

Individual Member Decision Record



This form records an individual member decision and is published in accordance with the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 and the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014.

Decision Maker:	Councillor Mark Crane, Leader of the Council
Lead Officer:	Martin Grainger, Head of Planning
Title of Decision:	Planning Resource
Ward(s) Affected:	All
Type of Decision:	<input type="checkbox"/> Key decision <input type="checkbox"/> Non-key decision discharging (or connected to the discharge of) an Executive function <input type="checkbox"/> Specific delegation from Council or Committee <input type="checkbox"/> Grant of permission / licence <input type="checkbox"/> Affecting the rights of an individual <input type="checkbox"/> Awarding a contract or incurring expenditure which materially affects the financial position of the Council <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Decision Under Urgency
Details of decision:	<p>At the end of October in year income was approximately £1,074,570 against the annual budget of £905,700. If we look at the five years pre Covid the yearly average is around £886,717 for the whole year. If we continue on a financial trajectory that reflects a normal year this would take us too around £1,444,570. This would put us around £538,870 ahead of target. This however is a very conservative estimate as we have several large applications expected this financial year e.g., GWRF, TCF. In order to support the increased demand within the service, a virement of income to agency costs is requested.</p> <p>The number of planning applications received over the last two years and the number received in the first 6 months of this year are set out below.</p>

- April 2019 – March 2020 - 1281
- April 2020 – March 2021 - 1341

- **April 2021- September 2021 - 831**
- **Year-end estimate - 1660**

This represents between a 24% - 29% increase in applications. As well as the general high volumes we are dealing with a series of complex developments or super majors as applications or pre apps e.g., Kellingley Colliery; Staynor Hall, major energy applications relating to solar farms and battery storage; Sheburn 2; GWRF interchange, NSIP & DCOs, Crosshills Lane etc.

The structure that was recommended following the Planning Review exercise was designed to deliver around 1200 – 1300 applications. Given the financial envelope it was not possible to the deliver that recommended; effectively that implemented was one senior DM officer down. We have also lost a senior planner and planning project officer in the last 4 months although we will hope to commence new staff shortly. This will not however address the high workloads and the backlog resulting from Covid.

At September Executive a draw down of £128k was approved to support the salaries of agency staff. As these staff were effectively filling posts on the structure the savings made by the vacancies were netted off against the costs. Netting off the monies remaining from the draw down this would require a further £43k to extend the contacts of DM agency staff. Although it would be useful to add some flexibility given, we ask agency staff to work more than 37 hours per week in some instances. Therefore, a figure including around a 10% uplift £47k would be more appropriate.

With regard to the Agency Officer currently providing additional support in the enforcement team, £130k was approved by Executive in September for G&T work. Around £80k of this would need to be reserved for legal costs but £50k is identified for Planning. Of the £50k we intend to spend £25k on a G&T specialist the remainder could be used to support the enforcement agency officers ongoing G&T work and his input into the two G&T Inquiries. If the officer was to continue to work full time this would equate to around 14 weeks (i.e., end of March); if, however, we reduced his time to three days this would actually equate to 24 weeks. This would be an advantage given the likely timing of the two G&T inquiries and is recommended.

	<p>The Leader is asked to approve a virement of £47k from Planning Income to Planning Agency Costs.</p> <p>RESOLVED: The Leader agreed that a virement of £47k from Planning Income to Planning Agency Costs be approved.</p>
Reason for decision:	As this virement is outside of delegation to the Chief Finance Officer and Lead Member for Finance and due to the urgency (contracts expire at the end of December), it requires a decision to be signed off by the Leader (FPR Rule 4).
Alternative options considered and rejected:	Given the workload pressures on the service and the nature of the applications we are currently dealing with there is no realistic, practical alternative.
Member Interests: <i>(Name of any Member who has declared a conflict of interest in relation to the decision and details of any dispensation granted by the Head of Paid Service if appropriate)</i>	
Legal, Financial or other implications:	<p><u>Financial</u></p> <p>The financial implications of this decision is to approve the virement of income of £47k to support the extension of the agency contracts for DM through to the end of March 2022 (this is after netting off the balance remaining from the September 2021 contingency drawdown).</p> <p>Income at the end of October 2021 was already £168k in excess of the approved budget for the year.</p> <p>This requires an urgent decision as the budget virement levels have been exceeded in Development Management for the current financial year and the agency contracts are due to end in the coming weeks.</p>
Background papers:	None.
Contact details	Martin Grainger, Head of Planning

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Signed:	<i>Signature redacted</i> Councillor Mark Crane, Leader of the Council
Date of Decision:	2 December 2021