



NORTHAMPTON
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Item No.

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| Name of Committee: | Cabinet |
| Directorate: | People, Planning & Regeneration |
| Corporate Director | Clive Thomas |
| Date: | 30th July 2007 |

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| Report Title | Establishing an Integrated Planning Service |
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| Key Decision | YES |
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1. Recommendations

- 1.1 That Cabinet agrees the proposed/draft indicative structure of an integrated planning service (contained at Appendix 3, 4 and 5) as a basis for formal staff consultations.
- 1.2 That subject to the outcome of any staff consultations that Cabinet agree to the recruitment and appointment of the Head of the Planning Service.
- 1.3 If the above proposals change as a result of the consultations to bring a further report to Cabinet with details of the suggested changes.
- 1.4 That Cabinet consider and agree the proposed/draft indicative staffing structure for the recruitment of vacant posts within existing budgets.
- 1.5 That a report is brought back to a future Cabinet to agree the final structure along with funding proposals.

2. Summary

- 2.1 The report sets out the need to establish an Integrated Planning Service within Northampton Borough Council and a proposed/draft indicative structure led by a Professional Planner at Corporate Manager level.
- 2.2 This is a response to the need to sustain the improvements already achieved

and those remaining in the Improvement Plan. Included are indicative additional costs anticipated to adequately resource Northampton Borough Council's contributions to the Joint Planning Unit for the growth area of West Northamptonshire.

- 2.3 The proposed/draft indicative structure rough costing identifies the need to consider resource allocations in the 2008/2009 budget process if the new structure or a variation of it is to be implemented, although some advantage may be able to be taken of the recently announced planning delivery grant.

3. Report Background

Improvement Priority

- 3.1 The Audit Commission Service Inspection of Planning Services was published in 2005. An Improvement Plan and supporting action plan has been in operation since August 2006. The Improvement Plan addresses the identified weaknesses under four themes, namely:

- Members, Planning Committee and Decision Making,
- Performance and Customers,
- Organisation, Management and Resources,
- Processes and Procedures.

- 3.2 Purposeful progress has been made against all themes, however, there remains much to do to achieve a sustainable and good level of service that is able to become a key enabler for achieving growth which is sustainable from social, environmental and economic perspectives. Further, the Council's Planning Service should be a key driver in planning for and delivering the Council's Corporate Priorities such as Town Centre Regeneration, increasing the supply of affordable housing and reducing the Carbon Footprint of Northampton.

- 3.3 In response to the Audit Commission Service Inspection, the Council brought together under a single Director, the responsibilities for Planning Services in September 2006, namely: -

- Planning Policy
- Conservation
- Concessionary Fares
- Development Control
- Building Control.

- 3.4 The existing Corporate Managers remained responsible for Planning Policy, Conservation and Concessionary Fares (Chris Cavanaugh) with Development Control and Building Control, the responsibility of Christine Stevenson.

Value for Money

- 3.5 The Value for Money profile in the Service Plan identifies the Planning Service as costing £6.84 per 1,000 population. Compared with a range of other Councils, the cost of the service is the lowest, with the highest being £19.79 per 1,000 population and the average being £12.46 per 1,000 population. Refer to Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.
- 3.6 This clearly indicates that for a Council in a growth area with significant regeneration demands, the Council's resources are not fully aligned to its priorities i.e. Improvement of a Poor Service and delivery of Growth and Regeneration.

