

Report to Planning Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Date of meeting: January 10th 2011

Subject: Request for District Development Fund (DDF) carry over to 2011/2012 and 12/13

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Committee Secretary: Mark Jenkins



Recommendations/Decisions Required:

That the Committee consider:

1. The carry over of DDF related sums totalling £45,800 to 2011/12 and 12/13 for the purpose of delivering and ensuring ongoing project delivery and service support and sustaining staff professional development and succession planning. More specifically:
 - a) Economic Development, LABGI funding of £16,000 for Town Centre Partnership (TCP) support and delivering outstanding commitments on Enhanced Business Contacts.
 - b) Conservation/Trees & Landscape, £10,000 for salary purposes (Technical Support Officer)
 - c) Business Management, £9,800 for non standard ICT items needed to maintain service delivery as part of the Directorate Electronic Document Management System.
 - d) Directorate Training £10,000 for ongoing commitments to meet essential training needs and succession planning within Planning and Economic Development.

Report:

1. As of mid December 2010 there has been a recruitment freeze on external recruitment to all vacant posts with the exception for posts that: have implications for health and safety, demonstrate that they generate surplus income and are externally funded. The current report is being submitted in parallel with a Town Centre Officer post extension request report. There is information contained within this document which is of relevance to the aforementioned report.
2. The amounts of DDF funding requested to be carried over for 2011/12 and 12/13 are as follows:
 - a) **Economic Development: £12,000 underspend for Town Centre support and £4,000 for Enhanced Business Contacts**
3. Cabinet agreed in December 2007 a support package using LABGI funds of £36,000 for 3 years from 2008/09. This has enabled each Town Centre Partnership to apply for a special projects grant of up to £2,000 per year to deliver a project. It is recognised that not every TCP has had its full allocation annually over this three year period. Discussions at TCP Chairs meetings, including 13 May 2009, have reflected upon this. Officer response has been that given uncertainties of future funding, particularly in the current economic climate, if there is money left in the budget in the

third year it is considered that this should roll forward for use in the following year i.e. 2012/2013. This was agreeable to all and officers had been continuing to work on this basis.

4. Another reason for this underspend, which was concentrated in the first two years of funding being allocated, was due to under staffing within the Town Centres/Economic Development team. This delayed progressing and implementing the TCP projects. It is requested that the outstanding £12,000 is carried forward into 2011/12 and 12/13. There is an additional £6,000 CSB amount per annum available to TCP's for special projects which is currently being utilised. This is available for all TCP's at a maximum bid of £2,000 per TCP, which means that in any given year not all TCP's have access to the funding.
5. It is considered essential to ensure the continuation of this important work in the current economic climate when our town centres are facing challenging times and in order to enable our town centres to capitalise on key events such as the London 2012 Olympics and when further sources of funding are hugely limited. There is however work in progress to investigate options to secure the longer term sustainability of EFDC Town Centres, through the work conducted in the Economic Development team.
6. Cabinet agreed in December 2007 that a £4,000 sum from LABGI payments be allocated for enhanced business contact related work. It remains key that work is delivered in this regard but on reviewing Economic Development priorities and in light of reduced staffing in early 2011 it is not possible for this work to be delivered in the current financial year but will be scheduled for 2011/12

b) Conservation/Trees & Landscape:

7. A technical support officer has been in post since July 2010 at Grade 5. The work that the postholder has assisted on includes developing and delivering Conservation Area, Management Plans and Character Appraisals, with great progress having been made.
8. Namely, the three Loughton Character Appraisals and Management Plans, York Hill, Staples Road and Baldwin Hill have all been progressed and are being completed. The Copped Hall documents are also being progressed satisfactorily. In addition to these tasks the technical support officer has taken on customer support functions, answering general enquiries and providing advice to the public. Furthermore the role also assists in statutory work that the service delivers, such as DC application site visits which are considerably detailed and time consuming. This has had a positive impact on the Conservation Officers workload allowing for more efficient, working and task delivery.
9. The current Conservation Officer will be retiring in February 2011. The £10,000 requested to be carried over to 2011/12 in addition to £7,000 already allocated for the technical support post will allow the postholder to remain until November/December 2011 and continue key work in the Conservation team in what is anticipated to be a challenging period for service and project delivery.

c) Business management

10. An essential part of the Directorate Improvement Plan identifies the need to improve planning processes that are directly linked to the Electronic Document Management System (EDRMS). The current £9,800 PDG Budget for ICT equipment and software is the only funding available to the Directorate for essential software upgrades to i-Plan and provision of non standard ICT equipment that is not funded/available from ICT.
11. This is divided into the following requirements;

- i. There is a need to have funding available for upgrades to Planning Specific Software such as Adobe Image Software, i-Plan and MVM , to ensure ongoing service delivery.
- ii. Secondly there is a need to actively move forward with EDRMS and provide a further six 24 inch monitors, essential for viewing detailed large plans and maps in Conservation, Trees and Landscape, Building Control and the Planning Support Team.
- iii. The purpose of not immediately spending this funding is to maximise value for money by targeting this funding towards software upgrades in the first instance and prioritising other spending accordingly up to 2012/13.

d) Directorate Training

- 12. Our ongoing CSB Training Budget is fully committed with previous commitments to meet the training needs of one trainee building surveyor in Building Control who is completing four year Bsc in Building Surveying from 07/08 to 11/12 at £1600 per year. He will then undergo certification by the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors in 2012/13 at an estimated cost of £2,000. The balance of the CSB Training Budget is fully committed for a large number of short courses and seminars for Development Control, Forward Planning Conservation and Trees and Landscape. The frequency and priority of the short one/two day course has increased due to the numerous changes affecting Planning as a result of the Coalition Government changes.
- 13. Planning & Economic Development have been dedicating efforts to update the Directorate's Workforce Development Plan. The DDF sum requested will ensure ongoing succession planning within the Directorate to;
 - i. Aid succession Planning in Conservation to allow the Technical Officer Conservation attend an MSc in Historic Conservation at £5700 per year for a two year course as identified via the PDR process.
 - ii. For the Corporate ICT Planning Trainee to undertake specific Information Technology training at £3000 per year for 10/11, 11/12 and 12/13.
 - iii. Sending some of our staff to University are key elements of how we have successfully in the past, managed succession planning within the Directorate. This is a key element of our Workforce Development Strategy. If we are unable to retain the above budget of £10,000 we may well be required to prioritise our CSB budget commitments with both items d (i) and (ii) above, being postponed indefinitely pending funding availability from other sources.

Reason for decision:

To allow for project delivery including Town Centre Partnership support, ongoing ICT operational support, professional development and succession planning in the Directorate. The DDF amounts referred to have not been spent either as a result of staffing shortages, the need for the funds to be spread out over time to cover ongoing needs i.e (training and staffing). Furthermore relating to Town Centres Partnerships it appears that they have not required the same amount of funding within each financial year.

Options considered and rejected:

To find alternative sources of funding. The alternative for these items is CSB funding; a request that would put an additional demand on existing budgets. External sources of funding are unlikely to be available for the identified needs.

Consultation undertaken:

With Planning & Economic Development and Finance officers

Resource implications:

Budget provision: Existing DDF budgets previously agreed by Cabinet 17/12/07

Personnel: Agreement to recommendations would allow for ongoing technical support to the conservation team and training and workforce development within the

Land: N/A

Community Plan/BVPP reference:

Relevant statutory powers: N/A

Background papers: Cabinet reports 17/12/07

Environmental/Human Rights Act/Crime and Disorder Act Implications:

Key Decision reference: (if required)