		
2007	12	12		
2008	55	30	25	
2009	51	20	31	Up to 21/09/2009

Total number of Tree Preservation Orders = 994

(1974 – 21/09/2009)

6. When that work is complete, the future work associated with those new orders will fall upon EFDC, and not ECC. Technical work associated with delivering what is expected as a result of the existing Regional Plan is additional work for the team, and underlies the continuing requirement, rather than a short term one. The post is graded at grade 5 and the cost of an increase of 0.2 FTE is £4990.

Administration Supervisor PST 02

7. The post holder left earlier this year, and the post has been held vacant since, in part because if savings of some magnitude are required, then removing the post from the establishment completely, or replacing it with a lower graded post, may have been the least harmful way to achieve such savings. If the post is deleted and the savings are used for the purposes set out in this report, which has some consequences for the Customer support team. It is intended that the new Business Manager will review several issues within that team.

8. Recent information provided to Councillors by the Director of Finance and ICT emphasises that the Council is likely to have to make savings over the next few years and in particular from CSB budgets. Those savings are of some scale, and any decision now to use or reallocate CSB funds needs to be seen in that context.

9. The Panel considered Building Control information at its last meeting and in scrutinising shared service arrangements will present an opportunity to consider savings. As vacancies arise, some hard choices will be necessary whilst continuing to maintain and improve performance.

10. Providing the Panel agree with these proposals they can be reported to Cabinet for their formal approval.

11. Staff and unions have been consulted about these proposals, and any comments received will be reported to the Panel. At the time of drafting this report the following comments had been received. (Post titles rather than individuals names have been used in this report).

<u>Comment</u>	<u>Director's Response</u>
GMB Representative: "I forwarded your report to the regional office of the GMB who have no issues with it."	Noted.
Staff Comment 1: "I am disappointed that the Supervisor post is to be deleted. When the Business Manager reviews the impact of this on the admin team, I presume he will either undertake some of the Supervisor's tasks or change my job description to reflect the tasks I have covered since the Supervisor left in February, if this happens will my job have to be re evaluated? We spoke at the time of the Supervisors departure of the need to have two people in the Admin team for development control, as the Supervisor post is now being deleted and a contract post is covering some of the roles I use to do when the Supervisor was here are you going to create a post that perhaps that person can fill on a more permanent basis rather that being on a contract?"	In response to this the Director commented; "I note your disappointment. With the arrival of the new Business Manager (BM) the complete customer support teams have The Assistant Director (Building), The Principal Building Control Officer and the new BM to guide and manage them. However, I recognise there may be a case to evaluate how the Admin Supervisors work is being dealt with, and that your role may well end up being re-evaluated. That may also be relevant to others. I have sought to keep the three contract posts whilst the customer support team is more fully reviewed, and recognising the unfilled vacancies of the Scanning Assistant and the afternoon Receptionist posts. If you want to speak, please come and see me."
Staff Comment 2:	In response to this the Director commented;

