

| | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|--|--|----|
| Subject: | Shared Planning service across Rossendale and Hyndburn | | Status: | For Publication | |
| Report to: | Council | | Date: | 11 th December 2013 | |
| Report of: | Director of Business | | Portfolio Holder: | Operational Services and Development Control | |
| Key Decision: | No - reserved for Council | Forward Plan <input type="checkbox"/> | General Exception <input type="checkbox"/> | Special Urgency <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Equality Impact Assessment: | | Required: | No | Attached: | No |
| Biodiversity Impact Assessment | | Required: | No | Attached: | No |
| Contact Officer: | Stuart Sugarman | | Telephone: | 01706 252422 | |
| Email: | stUARTSUGARMAN@rossendalebc.gov.uk | | | | |

| | |
|-----|--|
| 1. | RECOMMENDATIONS |
| 1.1 | Members agree the principle of a shared planning service with Hyndburn Borough Council based on the structure in appendix 1 and delegate to the Portfolio Holder and Director of Business the terms of the joint service level agreement to underpin the shared service. |
| 1.2 | To authorise the Chief Planning Officer, Planning Manager and Principal Planning Officer to determine planning applications on behalf of Rossendale Borough Council. |

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

2.1 To consider the potential for a shared planning service between Rossendale and Hyndburn Council.

3. CORPORATE PRIORITIES

3.1 The matters discussed in this report impact directly on the following of the Council's corporate priorities:

- Responsive Value for Money Services: This priority is about the Council working collaboratively, being a provider, procurer and a commissioner of services that are efficient and that meet the needs of local people.

4. RISK ASSESSMENT IMPLICATIONS

4.1 All the issues raised and the recommendation in this report involve risk considerations as set out below:

- Failure to maintain an efficient, well organized and cost effective Planning service risks legal proceedings being taken against the Council, and risks members of the community being dissatisfied with the action of the Council.

5. BACKGROUND AND OPTIONS

5.1 Both authorities recognise that the presence of a positive and efficient planning service will play a major role in attracting development into their areas, but reductions in fee income coupled with continued financial pressures make this increasingly difficult to provide.

- 5.2 The Government encourage local authorities to develop more efficient ways of working through the development of shared or joint services and this has already happened, to differing degrees, across a number of different local authorities and service areas.
- 5.3 Officers from Rossendale and Hyndburn Borough Councils have both agreed (subject to member approval) to develop shared services across planning and building control. The report includes structure diagrams that illustrate the existing and proposed employee structures within Planning. The Building Control shared service was previously agreed by Full Council.
- 5.4 The proposed structure does not involve any changes being made to the salary grades of individual posts and individuals will remain on their existing terms and conditions.
- 5.5 Wherever possible employees will remain with their current employer. It is not envisaged at this stage that any employees would be formally transferred from one authority to another.
- 5.6 Both Rossendale and Hyndburn have consulted employees and Trade Unions on these proposals in line with relevant legal requirements and the policies of both Councils. There will also continue to be individual consultation with any employee placed at risk of redundancy, in accordance with statutory requirements, to consider ways in which this can be avoided.
- 5.7 The development of a shared service across the two authorities will initially realise approximately £90k savings each for both authorities. The structure has been designed to ensure that the savings are equally distributed between the two parties.

Background

- 5.8 Rossendale and Hyndburn are district councils within the County of Lancashire. Both authorities are within the Pennine Lancashire Group of authorities and they share a common boundary.
- 5.9 The two authorities have much in common:
- Hyndburn population 80,734; Rossendale population 67,982 (census 2011);
 - Similar housing issues – large proportion of terraced housing;
 - Similar employment issues – low wage economy; and,
 - Similar landscape and environmental issues.
- 5.10 The planning services in the two authorities also have similarities:
- Both authorities have an adopted Core Strategy and are working towards the preparation of the remaining elements of the LDF;
 - Both authorities have witnessed a decline in the number of planning applications submitted and the associated fee income, but have similar workloads;
 - Both authorities have already reduced the size of their services and introduced efficiencies as a means of reducing costs. These pressures are set to continue for the foreseeable future;
 - As already agreed by Council the Building Control Teams of both authorities have taken steps to develop a shared service and the back office systems for building control are now being merged.

