



East
Northamptonshire
Council

Personnel Sub-Committee 31 January 2012

Head of Planning Services vacancy

Purpose of report

This report outlines the options considered for the future of this post and advises on the timetable for the recruitment on a fixed term basis for 2 years.

1.0 Background

1.1 The current Head of Planning Services has given notice for the end of March. It was considered important that the future of this post be decided as soon as possible given the increasing importance of planning in the delivery of the council's agenda, the urgent need to progress the strategic plans for the District (via the CSS and Four Towns Plan) and the imminent significant changes to the planning framework and related legislation proposed by the Government.

2.0 Options Considered

2.1 Not filling. Although this would be attractive from a budget perspective, in the light of the pressures identified above it is considered essential for the council to have senior planning expertise in place at this time.

2.2 Combining with Head of Environmental Services role to create a Head of Regulatory Services role. This would create a significant service area whose size and responsibilities would be out of kilter with other service areas. In addition, as noted above because of the current pressures, the combined post would require either significant planning expertise, which the current Head of Environmental Services does not have, or the creation of a senior planning management post below the Head of Service, resulting in minimal savings.

2.3 Filling as now on a permanent basis. Although this would be probably the most obvious action, significant planning policy expertise and change management skills are required in the next two years because of the need to focus on the Core Spatial Strategy and the 4 Towns Plan and to tackle ongoing budget challenges. Beyond two years, the requirements are likely to change and there will probably be a need to review the Management Team structure again, so a permanent appointment is not considered appropriate.

2.4 Fill as now but on a fixed term basis. This will provide short-term stability and senior expertise over the next two years to drive the delivery of our emerging planning policies and to review Planning Services to ensure that we are structured and resourced to suit the emerging planning framework. This approach will also leave flexibility for a future Management Team review and give time to explore the creation of a shared service with another authority.

2.5 Delaying making an appointment, or seeking to make an appointment on reduced hours, were not considered viable options because of the imminent strategic pressures identified above, together with operational issues arising from a number of current major applications, particularly Rushden Lakes. Outsourcing the work via a shared service with a neighbouring authority is a medium-long term option but will take time to explore and evaluate.

3.0 Conclusion

3.1 After careful consideration of the above options by the Chief Executive and Executive Director and consultation with the Leader of the Council and Chair of Personnel Sub-Committee, it was agreed that the option of filling on a short-term basis was most appropriate. Since this did not involve any changes to the structure or financial implications the standard recruitment process is now being followed subsequent to the production and signing of a vacant post form.

3.1 An advertisement for the fixed term post is about to be placed on the jobs portal that ENC uses and on the Planning Magazine website. This is the most cost-effective approach using the most appropriate professional publication.

3.2 Interviews are scheduled to take place in the week of 5 March 2012, with the Chair and Vice Chair of Development Control and Planning Policy being offered an opportunity to meet the shortlisted candidates over lunch. As with other senior posts, the interview process will last a day with psychometric and other tests as well as a formal interview with the Chief Executive and Executive Director.

4.0 Financial implications

4.1 There are no additional financial implications as a result of the decision to fill on a fixed term basis. However, it does provide the opportunity for a review of management team in two years with a view to delivering savings.

5.0 Legal implications

5.1 There are no legal implications at this time.

6.0 Risk implications

6.1 The decision to fill this post on a fixed term basis is considered to be the best option to manage the known risks posed by delivery of significant workloads and enabling the council to respond to the major changes in the planning system with the likely continuing financial pressures on the council.

6.2 There is a risk that advertising a fixed term as opposed to permanent post may attract a smaller or less experienced pool of candidates. However given the state of the market at this time this risk is considered low and is outweighed by potential benefit of future flexibility.

7.0 Equality implications

7.1 The council's recruitment practices ensure that equality legislation is complied with.

8.0 Recommendations

8.1 The Sub-Committee is asked to note this report.

Legal	Power: Local Government Act 1972.				
	Other considerations: Localism Act 2012 and National Planning Policy Framework				
Background Papers:					
Person Originating Report:	Sharn Matthews				
Date: 18/1/ 2012					
CFO		MO		CX	