<p>“I understand the need for savings at this difficult time. I would like it to be noted that in deleting an admin post services will suffer. We have all taken on different tasks to maintain the admin services of the Directorate in the belief that this was a temporary situation. If it has not been noticed that there was any difference in the services offered it is certainly to our credit that so many tasks have been temporarily absorbed without making a fuss. There is however no cover available for leave or sickness and backlogs will accrue. It now seems that we are being penalised for having helped to maintain the service by the deletion of a post.”</p>	<p>“The efforts of the staff to seek to maintain a high level of service is not unrecognised in these difficult times, and it is known that the taking of leave, and sickness, quickly impacts upon the services offered. Workload (on some measures) and income are down, and there are other pressures which these proposals seek to respond to. As indicated at paragraph 7, the new Business Manager will be asked to urgently review the complete admin team, including the points that you raise. If you want to speak, please come and see me.”</p>
<p>Unison Branch Secretary comments:</p> <p>“The main area of concern is the deletion of post PST02, Admin Supervisor. This post is a Grade 7; with the next tier below being grade 5, of which there are 4 posts.</p> <p>“Unfortunately, your report gives no indication of how the Admin Supervisor’s duties and responsibilities will be dealt with once the post is deleted. The obvious conclusion can only be that the majority of these will be disseminated across the Grade 5 posts, with some of the decision-making referred to the Business Manager. If this is the case, it is likely it could affect the levels of responsibility of these posts and they will require reassessing under the Council’s job evaluation scheme. It would be somewhat naïve to think differently.</p> <p>“In addition, it appears that there is already a problem with holiday and sickness cover within the admin section; this will be further compounded by the deletion of the Admin Supervisor post. Also, the level of decision-making by the Technical Officers will be limited by their Grade 5 status. Quite simply, if the Business Manager is on leave, or sick, and an issue arises in the Customer Contact Team, BC or DC Processing Teams, or the Specialist Support Team, these staff will need to seek the help of the Assistant Director (Building) which would seem a little unreasonable.</p> <p>“I shall be obliged if you will give these issues your attention.</p>	<p>In response to this the Director commented:</p> <p>“The Union’s main area of concern is noted.</p> <p>“The duties and responsibilities of the Supervisor’s post fall into two categories; supervisory ones and day to day work.</p> <p>“It is not ideal to lose the second of two such supervisor posts achieved in the 2005 Restructure, and where one was lost in the 2007 Restructure, however, other existing Managerial posts do still exist in the Management hierarchy, and Managers have coped with those situations, and the situation since this post holder left. The Business Manager position has also been vacant whilst it was recruited to, and that has been coped with by the efforts of many staff. The demands of Managers by range 5 staff for assistance are not judged to have been at unreasonable levels.</p> <p>“The day to day work of the post has been carried by some other staff and contract positions during a period when workload, on some measures, has reduced because of the recession, and it is recognised that some re-evaluation of a post or posts may arise. This will be considered further by the new Business Manager shortly.”</p>
<p>Unison Branch Secretary comments:</p> <p>“I have since been reminded that prior to the service review, which took place some 18</p>	<p>In response to this the Director commented:</p> <p>This is already commented on above.</p>

<p>months ago, there were two supervisory posts overseeing the Planning administration function.</p> <p>“Deletion of the Admin Supervisor role will have a significant effect on service delivery at the Planning Reception, as the post holder was often required to solve disputes and appease situations with members of the public.</p> <p>“Furthermore, the deletion of this Grade 7 post is likely to have a negative effect on staff morale, as there will no longer be any career or training structure within the admin function. In addition this will have a knock-on effect on the flow of information between staff and management within the service.</p> <p>“Finally, recent trends indicate an increase in public enquiries, rather than a decrease. Therefore it seems absurd to cut resources from the admin function.</p> <p>“I shall be obliged if you will give these issues your attention.”</p>	<p>No further comment.</p> <p>It is not accepted that the deletion of a post has any adverse impact upon the training of remaining staff. It is recognised that the loss of a post limits some career opportunities.</p> <p>No further comment.</p>
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Resource Implications:

As set out in this report.

Legal and Governance Implications:

Unless there is adequate capacity in the Enforcement and Landscape teams there could be adverse consequences.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

None.

Consultation Undertaken:

Staff and Unions.

Background Papers:

None.

Impact Assessments:

Risk Management

There are risks if the Planning Enforcement Team operates below capacity and if it operates without sufficient capacity to not only investigate but also to evaluate the planning implications of unauthorised development. These proposals seek to lessen these risks. Similarly if trees currently protected by Essex orders were left without any protection they could be at risk of being felled or damaged.

There are some risks of deleting a supervisor’s post. It is considered that sufficient managerial capacity

exists. The recession has lessened some workloads, but a further review will consider the full capacity of the administrative teams.

Equality and Diversity:

Did the initial assessment of the proposals contained in this report for relevance to the Council's general equality duties, reveal any potentially adverse equality implications? **No**

Where equality implications were identified through the initial assessment process, has a formal Equality Impact Assessment been undertaken? **No**

What equality implications were identified through the Equality Impact Assessment process?

N/A

How have the equality implications identified through the Equality Impact Assessment been addressed in this report in order to avoid discrimination against any particular group?

N/A