- 5.11 From a financial perspective both authorities are also under significant pressure to reduce their costs whilst at the same time maintain a good level of service. The Government promotes the development of shared services as a means of seeking to reduce costs and improve standards of service.
- 5.12 At a time when there is pressure upon local authorities to reduce costs and find more efficient ways of working the development of a shared service offers a number of opportunities:
- Increased professional capacity in otherwise small service areas.
 - Increased capacity to cover when officers are on leave or sick.
 - Increased opportunities to develop more efficient back office support.
 - Increased opportunities to consider shared computer services.
 - Opportunities to develop shared policy and the development of shared member training.
 - Increased ability for the development management services of both authorities to move towards a cost-neutral position.
- 5.13 The development of a shared service will take place in a phased manner, the degree of “sharing” steadily increasing. Although this initial report focuses on the potential financial benefits, the relationship between the two authorities will develop in the following way:
- Sharing of managerial costs with relevant officers equally dividing their time between the two authorities. This would utilise existing vacancies but would also require office accommodation to be made available for officers.
 - The development of a shared planning team with officers from both authorities working together as a single team. This may necessitate the location of staff within the same offices.
- 5.14 It is important to stress that the development of a shared service is not seen by either authority as a “take-over”. As far as practically possible, employees will continue to be employed by the same authority that they are currently employed with. However, employees will be expected to deal with planning matters on behalf of both Rossendale and Hyndburn Councils and appropriate delegation arrangements will be put in place to enable this to happen.
- 5.15 The development of a shared service will require flexible working from the team. Recognising that the aim is to develop a shared service, it is intended that employees will be equally distributed between Hyndburn and Rossendale but that there could be movement between offices (for example, through hot-desking or mobile working).
- 5.16 The development of a shared service has the potential to deliver a number of benefits:
- The ability to increase knowledge and capacity within the services of two relatively small planning services;
 - The ability to deliver a variety of efficiency savings that would potentially include:
 - Salary savings.
 - A reduction in management costs.
 - A reduction in the cost of delivering planning policy through the production of shared evidence and policy documents.
 - Reduced procurement costs.
 - The ability to deliver a variety of office savings that could include:

- IT costs
- Subscription costs
- Training and development costs
- Office accommodation costs
- Savings associated with attendance at meetings

Management Structure

- 5.17 There are currently two senior managers at Hyndburn and Rossendale. These two officers will be ring fenced for the Chief Planning Officer and Planning Manager positions, as shown on the proposed structure diagram. These two posts will require each Council's authority to determine planning applications.
- 5.18 The Chief Planning Officer position will be expected to report to the Corporate Management Teams of both authorities and primarily undertake a strategic management and planning role, recognising that a flexible approach will be needed for this to succeed for both authorities.
- 5.19 The Planning Manager position would with the support of the Chief Planning Officer be expected to manage the day to day work of the two main service teams, Development Management and Planning Policy and oversee the work of the technical / administration support team.
- 5.20 There would be a need for the Chief Officer and Planning Manager to work closely together to ensure that the priorities of the service are delivered. It is anticipated that the priorities would be focussed around the following:
- The Local Plan / Local Development Framework to be delivered in line with a shared Local Development Scheme that would be prepared, taking advantage of opportunities to develop shared documents wherever possible.
 - The need to take a positive and pro-active approach to development and ensure that all planning applications and appeals are managed within the relevant timescales.
 - The need to deliver an efficient and cost-effective planning service across Rossendale and Hyndburn.

Development Management

- 5.21 The Development Management services of the two authorities have a central role to play in the future development of both Boroughs. The service must operate efficiently and effectively and should take a positive approach to development. The Government places significant weight on the need to determine planning applications within the relevant timescales and both Hyndburn and Rossendale should be seeking to determine all planning applications within the prescribed time periods (8 and 13 weeks).
- 5.22 To do this efficiently it is necessary to ensure that the structure reflects the types and complexity of planning applications submitted:
- Applications for prior approval: to be managed by admin / technical staff unless an objection is received.
 - Householder / minor / other planning applications that are relatively straightforward (this would include some major planning applications and appeals): to be managed by a core team that would comprise four Planning Officers that would be

supported by the technical / administrative team.

