

Expenditure for Planning Support

Report of Councillor I Pritchard

Cabinet Member for Economic Growth, Development & Environment

Date: 12 March 2019

Agenda Item: 6

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Key Decision? YES

Lichfield
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CABINET

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 There is a present need to procure temporary planning officer support to deal with issues such as permanent recruitment; increased workloads; maternity leave and dedicating existing resources to service improvement work. At the same time, there is a limited availability of suitably qualified and experienced planners in the recruitment market.
- 1.2 The use of recruitment agencies to engage consultant planners is limited due to the existing procurement limits over a rolling 4-year period. It is therefore requested that extensions to the limits for certain recognised specialist agencies is given, to allow greater flexibility for procurement of consultant planners and to ensure that agencies used previously to supply quality consultants may be used going forward. Cabinet endorsement is therefore sought to approve the level of expenditure for each of the agencies set out below. This will allow timely and best value engagement of suitable interim planning consultants when needed, within both Development and Economic Growth Services. Consultants are only used when it is not feasible or physically possible to recruit permanent employees.
- 1.3 Any spend associated with agency, consultant planners will be contained within existing budgets, such as planning fee income or the existing planning fee increase that is targeted on planning services, and no request is being made for additional budget as part of this report.
- 1.4 Officers are also working with the Procurement team to fully explore the option of procurement via framework agreement arrangements going forward. While the work will continue on this alternative procurement, there is a need to put the recommendation forward in this report to provide appropriate professional staffing to deal with present and anticipated service requirements.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Cabinet approves, over a 4-year period (2018/19 to 2021/22), the extension of procurement limits, up to a limit of £150,000 of expenditure from existing budgets, for any of the following recruitment agencies, to allow procurement of temporary planning officer resources:

Matchtech Group Ltd, Oyster Partnership, Vivid Resourcing, Park Avenue Recruitment, Carrington West, Macdonald and Company and G2 Recruitment

3. Background

- 3.1 There is a current need to cover temporary resource demands within the Council’s planning teams. Such demands arise for various reasons, such as timescales for successful recruitment to vacant posts; high and demanding workloads; maternity leave; and dedicating existing resources to service improvement initiatives. At the same time, there is a limited availability of suitably qualified and experienced planners in the consultancy recruitment market. Consultants are only used when it is not feasible or physically possible to recruit permanent employees.
- 3.2 The Council has previously used Urban Vision, via a Framework agreement, to provide consultancy support on a range of specialist planning and environmental matters. However, this Framework Agreement has expired and, due to organisational changes for the provider, suitable interim planner support is no longer available from them.
- 3.3 Temporary interim consultant planners have therefore been engaged through specialist recruitment agencies. Going forward, the use of appropriate Framework Agreements to engage interim consultant planners will be fully explored via the Council’s procurement team. However, at present there are existing arrangements in place to seek competitive quotations from specialist agencies and this procurement route has proved successful. This direct procurement will therefore allow the present and anticipated needs to be met while other options are being explored with the Procurement team.
- 3.4 It is requested that Cabinet approval be given to extend procurement limits to any of the named organisations in the Recommendation section of this report, up to a limit of £150,000 for any organisation. This will allow officers to seek three competitive quotations from specialist recruitment agencies in accordance with contract procedure rules to address temporary resource demands. The agencies have been selected due to their specialist nature in providing planning staff and that they will allow at least three competitive quotations to be sought from the relevant part of the recruitment market.
- 3.5 It is to be noted that any spend associated with the procurement of consultant planners will be contained within existing budgets and no request is being made for additional budget as part of this report. These existing budgets are, for example, general planning fee income or the existing planning fee increase that is targeted on planning services. The current level of spend, commitments and additional procurement limits up to £150,000 per organisation is set out in the table below:

| Organisation | Spend and Commitments to 26/02/2019 | Commitments anticipated 2019 | Additional procurement limit to 2021/22 | Procurement limit for 4 years to 2021/22 |
|---------------------|--|-------------------------------------|--|---|
| Vivid Resourcing | 24,000 | | 126,000 | 150,000 |
| Carrington West | 13,000 | | 137,000 | 150,000 |
| Matchtech | 67,000 | 42,000 | 41,000 | 150,000 |
| Oyster Partnership | | | 150,000 | 150,000 |
| Macdonald & Company | | | 150,000 | 150,000 |
| G2 | | | 150,000 | 150,000 |
| Park Avenue | | 25,000 | 125,000 | 150,000 |

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| Alternative Options | Alternative options to the use of framework consultants (who have already been successful in tendering via the open market) would be to use alternative consultancy support on a case-by-case tender basis. This would add delay to the process; incurring potential costs at appeal (unreasonable delay) and no guarantee that appropriate (without conflicts of interest) and more cost effective consultants could be procured within very short time-frames. |
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| Consultation | None |
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| Financial Implications | It is intended all costs associated with required consultant planners will be met within existing budgets - accordingly no additional budget is requested. |
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| Contribution to the Delivery of the Strategic Plan | The development of planning policy, processing of planning applications and defending appeals in an effective and timely manner, ensures the delivery of additional housing, businesses and essential infrastructure for the District (planned economic growth). |
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| Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Implications | None |
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| Crime & Safety Issues | None |
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| GDPR/Privacy Impact Assessment | None |
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| | Risk Description | How We Manage It | Severity of Risk (RYG) |
|---|---|---|---|
| A | Procurement Challenge | Engaged with procurement team on whether there were any alternative options to the proposed procurement option such as a framework agreement. Confirmed that this was not appropriate at present and further development of this option is proposed going forward. Confirmed with procurement team that the approach set out in this report is appropriate. | Yellow. The Council could be challenged on the nature of the procurement. |
| B | Failure to secure further temporary officer support would impact on the effective and efficient processing of planning applications and appeals and the delivery of service improvements – undermining the delivery of the Local Plan and planned | To extend and secure temporary officer cover, through any consultancy so long as best value is demonstrated. | Yellow. The Council would be at risk of failing to effectively process planning applications and secure service improvements – impacting on planned economic growth with resultant impacts on housing supply and business growth (reduced New Homes |

sustainable economic growth and placing undue pressure on planning officers within the team who already have high workloads.

Bonus and business rate retention)

Background documents: MTFS report to Cabinet Feb 2019

Relevant web links: None