

POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE

25 NOVEMBER 2021

AMENDED STRUCTURE FOR PLANNING DEVELOPMENT

1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 To seek amendments to the current Planning Development Unit to enable the creation of a new Tree Officer post (NS12), replacing current consultancy support, and to delete an existing full-time vacant Planning Technical Support Officer Post (NS6).

2.0 Background Information

2.1 Members will be aware that the delivery of the planning service often requires an assessment of trees, either through planning applications or requests to do work to those protected as a result of Tree Preservation and/or Conservation Area status. At present, Planning Technical Support Officers (PTSO) undertake this work with input from a consultant Tree Officer, currently provided by North Kesteven District Council. The contract with NKDC is approximately £7,000 per annum.

2.2 Works to trees form only part of what a planning function covers. Planning applications often require existing landscape on a site to be assessed, as well as landscape proposals submitted as a result of a condition to be determined whether or not they are acceptable.

2.3 In addition to the planning service, across the Council there are various strategies and projects underway that a permanent in-house resource could either feed into or have direct input in shaping, such as works regarding the implementation of the Open Space Strategy, our Climate Emergency Strategy & Action Plan, and maintenance of parks and open spaces.

3.0 Proposals

3.1 It is proposed that a new in-house post is created for a Tree/Landscape Officer. A new job description has been created and evaluated which records the varied duties that would be performed by this officer. As well as dealing with tree applications and responses to consultations on landscape impacts/proposals, they would also be able to review the Council's Tree Preservation Orders. In addition, they would also be able to advise other departments within the Council.

3.2 It is proposed to utilise the monies from the deletion of a vacant PTSO post and the £7K contractual monies. The proposals are due to be considered at 17 November Economic Development Committee, at which it is expected that this Committee will be asked to approve appropriate budget to allow recruitment.

4.0 Digital Implications

4.1 A laptop and ICT equipment to facilitate working from home will be required.

5.0 Financial Implications FIN21-22/9510

- 5.1 The proposal is to delete the vacant PTSO post (£26.2k) as well as utilising the monies currently paid by contract to North Kesteven District Council (£7k) in order to pay for the proposed NS12 Landscape/Tree Officer post on a full-time basis (£44.4k), leaving a shortfall of £11.2k, which we seek approval for, for the increase in budget.
- 5.2 Taking the above information into account, initially there would be an adverse impact on the General Fund of circa £11.2k per annum, however; it is anticipated that this will be mitigated by the means of this post creating wider benefits and opportunities across the authority and reduce the amount of resources required from external third parties in other Business Units. There have already been conversations with colleagues in Environmental Services regarding the possibility of using this resource, it is therefore anticipated that this post will create savings in the form of reduced expenditure to other business units across the council that may utilise the benefits of this in house post. Currently any proposed savings are unquantifiable however; as and when these are identified these will be built into future budget processes.
- 5.3 The figures below are with associated on-costs and incremental increases reaching the top of the scale in 2023-24. For the purpose of this report no pay award or increase in cost for the Council in relation to the Professional Services contract has been included.

	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Creating FT Tree Officer Post NS12 (SCP 31 – SCP33)	44,385	45,720	47,266	47,266
Professional Services to NKDC savings if post created	(7,000)	(7,000)	(7,000)	(7,000)
Deleting Vacant Post NS6 Planning Tech Support Officer (PTSO)	(26,233)	(26,783)	(27,342)	(27,342)
TOTAL REQUIRMENT (FAVOURABLE)/ADVERSE	11,152	11,937	12,924	12,924

The Contractual Services budget code would also be reduced by £7,000 and this sum moved to the salary code.

6.0 Equalities Implications

- 6.1 These proposals will impact directly on staff however there is no disproportionate or potential adverse impact on anyone with a protected characteristic. The grading of the new post has been determined using the Council's agreed Job Evaluation Scheme to ensure there are no equal pay issues. The recruitment and selection processes will be undertaken in accordance with Council policy and procedures which have due regard for the requirements of equalities legislation.

7.0 Legal Implications

7.1 The post holder will be required to comply with legislation as set out within the Town and Country Planning Acts and, in particular, the Town and Country Planning (Tree Preservation (England) Regulations 2012 [SI 2012 No. 605].

8.0 Community Plan – Alignment to Objectives

8.1 The creation and recruitment to this post will contribute directly to the plan's objective of 'Enhance and protect the District's natural environment' and 'Improve the health and wellbeing of local residents'.

10.0 RECOMMENDATIONS that:

- (a) Members approve the amended structure and associated budget required for the Landscape/Tree Officer post; and**
- (b) subject to (a) above the Planning Development Business Manager liaise with HR colleagues and Unions as required to recruit a Landscape/Tree Officer on a full-time basis.**

Reason for Recommendations

To have a dedicated post to consider tree applications, responses to consultations on landscape impacts/proposals, and to review the Council's Tree Preservation Orders.

Background Papers

Nil

For further information please contact Lisa Hughes on Ext 5565.

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