

Report to: **Hub Committee**

Date: **7 June 2022**

Title: **Planning Improvement Plan Update**

Portfolio Area: **Built Environment - Cllr Caroline Mott**

Wards Affected: **All**

Urgent Decision: **N** Approval and clearance obtained: **Y**

Date next steps can be taken: **14 June 2022**

Author: **Drew Powell** Role: **Director of Strategy and Governance**

Contact: Drew.powell@swdevon.gov.uk

Recommendations:

That the Hub Committee:

- i) Endorse the proposed restructure of the Development Management Service, and**
- ii) Notes that the cost of the restructure, £33,000 per annum, will be funded for the first three years from the additional planning income held in the planning earmarked reserve.**

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Members on proposals to restructure the Council's Development Management and Enforcement Service as part of continuing implementation of the Planning Improvement Plan (the Plan) adopted by the Hub Committee on 21st September 2021 (minute HC 30/21 refers).
- 1.2 The purpose of the proposed staffing structure is to add significant additional capacity at a senior level with the appointment of a new Assistant Director for Planning, and by creating dedicated teams to support

the Council and South Hams District Council, respectively, each with a Head of Development Management.

- 1.3 The appointment of the Assistant Director will bring together planning policy and development management, and provide senior level capacity to drive continuous improvement throughout the service, and to help build and maintain strategic partnerships to deliver against corporate ambition.
- 1.4 The proposal has been the subject of a consultation with affected staff that finished on 23rd May 2022. A verbal update on the result of the consultation will be provided at the meeting that may change the financial implications and hence the recommendation.
- 1.5 Subject to the above, it is proposed to implement the changes with effect from 13th June 2022 and advertise the new roles immediately.
- 1.6 In line with delegated authority resolved by Council on 15th February 2022 (minute CM57 refers), the proposals will be funded from the additional planning income, retained within the Planning Earmarked Reserve, for a period of three years for 2022/23, 2023/24 and 2024/25. This equates to £33,000 per annum, a total of £99,000 over 3 years. This is the WDBC share of the staffing costs.
- 1.7 In the event that these costs cannot be funded through additional planning income after Year 3, a report will be brought back to Members as part of the Revenue Budget Proposals for 2025/26.

2. Strategic Context

2.1 The Council's adopted Corporate Strategy, 'A Plan for West Devon', sets out a range of themes and associated aims supported by Thematic Delivery Plans. The Development Management and Enforcement Service forms part of the wider planning function alongside, for example, the Joint Local Plan, Strategic Planning and Neighbourhood planning teams, which are essential to deliver against our strategic aims.

3 Background

- 3.1 In the Autumn of 2021 the Council, jointly with South Hams District Council, engaged and worked with the Planning Advisory Service to develop a comprehensive Planning Improvement Plan. The Plan was adopted in September and is being implemented broadly in line with the agreed timescales.
- 3.2 At that time the Council, in recognition of the demonstrable increase in workload, approved an additional 4 planners and 2 lawyers to support the service. As expected, recruitment has been difficult and aligned with subsequent departures, the team has yet to be operating at full capacity and is currently supported by agency planners.
- 3.3 A number of other changes, included aligning the 'full service' under the Head of Service (HoS) were also agreed. In addition, and in recognition of the clear lack of management support for the HoS, further changes to supervision and management were to be explored and implemented where possible. To date

such changes have not been formalised and have been operating on a temporary basis

3.4 During this time, it has become clear that, regardless of implementing management changes using the existing resources, the improvements sought will not be delivered. There is a lack of capacity in terms of leadership and management under the present model to secure the outcomes needed on a sustainable basis.

3.5 In view of this, a review of future corporate need has been undertaken. The focus of this review has been wider than the existing Development Management and Enforcement Service and includes the wider planning function and foreseeable future needs.

4 Proposed Changes – An Integrated Planning Service

4.1 The proposal to create a new role of Assistant Director of Planning reflects the complexity of managing a planning service across two Councils. The role will take on responsibility for the strategic leadership of the shared service across both councils, with accountability for service delivery and standards.

