Report to the Council

Committee:	**Cabinet**	**Date: 26 September 2017**

Subject: **Staffing Structural Adjustments within Development Management**

Portfolio Holder: **Councillor J Philip (Planning & Governance)**

Recommending:

(1)   That a Continuing Services Budget supplementary estimate in the sum of £109,760 be approved to convert the following existing temporary posts to permanent posts, effective from 1 October 2017, as detailed in Appendix A :

(a)   Technical Officer (Validations);

(b)   Technical Officer (Systems); and

(c)   Two Assistant Planning Officers.

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1.   Development Management fee income has increased by over 50% generating an additional £300,000 per year from 2014/15. Further additional income of £100,000 per annum has been created by the provision of Planning Pre-Application advice. In addition, although the levels of planning applications in the last ten years have increased by 33%, the establishment structure of Development Management has not increased accordingly. Whilst the Planning Officers and support staff within Development Management have absorbed greater workloads through process changes and greater use of technology, temporary contracts have been granted to handle the sustained demand for planning applications, advice etc. However, it is clear that the demand is not of a temporary nature.

2.   Investment in training and experience gained by the current temporary staff would be a loss to this Council. The staff occupying the temporary posts are looking for permanent positions and have acquired skill sets that are marketable. Losing the resource or having to devote senior staff time again to train a new, temporary recruit is not a sustainable use of resources.

3.   There is a priority need to ensure that Planning Services is both resilient and robust enough to sustain the current increased levels of Planning Applications including Planning Pre-Applications as a secure base to address the future. At the meeting on 7 September 2017, the Cabinet agreed the adjustments to the staffing establishment as detailed in Appendix A to support the effective management of planning applications to meet statutory processing of planning applications timescales.

Technical Officer (Validations)

4.   A key priority in processing planning applications is to make sure that there is an efficient and timely business process for registering and validating planning applications. Following a detailed process mapping exercise, Members agreed (Cabinet 1 December 2016, minute 105 refers) to resource a streamlined procedure which is showing an improvement of 3 - 5 days. The new process also helps to allow Planning Officers more time to provide the fee-earning Planning Pre-Application service in addition to their caseload of Planning Applications.

5.   The creation of the temporary fixed term Technical Officer (Validations), as part of prototyping the process, has been an essential part of that service improvement, demonstrating the need for the role. Conversion to a permanent role will improve both the stability of the Applications/Validation team as well as add a degree of business resilience for processes regarding planning applications. The cost for a permanent Technical Officer Planning Validation will be £29,060 per year.

Technical Officer (Systems)

6.   A temporary fixed term Technical Officer (Systems) Grade 5 was appointed in April 2016 for two years to manage the software systems Northgate M3, Information@work and iPlan at directorate level, as well as assist in electronic records development. This has proved very successful – also in supporting corporate initiatives involving changes to electronic systems. Currently the incumbent has a well-developed knowledge of specialist areas of planning and electronic records within Development Management and of wider corporate systems.

7.   This post will be essential in supporting transformation initiatives being directly responsible for directorate level management of Northgate M3, Information@work, the Planning/Building Control area of the Council's website as well as supporting mobile and flexible working for Development Management. The post is key to ensuring the robust and resilient integration of electronic working within Planning, Building Control and Local Land Charges. There is simply not enough resource within the ICT section to handle this work and deliver on their priorities. The cost for a permanent Technical Officer Applications Systems will be £29,060 per year.

Assistant Planning Officer Posts (two)

8.   Development Management have been aware for some time that qualified Planning Officers are in great demand with the attendant recruitment difficulties that brings. To address this, two Trainee Planning Officer posts with fixed term DDF funding to 31 August 2018 were created to allow us to 'grow our own' while meeting increased demands.

9.   The idea, as well as the individuals, has proved to be invaluable in dealing with the more frequent and smaller type of planning applications, as well as Certificates of Lawful Development, amendments and the such like. Having invested in the training – both in terms of finance and time – it would be a retrograde step to lose this expertise and resource. If the fixed term ends then the workload will pass to the permanent Planning Officers on the establishment or be met by more expensive agency options. This would undoubtedly affect performance. It is therefore recommended that these two posts are converted to permanent on the same grade 4/5 as Assistant Planning Officers at a total cost of £51,640 per annum.

Conclusion

10.   We recommend as set out at the commencement of this report.