Local Development Scheme and Inter-Agency Working

- 3.7 The area of West Northamptonshire has to meet the growth of 167,000 dwellings by 2031. In order to achieve this, in a truly sustainable way, without infrastructure deficit and creating enduring communities and places where people enjoy living, all public sector agencies need to work together with common purpose.
- 3.8 The key agencies with direct democratic mandates are: -
- Daventry District Council
 - Northampton Borough Council
 - Northamptonshire County Council
 - South Northamptonshire Council.
 - West Northamptonshire Development Corporation (a Government Agency with local politicians appointed to its Board).
- 3.9 There are significant pressures for growth in West Northamptonshire, yet the current local plans do not provide for the scale or locations that will ensure sustainable growth is achieved. The approved Local Development Scheme (LDS) is deliberately challenging in terms of timescales to provide the earliest clarity of how the communities in West Northamptonshire can accommodate the planned growth and needs of the area.
- 3.10 To maximise the ability to maintain the LDS programme, a Joint Planning Unit is being established with dedicated Unit Manager, staff and resources from each plan making authority. In addition, consideration is being given to creating a Joint Planning Committee to determine the Joint Core Strategy and common policy documents which form part of the LDS. This will allow for more effective and timely decisions to minimise slippage against the LDS programme.
- 3.11 In order to give effect to this, any new structure must allow for the resources to be dedicated to the Joint Planning Unit and maintain links to the Policy and Development Control functions within the Borough Council to ensure a contemporary knowledge is maintained between emerging policy and operational realities and pressures.

Professional Head of Planning

3.12 Purposeful improvements have been made to Planning Services since the publication of the Planning Service Inspection in September 2006. These include a strengthened Planning Policy and Conservation function, top quartile Development Control performance on key indicators over the last six months, a real focus on performance and shift towards a Customer Focus example by the new facilities at Planning Reception, enhanced Member training and a new Scheme of Delegation. However, much still needs to be accomplished and a culture of continuous improvement embedded across the service.

3.13 The above achievements have been secured by staff who have exemplified commitment and resolve to improve through a difficult period. The loss of Major Planning Applications to WNDC, together with fee income of some £440,000 per annum and a continuing loss of staff to other organisations have all added to the challenge.

3.14 The examples of improvements identified above are acknowledged as being fragile, not least because of the diminishing staff base in Development Control.

3.15 In the context of a Poor and Improving Planning Service, it has been identified and widely agreed that the service needs a qualified professional planner to lead it. The key benefits are:-

- Improved leadership of the Planning Service, providing integrated responses to internal and external customers and partners.
- Single point responsibility and accountability for continuous improvement.
- Leading the professional input to the Joint Planning Agenda with other agencies and maintaining positive and effective relationships.
- Establishing and applying professional standards that deliver a quality service, enjoyed by customers, councillors and staff.
- Acting as an advocate for the Planning Service and the significant contribution the Planning Service can make to delivering the Council's Vision and Priorities.
- Creating a Planning Service that current staff want to be part of and can improve their own professional experience and development.

Design Principles of a proposed/draft Indicative Structure

3.16 There is always more than one way of designing a structure that will deliver the organisational objectives. The proposed structure is designed to address the key issues above, provide a sense of future direction and establish a level of resource within which a Planning Service will make significant contributions to the growth of sustainable communities and the renaissance of Northampton as the County Town.

3.17 Good and excellent organisations are founded on much more than structures. While these are important, issues of clarity of purpose, leadership, motivation, hunger for continuous improvement, being "one organisation" rather than a

collection of individual services and unswerving focus on customer outcomes are all crucial to achieving excellence. Hence the proposed structure must be adaptable and flexible to changing circumstances and priorities. Above all, it must retain the ownership and credibility of staff, partners and customers as well as potential recruits.

3.18 For these reasons the structure should be seen as a reference point that will be adapted over time. The appointment of a Head of Service will allow the development of the structure in a way that enhances their responsibility and ownership. The resource parameters would be those established by the proposed/draft indicative structure if confirmed as part of the 2008/2009 budget process.

Key Components of proposed/draft Indicative Structure

3.19 The key components of the proposed/draft Indicative structure are:

- Professionally Qualified Head of Planning Services.
- Dedicated staff and resource input to Joint LDS Planning Team.
- Separate Northampton LDF Team with enhanced research, monitoring and administrative capacity.
- New role of Assistant Development Control Manager, focussing on consultations and major pre-applications and establishing day-to-day dialogue with key partners.
- Creation of new specialist advisers on Transportation, Sustainability, Climate Change and Urban Design.
- The creation of clear career paths through and across the Planning Service with established levels of expertise and experience to train, develop and attract staff.
- Establishment of a discrete role of Building Control Manager to lead and drive forward the creation of a public/private shared service.
- Continuance of a Conservation Unit headed by a Principal Conservation Officer.