4.2 The Assistant Director (AD) will be responsible for the overall performance of the service, working with the two Heads of Development Management (DM) to drive continuous improvement. The AD will also be responsible for the delivery of the corporate ambitions set out in 'A Plan for West Devon', budgets, organisational development and providing advice and guidance to SLT and Members. The AD will play a key role working with SLT to develop strategic partnerships across all sectors.

4.3 To add further management capacity, and in addition to the creation of the Assistant Director role, the proposal is to create an extra Head of Development Management role so that each Council has a dedicated Level 3 post.

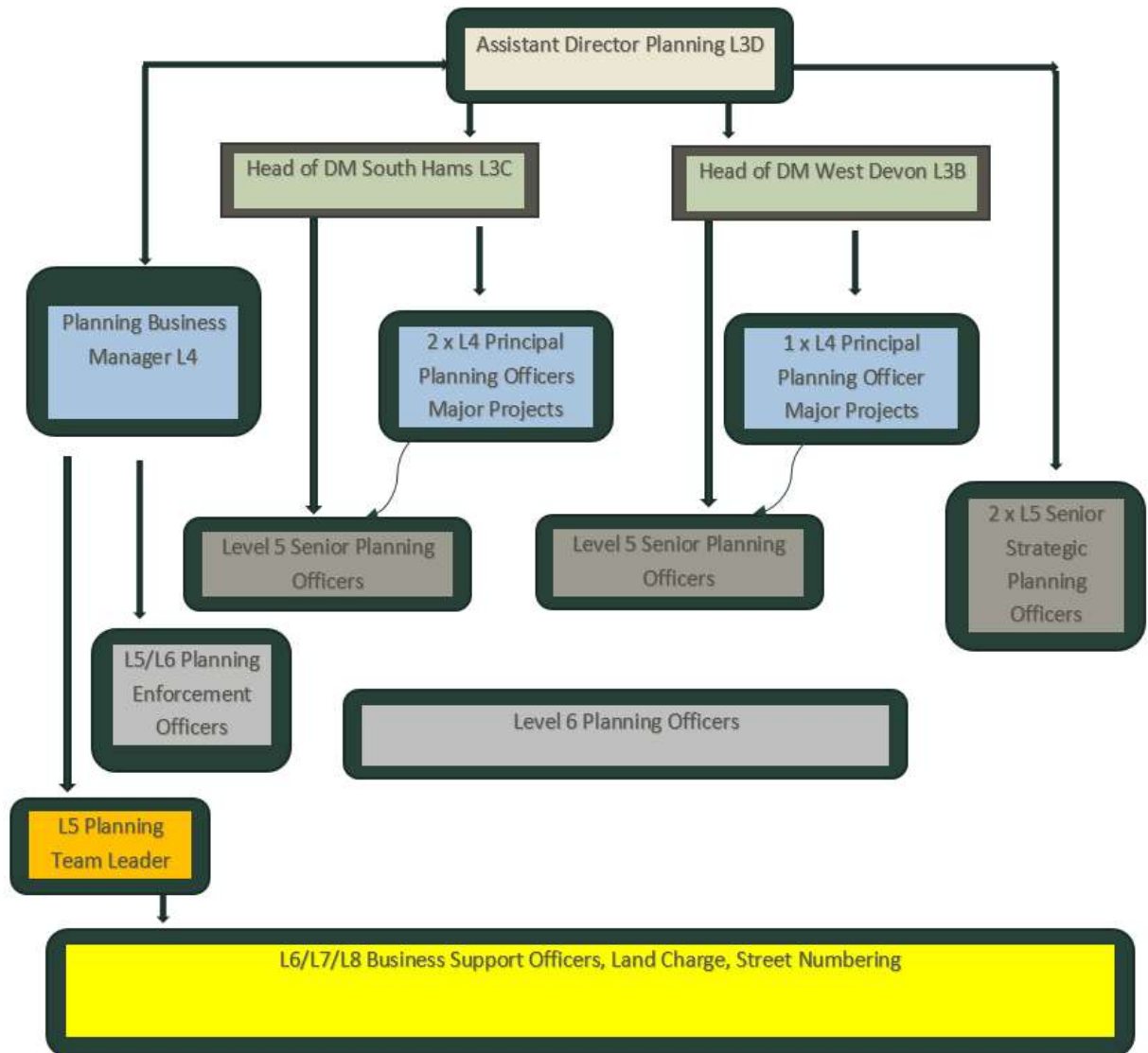
4.4 The Head of Development Management will have responsibility for service delivery and performance within their Council, and will be supported by a dedicated Principal Planner(s) and Senior Planners (subject to flexibility in response to geographical demand).

