

IMPROVING COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT SERVICE
Councillor P Strachan
Cabinet Member for Planning and Enforcement

1 Purpose

- 1.1 This report seeks to obtain Cabinet's agreement to additional posts within the Council's Development Management service in order to provide improved pro-active customer focussed communications for applicants and other customers.

2 For decision

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| 2.1 Cabinet are asked to approve the proposals for improving communications with planning applicants and other customers. |
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3 Supporting information

- 3.1 The development management service at AVDC continues to contend with the combined challenges of a national shortage of skilled planners alongside a very high workload that comes from being an area of significant housing growth.
- 3.2 Our planners are therefore working exceptionally hard and spend most of their time either out on site visits or writing up the reports necessary to issue decisions on applications. This has sometimes meant that they are not available to take calls from applicants, which can give the erroneous impression that an application is not progressing or that their calls are being ignored. This has led to applicants becoming frustrated with the Council and has ultimately triggered complaints, helping to respond to which can actually divert planner's time away from deciding applications.
- 3.3 It is noticeable that where developers use our account manager service, they are better informed about the progress of their applications and are more likely to understand the reasons why their application has not been decided or the reasons why consultees have concerns about their proposals.
- 3.4 This report proposes the setting up of a small team of staff who will undertake proactive communications with applicants similar to the way the account managers communicate with larger developers. This will improve the customer service provided by the team and provide reassurance to applicants.

4 Options considered

- 4.1 The alternative would be to wait until the full results were known of a series of reviews and workshops underway in the service identifying further initiatives to combat the challenges the service faces and present them as part of package of measures. However, as this proposal will directly improve customer experience for applicants and can be implemented quickly it was decided that it could be taken forward as a stand alone proposal at this stage.

5 Resource implications

- 5.1 It is proposed that the support and communications elements that relate to planning are separated out from the current Customer Relationship structure into a new and separate team. This team will have a dedicated manager and

staff and will be housed first within the Customer Relationship group and then move to the Planning Group.

5.2 The costs of these proposals are as follows;

Role	Grade	SCP	Salary	On-costs	Total
Interim Planning Coms Manager +	SG6	662	£44,424	£11,994	£8,336
4 x Customer Liaison Officers	SG2	517	£86,160	£23,263	£109,423
					£117,759

5.3 An agreed budget pressure for 2019 included the addition of an SG5 post of "Planning Office Manager" which has not been recruited in to as of yet. It is therefore proposed that this post be deleted, some of its duties transferred to the planning coms manager post and the funding be used to offset most of the costs of this new post. The net cost that AVDC would be left to find for this post is £8,336

5.4 A post of Supervisor SG4 will also be part of the team, but will be transferred from another team in Customer Relationship and will therefore not incur additional cost.

5.5 Initially, the Customer Liaison Officers will be taken from the wider Customer Fulfilment Team in order to implement the proposals quickly. However, this is not sustainable and will create pressure on the remaining team. It will therefore be necessary to budget to replace these positions on a fixed term basis (until 31st March 2020), as any longer term decision on structure will fall to the new unitary to make.

5.6 The net cost, including on-costs, of all the posts requested equates to £117,700 and this amount can be found from within Planning Reserves.

Contact Officer
Background Documents

Jeff Mamberly (01296) 585316