

Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C/023/2006-07.

Date of meeting: 10 July 2006.



**Epping Forest
District Council**

**Portfolios: Finance, Performance Management and Corporate Support Services.
Planning and Economic Development.**

Subject: Planning Delivery Grant 2006/2007.

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Democratic Services Officer: Gary Woodhall (01992 – 56 4470).

Recommendations:

(1) That the allocation of Planning Delivery Grant 2006/2007 be made as follows:

(a) Capital £33,000 comprising:

(i) £13,000 on a Countrycare replacement vehicle; and

(ii) £20,000 on Accommodation; and

(b) Revenue £95,851 comprising:

(i) £41,000 on completion of scanning;

(ii) £15,000 on training or the hit squad; and

(iii) the remaining £39,851 on Forward Planning staff; and

(2) That, notwithstanding the normal rules for virements of budgets, The Head of Planning and Economic Development be authorised to make variations of plus or minus 10 per cent for any of the items in recommendation (1).

Background:

1. The Council has been advised that we have been given £128,851 of Planning Delivery Grant (PDG) for this year (comprising £58,406 for housing considerations, £52,525 for plan making, £17,920 for on line capabilities, £578 as an adjustment for 04/05 and £0 for development control performance) Planning Delivery Grant (PDG) is not ring-fenced or hypothecated beyond the condition that 25% of the total received in the 2006/2007 Financial year must be used for capital.
2. This is a most disappointing total figure, in particular for development control performance. This arises because the calculation for performance improvement compares the year ending June 2004 with the year ending June 2005; because performance did not improve between those dates we get nothing. Performance did not improve between those dates because we had reached a plateau of what we could get out of the old computer system, we had tweaked other arrangements as much as we could with that system, and we had insufficient staff resources to have cleared a backlog of cases, and we had not Restructured. It is also disappointing in respect of on line capabilities. This element of PDG had been suggested as being worth up to £100,000 if 21 Pendleton points had been secured by December 2005;

we secured 20. Those attaining 21 only received around £25,000; The Government continues to expect electronic service delivery and improvements, which cost significant sums to bring in and maintain, but appears to be ending much in the way of financial reward for so doing.

3. This is the second time that there has been an explicit requirement that 25% must be used for Capital, and raises some important issues. Most significantly it means that just under £33,000 of this years grant must be spent on Capital. We have already put funding into ICT hardware, changes to accommodation, including furniture and storage, but this was when there were no limits to Capital compared to Revenue spending.
4. The Council in February 2003 decided that Planning Delivery Grant be credited to the Finance and Performance Management Portfolio, such that Cabinet would determine the use of the funds. This enables Cabinet to consider how the funds are used for Planning, but taking into account decisions already made to increase the resources EFDC was putting into Planning.

Capital Proposals for additional PDG 2006/2007:

5. To ensure that 25% is spent on Capital, £33,000 is proposed to be spent on the following Capital items:
 - (a) In previous allocations of Planning Delivery Grant £15,000 was set aside towards the cost of a replacement vehicle for Countrycare (who operate an eleven year old Land Rover) This was on the basis that the vehicle might get to the stage where a major issue with it would not be cost effective to repair, and that other budgets for it had been cut previously. So far the vehicle has not warranted replacement, although some £2624.95 of this was spent on a replacement trailer last year because the previous one had been stolen. It is suggested that £13,000 is added so that a replacement vehicle can be purchased this year; and
 - (b) It is suggested that £20,000 is allocated to bring forward further work on accommodation within Planning.

Revenue Proposals for additional PDG 2006/2007:

6. Scanning. The Cabinet on 14 November 2005 (minute 109 refers) considered a report about the data quality and scanning of records in Planning and agreed that a project would start, whilst recognizing that a further £41,000 would be required to complete it. That report indicated that Planning Delivery Grant would have to be the likely source of that funding; accordingly, it is proposed to use funds to that end. That report referred to a progress report, but it is rather early in the project to give a very meaningful report at present.
7. Training and Hit squad. Non-corporate training in Planning Services presently has a budget that equates to £150 per head per year. Although some courses are low cost, fully paid courses will use that budget in little more than one event. Officers have provided some member training in the past e.g. Induction, Planning protocol or seminars with Local Councils. When considered against what Investors in People, or Continuing Professional Development for staff would expect that figure is very low, and, for Members, the need to be seen by the public as concentrating on relevant considerations is more important in an age of human rights, equalities and freedom of information. Using Planning Delivery Grant has boosted training budgets in each of the three previous years. A separate report deals with the impact of the hit squad in Planning and to give some flexibility as to exactly when that ends; it is suggested that a further £15,000 is allocated.
8. Staffing. The importance of both the local and regional workload of the Forward

Planning team has been spelt out in previous reports about the Restructure of Planning, and the further allocation of Planning Delivery Grant last year; it is suggested that the remaining sum is used to add to the amount allocated last year, either to extend the number employed, or the length of contract able to be offered.

Statement in Support of Recommended Action:

9. Each of the proposals made, and in the amounts suggested would again make real impacts upon Planning Services, and a great many of them would be noticeable to customers and staff alike. The additional amounts now received, coupled with the Capital requirement, give little room for different suggestions.

Other Options for Action:

10. The options range from using PDG4 for the proposals set out above, to different amounts using the same essential menu, either of which could be expected to help gain further grant when PDG5 is calculated. The last option is to use some of the funds for other purposes, but to risk a lower amount of PDG in future.

Consultation undertaken: No external consultation undertaken.

Resource implications: As indicated in the report.

Budget provision: PDG is announced after the Council Budget has been set, thus these funds are an addition to the Council budget.

Personnel: From existing resources.

Land: Nil.

Community Plan/BVPP reference: Help progress Implementing Electronic Government strategy, in particular new document management system. Progress further performance improvements or address weaknesses.

Relevant Statutory Powers: None.

Background papers: News release of 30 March 2006 from Housing and Planning Minister.

Environmental/Human Rights Act/Crime and Disorder Act Implications: None.

Key Decision reference (if required): N/A.