Resource Implications

3.20 Additional one-off improvement monies of £175,000 have been agreed for 2007/2008 financial year. These are fully committed.

3.21 The estimated additional cost of the proposed/draft indicative structure is £455,000 in a full financial year. Following the outcome of consultations the structure will be firmed up and a report presented to a future cabinet meeting for approval along with funding proposals. These proposals will need to be considered alongside other priorities in the 2008/2009 budget considerations.

3.22 The current base budget makes no provision for defending appeals or for costs awarded against the Council. The base budget should make some provision for defending Appeals and set corporate balances at a level, which allows for costs awarded against the Council if and when Appeals are lost.

3.23 The appointment of Head of Planning Services will form part of a wider Management review by the new Chief Executive in the autumn, the cost of this post is assumed will be contained within existing budgets and is not included in the above costs. Any further appointments to the new structure will be phased and implemented within current budgetary provision for staffing. If the additional resources are agreed these would increase the cost per 1000 population to £9.24.

3.24 DCLG have published in the last week the second Tranche Provisional Allocations for Planning Delivery Grant for 2007/8. The amount proposed for Northampton Borough Council is £592,620. This is a cash allocation, which is to be used to support the delivery of Planning Services and support the growth agenda. The proposed allocation is the highest within Northamptonshire and acknowledges meeting all of the development control Best Value Performance Indicators (109a, b, c), sustainable development indicators and plan making requirements.

Retention and Recruitment

3.25 This is a serious national problem with many Councils experiencing difficulty in recruiting and retaining qualified staff. While it is important to keep in-line with “the market rate for the job”, Northampton is not seen as being out of line with the market price. However, active approaches direct to staff with cash inducement to join (£3,000 - £7,000) are now common and affecting our staff.

3.26 It is proposed in specific areas such as Development Control to offer modest cash retainers for sustaining top quartile performance, coupled with minimum 12-month retention clauses.

3.27 The proposed/draft structure also provides for clear career paths with the opportunity to recruit at graduate level and gain experience across the whole range of Planning Services. Staff are keen to be part of a professionally led service which they believe can provide a quality service and help improve the quality of life for the people of Northampton.

Phased Implementation

3.28 It is not realistic, practical or affordable to recruit to all of the vacant posts in the proposed structure. Subject to the outcome of consultations it is proposed to recruit in the first instance to the Head of Planning and Development Control Manager.

3.29 The proposed/draft indicative structure will be used as the basis for formal staff consultation and appointment to other vacant positions will be subject to budget decisions and current budget allocations. A report on the final structure and the funding will be brought to a future Cabinet.

4. Options and Evaluation of Options

4.1 There are a number of options:-

1. Status Quo.
- 2a. Integrated Planning Service with new Professional Head of Service, but within existing resource allocations.
- 2b. Integrated Planning Service with new Professional Head of Planning Service, but with enhanced resource allocations to allow establishment of the proposed/draft Indicative Structure, following appointment of Head of Service.
3. Shared Service for Planning across West Northamptonshire.
4. Minimalist Professional client for Planning Service with all services provided through contract with external providers.

Evaluation of Options

- 4.2 **Option 1:** The Status Quo is not recommended as the need of professional leadership is seen as crucial to driving forward and sustaining an excellent Planning Service. It will not be attractive to new potential recruits and will not meet the staff's aspirations for career development and being party of a service they believe can deliver excellence. The significant improvements over the last nine months are unlikely to be sustained and built upon which will fail to deliver the Corporate requirements for improvement of Weak Services.
- 4.3 **Option 2:** Both Options (Integrated Planning Service with new Professional Head within existing resource allocations and (2b) as 2a, but with enhanced resource will secure improvements. Indeed, there are options between (2a) and (2b) with different resource implications.
- 4.4 **Option 3:** A Shared Service for Planning Services across the geographic area of West Northamptonshire has many advantages, such as true integration, a one-stop service to customers, good use of specialist expertise, proportionately reduced overheads and common standards, procedures etc. There are, however, issues of governance and accountability across three separate local authorities, harmonisation of remuneration and an inevitable period of uncertainty for staff which may lead to further loss of scarce planning resources to the area.
- 4.5 **Option 4:** The minimalist professional client for Planning Service could provide a good level of service with contractual requirements to meet speed and qualitative standards. However, this would rely on a very clear exposition of the services required. While this is straight forward for the direct delivery against individual planning applications, it is much more challenging to achieve in terms of the corporate contributions that the Planning Service can

offer. Whilst it is possible to procure Development Control services at affordable and competitive rates, it is likely to be more expensive when moving away from this defined area.