4.5 The Head of Development Management will be responsible for the line management of the dedicated team, and for a proportion of the shared L6 Planning Officers (who will be aligned with a geographical focus to ensure efficiency where possible). The two Heads will also each have a small allocated case load, and oversee the allocation of cases/applications to relevant officers.

4.6 The existing DM service is also supported by L5 Heritage/Conservation, Tree and Landscape Officers. These officers will, where possible, be managed on a geographical basis but there will need to be flexibility based on demand and service efficiency.

4.7 The Heads of DM will work closely with the relevant Lead Members and Chairs of Committee and be the primary point of contact for their Council.

- 4.8 The proposed new structure has 3 x L4 Principal Planning Officer roles. The main responsibility of the roles will be to manage major planning applications, and to provide professional support, mentoring and guidance to the Senior Planning Officers and Planning Officers. These roles will play a key part in embedding quality assurance and control of the decision making process. To ensure flexibility of the new working structure the job descriptions of these roles will include full management responsibilities.
- 4.9 Due to the historical and anticipated geographical distribution of major planning applications, one of the L4 roles will be assigned West Devon, with the remaining two assigned to West Devon. The Assistant Director, working with the two Heads of DM, will retain the right to allocate major applications across the geographical boundaries to meet business requirements where necessary.
- 4.10 The proposed structure, detailed in simple terms below, is designed to deliver a service that reflects the needs of the community on a local basis but retains the flexibility and resilience afforded by our shared service arrangements. The structure reflects tried and tested organisational design and best practice.



5 Proposed Way Forward

5.1 The proposed structure will provide the additional leadership and management capacity to support delivery of the wider planning service and reflects best practice in organisational design.

5.2 The existing team will, under transitional arrangements, continue to implement the adopted plan as far as capacity will allow pending the new structures implementation.

6 Implications

Implications	Relevant to proposals Y/N	Details and proposed measures to address
Legal/Governance	Y	The continued implementation of the DM and Enforcement Improvement Plan and the new structure will deliver improved governance and decision-making and continue the positive trend of improved performance.
Financial implications to include reference to value for money	N	<p>In line with delegated authority resolved by Council on 15th February 2022 (minute CM57 refers), the proposals will be initially funded from the additional planning income, retained within the Planning Earmarked Reserve, for a period of three years for 2022/23, 2023/24 and 2024/25. This equates to £33,000 per annum, a total of £99,000 over 3 years. This is the WDBC share of the staffing costs.</p> <p>In the event that these costs cannot be funded through additional planning income after Year 3, a report will be brought back to Members as part of the Revenue Budget Proposals for 2025/26.</p> <p>The Planning Reserve has an estimated balance of £147,000 at 31/3/2022 and therefore sufficient funding to finance the proposals in this report.</p>
Risk	Y	That the Council fails to deliver a Planning Service that meets the expectations of the Members and our Customers
Supporting Corporate Strategy	Y	<p>Maximising resources - ensuring that we make the best use of the budget available to ensure value for money.</p> <p>Built Environment – Planning the infrastructure that we need for the future while celebrating our heritage.</p>
Climate Change - Carbon / Biodiversity Impact	N	No direct carbon or diversity impacts arise from this report.
Comprehensive Impact Assessment Implications		
Equality and Diversity		N/a
Safeguarding		N/a
Community Safety, Crime and Disorder		N/a
Health, Safety and Wellbeing		N/a
Other implications		N/a

Supporting Information

Appendices:

None

Background Papers:

None