

Report

Report to:	Community and Enterprise Resources Committee
Date of Meeting:	3 September 2019
Report by:	Executive Director (Community and Enterprise Resources) Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources)

Subject:	Planning Services – Graduate Planning Officer
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1. Purpose of the report

1.1. The purpose of the report is to:-

- ♦ seek approval to establish 1 FTE Graduate Planning Officer within Planning Services

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1. The Committee is asked to approve the following recommendation(s):-

- (1) that the establishment of 1 FTE Graduate Planning Officer within Planning Services, on (Grade 2) (Level 4), (£28,398 to £29,271), as detailed in section 5.0. of the report, be approved.

3. Background

- 3.1. The Council's statutory role as Planning Authority for its area is undertaken by the Planning Service which sits within the Planning and Economic Development Service. The Planning Service is responsible for the preparation of the Local Development Plan and associated supporting guidance; the processing of planning applications; and enforcement and monitoring function. In addition, officers within the service provide advice and guidance on a wide range of planning matters as well as dealing with consultations from licensing, property enquiries, information requests and liaison with groups and community bodies.
- 3.2. The Planning Service is responsible for delivering a front-line statutory function. Within the context of a changing economic climate and budgetary matters, there has been a reduction in the number of planning officers/team leaders within the Service, from 29.8 FTE in 2016 to 26.5 FTE at present. In addition, the number of managers within the service has reduced from 4 to 3 in March 2018. Analysis of the workforce profile of the service shows over 50% of officers, team leaders and managers are now over 50.
- 3.3. During this period, the number of applications received has increased from 1848 in 2015/2016 to 2001 in 2018/2019. This reflects the trend of an upturn in the economy which has seen increasing activity by developers including housebuilders. The effect has been an increase in the average number of applications that are dealt with by officers. The Local Development Plan (LDP2) has also been produced in this period and it is due to undergo examination by Scottish Ministers with adoption expected in early 2020 which will meet statutory timescales. This in turn will generate interest from developers and landowners seeking to bring forward sites that have been allocated in the Plan.

- 3.4. The number of planning applications that have been granted has exceeded 98% over the last several years which reflects the Open for Business culture that underpins the ethos of the service. This supports the objectives of the Council Plan, Connect of making South Lanarkshire a place for business by encouraging the conditions for economic growth. This has resulted in a significant amount of new development being carried out across South Lanarkshire including the Hamilton, Larkhall, Newton and Ferniegair Community Growth Areas as well as sites at the former Rolls Royce land and Shields Road in East Kilbride, Gilbertfield in Cambuslang and land at Edinburgh Road in Biggar. New commercial development includes a hotel at Hamilton Racecourse and business units at Farme Cross in the Clyde Gateway area.
- 3.5. The Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 received Royal Assent in July. It will result in the introduction of a number of additional statutory duties across the planning service which will have an impact on the role and responsibilities of officers. A detailed report on the implications of the Planning Bill will be presented to the Planning Committee in September 2019, however, the main points include changes to the way in which Local Development Plans are produced, the introduction of the ability of community bodies to prepare Local Place plans and a requirement to prepare an Open Space Strategy.

4. Proposed changes to establishment

- 4.1. Consideration has been given to ways in which capacity within the Planning service can be increased to address the increasing workload, changes that will be introduced by the Planning Act and address the age profile of the Service. It is proposed that this will be addressed as follows:
- (1) An advanced planning officer vacancy will be filled at an entry level position (graduate) suitable for recently qualified graduates. This operational change does not require Committee approval but is highlighted to show changes to staffing structure.
 - (2) A second post also at an entry level, planning officer position suitable for recently qualified graduates be established.
- 4.2. The establishment of two new graduate Planner posts will enable the Service to increase capacity and deal with the pressures of the new planning legislation. Moreover, the Service has an ageing workforce and limited capacity for succession planning to deal with gaps in expertise and knowledge as staff retire. These two new posts at this entry level will help to address these issues and make the Service more resilient to deal with future pressures and challenges.
- 4.3. In terms of funding, the additional planning officer post this would be funded by taking account of the vacant advanced planner post being filled at a lower salary and other vacant hours becoming available due to changes in officers working patterns, resulting in a further overall reduction of 0.5 FTE.

5. Employee Implications

- 5.1. The following post should be added to the Community and Enterprise Resources' establishment on a permanent basis:-

Post	Proposed Number of Posts (FTE)	Grade	SCP Range	Hourly Rate	Annual Salary	Gross Cost (inc on costs 30.3%)
Planning Officer	1.0	G2 L 4	SCP55 - 57	£15.56 - £16.04	£28,395 - £29,271	£36,999 - £38,140

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1. This post has been graded using the Council's job evaluation scheme. The filling of the vacant advanced planner post (£53,645) with a graduate planning officer (£38,140) amounts to a salary saving of £15,505. The savings accrued from the changes in the working patterns of three officers amounts to £23,609 (0.5 FTE posts). The overall amount in terms of salary savings is therefore £39,114.
- 6.2 The cost of a further 1.0 FTE Planner post will be £38,140 and this will be funded from salary savings as outlined.

7. Other Implications

- 7.1. The failure to fully resource the Planning Service could result in a fall in performance levels and a reputational risk to the Council. There will also be implications for implementing the additional duties placed upon the Council in the Planning Bill. Addressing the age profile of the service is also a key issue. There are no implications for sustainability in terms of the information contained within this report.

8. Equality Impact Assessment and Consultation Arrangements

- 8.1. This report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy or recommend a change to an existing policy, function or strategy and therefore, no impact assessment is required.
- 8.2. Trade unions have been consulted in terms of the content of this report.

Michael McGlynn
Executive Director (Community and Enterprise Resources)

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Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources)

12 August 2019

Link(s) to Council Objectives/Values/Ambitions

- ◆ Improving the availability, quality and access to housing
- ◆ Working with communities and partners to promote high quality, thriving and sustainable communities
- ◆ Supporting the local economy by providing the right conditions for inclusive growth

Previous References

- ♦ None

List of Background Papers

- ♦ None

Contact for Further Information

If you would like to inspect the background papers or want further information, please contact: -

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