The option is not recommended as it is believed it will be more expensive, less flexible to meet changing circumstances and demands and will not be able to match the added value an integrated internally provided Planning Service can offer.

4.6 None of the above disadvantages outlined for Options 1,3 and 4 are insurmountable, but given the imperative to improve and sustain the quality and speed of Planning Services in Northampton, it is recommended on balance that at this time, Northampton builds a strong integrated team as outlined in option 2. This will not preclude any future development of a shared Planning Service, but will allow change to be implemented from a position of strength rather than weakness.

4.7 Option 2b is recommended as it provides the level of expertise and professionalism that will sustain a quality Planning Service that one would expect to see in an authority the size of Northampton with its growth requirements and regeneration priorities. This Option is significantly more expensive than the Status Quo, but relative to the Value for Money profile, still is below the average cost of Planning Services in the comparator table.

5. Resource Implications (including Financial Implications)

5.1 The proposed/draft indicative structure and additional costs identified in the report will increase the estimated revenue cost of the planning service by £455,000. This is only a rough estimate and will be refined during the consultation stage with staff and a fully costed proposal will be brought to a future cabinet and included in the medium term financial plan.

5.2 Build up of Estimated Additional Costs

| | £ |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Additional Staffing | 280,000 |
| Appeal Experts and Specialist Advice | 50,000 |
| JPU | 100,000 |
| Retention | <u>25,000</u> |
| | <u>£455,000</u> |

Any future changes to allocation of planning functions and increases or decreases in volume of work will change the above estimates.

6. Risk and Opportunity Issues

6.1 The risk of not implementing a properly resourced and led Planning Service is that short term improvements will not be sustainable and further staff losses will ensue. There are enormous opportunities to make significant contributions to sustainable growth and regeneration.

7. Consultees (Internal and External)

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|-----------------|---|
| Internal | To follow consideration of proposed/draft Indicative Structure by Cabinet |
| External | None at this stage |

8. Compliance Issues

A: How Proposals Deliver Priority Outcomes

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| Recovery Plan |
| As a poor service, achieving and sustaining significant improvements in terms of speed, quality and customer focus are central to the Council's improvement journey. |
| Corporate Plan |
| This report and its proposals are fundamental to the delivery of all five of the Corporate Plan's Objectives and Priorities. |

B: Other Implications

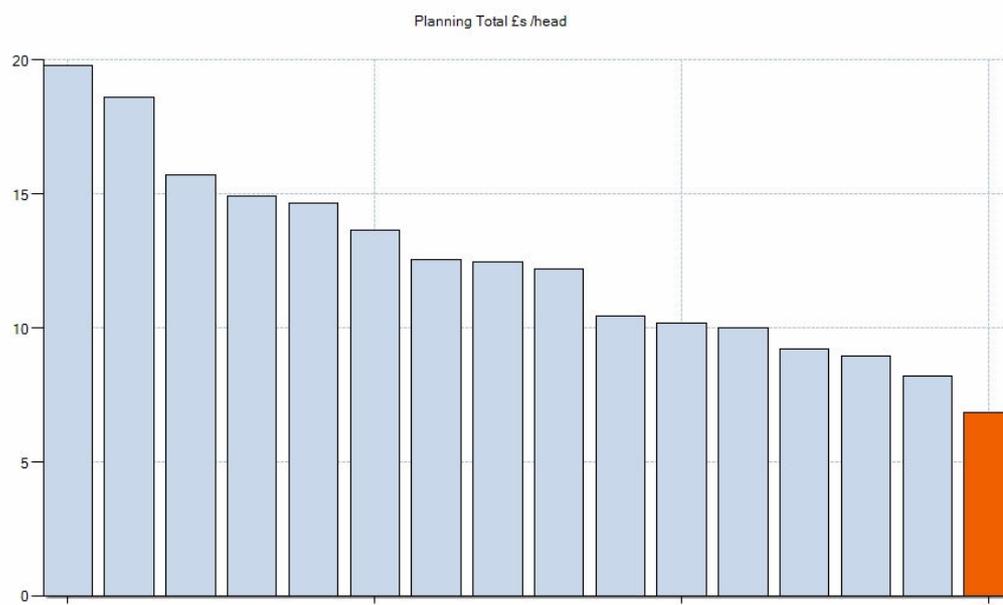
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| Other Strategies |
| The proposals will be a key enabler to deliver the Community Vision, Local Area Agreement and Government Growth Agenda in a sustainable context. |