- Major and more complex planning applications: to be managed by a Principal Planning Officer who would also be supported by the Technical and Administrative team and if necessary with the support of the Planning Manager and / or the Chief Planning Officer.

5.23 At present both Rossendale and Hyndburn employ a Principal Planning Officer. The structure proposes that a single Principal Planning Officer would work across both areas and the existing Principal Planning Officers will be ring-fenced for this position. The successful postholder will require each Council's authority to determine planning applications in accordance with the delegations in our constitution.

5.24 The majority of the planning applications that are submitted in Rossendale and Hyndburn are for householder developments or minor proposals. A team of four Planning Officers is proposed to manage these applications and undertake other planning work that is appropriate to that grade.

5.25 Hyndburn and Rossendale currently employ 2 Assistant Planning Officers on a temporary contract. It is intended that these posts will be made available to any permanent member of staff at risk of redundancy provided they are suitable and wish to undertake that role, albeit at a lower grade.

5.26 It is recognised that Development Management has a high political profile. In addition, Development Management is based on a more specific geographic area and officers need to be able to readily visit sites. For these reasons it will be necessary to have an office presence in both Rossendale and Hyndburn and enable officers to use more than one office base.

5.27 Both authorities also employ different back office software systems. Rossendale are currently implementing an IDOX system across their Council as a whole and Hyndburn currently use Northgate supported by IDOX. Hyndburn will look to move on to IDOX as part of this shared service plan.

5.28 Efficient back office support from technical and administrative employees is essential for a strong development management service. Both authorities employ a number of staff in this role at the current time and at this stage no changes are proposed to this element of the service.

5.29 **Planning Policy**

5.30 It is proposed that the shared Planning Policy service would comprise two Principal Planning Officers, who would be supported by a Planning Assistant. The Conservation Officer would also form part of that team.

5.31 There are currently three Principal Planning Officers in Rossendale and Hyndburn and it would be necessary for existing Principal Planning Officers to be ring-fenced for these two positions.

5.32 There are opportunities to prepare a shared / joint Development Management DPD for Hyndburn and Rossendale. This would generate a variety of efficiency savings throughout its development. It would also be possible to develop shared evidence documents and other supporting documentation such as the Annual Monitoring Report.

COMMENTS FROM STATUTORY OFFICERS:

6. SECTION 151 OFFICER

6.1 Financial matters are noted in the report and will form part of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.

7. MONITORING OFFICER

7.1 All legal implications are commented upon in the body of the report.

8. POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND CONSULTATION CARRIED OUT

8.2 Consultation with Statutory Officers, Legal Officers, Trade unions and officers in the planning department has already taken place.

9. CONCLUSION

9.1 Members are asked to agree the principle of a shared planning service with Hyndburn Borough Council based on the structure in appendix 1 and delegate to the Portfolio Holder and Director of Business the terms of the joint service level agreement to unpin the shared service. A similar proposal is being put before Hyndburn Borough Council.

Background Papers

| Document | Place of Inspection |
|--|--|
| Existing and shares structure The Constitution of the Council | www.rossendale.gov.uk/constitution |

Existing Structures

**Chief Planning and
Transportation Officer - 11**

**Head of Development M'gement
(vacant) 12**

**Principal Planning Officer DM
13**

**Assistant Planning Officer
14**

**Assistant Planning Officer
15**

**Enforcement Officer
16**

**Planning Technician
(0.5) 22**

**Admin Officer
24**

**Principal Planning Officer
Policy - 17**

**Assistant Planning Officer
(0.5) Policy - 18**

**Trees and Woodlands Officer
(0.5) 19**

**Conservation Officer
(0.2) 20**

**Environmental Initiatives Officer
(0.8) 21**

**Planning Technician
(0.5) 23**

**Admin Officer
25**

**Planning Manager
1**

**Principal Planning Officer DM
2**

**Planning Officer DM
3**

**Planning Officer
4**

**Admin Manager (Planning)
9**

**Principal Planning Officer
Policy - 5**

**Principal Planning Officer
Policy 6**

**Planning Assistant
Policy 7**

**Technical Planning Assistant
Policy 8**

**Conservation Officer
10**

**HYNDBURN
EMPLOYEES**

**ROSSENDALE
EMPLOYEES**