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| Legal Comments |
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9. Background Papers

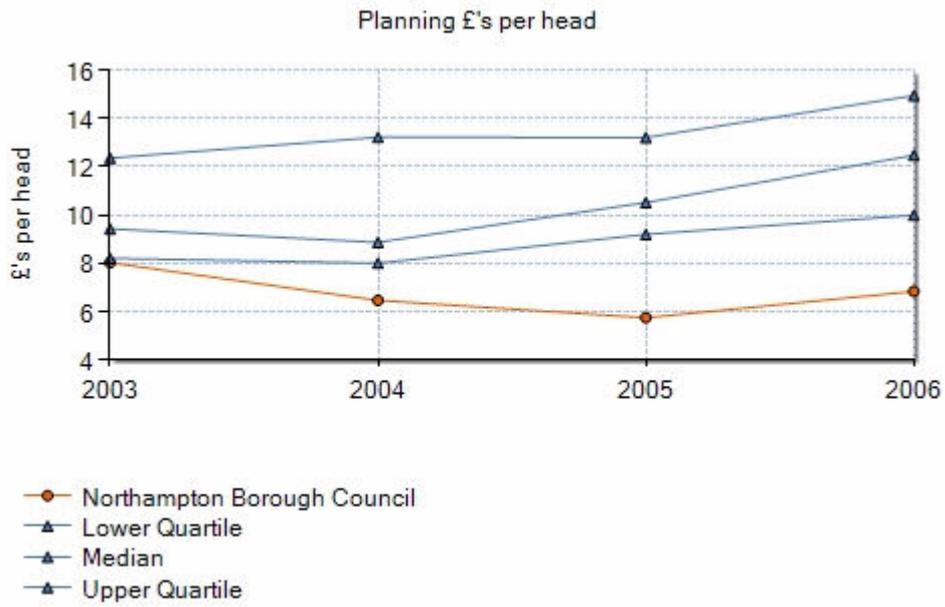
| Title | Description | Source |
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| GMB Sub Board papers | | |

| Name | Signature | Date | Ext. |
|--|---------------------|----------------|-------------|
| Author | Clive Thomas | 27.7.07 | 8531 |
| Corporate Manager | | | |
| Director | | | |
| Monitoring Officer or Deputy (Key decision only) | F.Fernandes | 27.7.07 | |
| Section 151 Officer or Deputy (Key decision only) | I.Procter | 27.7.07 | |

VFM Detailed Profile Information**COST PROFILE**

| Authority name | 2006 |
|---------------------------------------|-------------|
| Rugby Borough Council | 19.79 |
| Maidstone Borough Council | 18.60 |
| Chester City Council | 15.70 |
| Rushmoor Borough Council | 14.94 |
| East Staffordshire Borough Council | 14.67 |
| Bedford Borough Council | 13.63 |
| Colchester Borough Council | 12.55 |
| Warwick District Council | 12.47 |
| Worcester City Council | 12.21 |
| Nuneaton And Bedworth Borough Council | 10.46 |
| Charnwood Borough Council | 10.18 |
| Gloucester City Council | 9.99 |
| Ipswich Borough Council | 9.20 |
| Preston City Council | 8.96 |
| Basildon District Council | 8.20 |
| Northampton Borough Council | 6.84 |

The chart below depicts planning costs over time. NBC spend has been consistently very low.



2005/06

