

## Report to Cabinet

Thursday, 8 June 2023

By the Cabinet Members for Environmental Health,  
Recycling & Waste and for Local Economy & Place



### DECISION REQUIRED

Not Exempt

## Environmental Health & Licensing and Economic Development Staffing

### Executive Summary

This report asks Cabinet to ask Council to establish budgets for extra posts in Environmental Health & Licencing and Economic Development. These posts are needed to allow the Council to discharge its statutory functions, put in place a succession plan in Economic Development and administer the Shared Prosperity Fund.

### Recommendations

Cabinet is recommended to ask Council to:

- i) Approve the £41,200 increase in the 2023/24 salaries budget to accommodate the creation two extra posts, one in Environmental Health team and a temporary post in Economic Development.

### Reasons for Recommendations

- i) All local authorities are under a statutory duty to inspect housing and ensure that the powers used to tackle housing problems are effectively discharged. The increase in awareness of damp issues, new guidance on damp and in the increase in the number of applications houses in multiple occupation has led to a need for an extra employee permanently in the Environmental Health Private Sector Housing Team.
- iii) In the Economic Development Service there is a need for a temporary role to carry out the extra work associated with the Shared Prosperity Fund and get the service prepared for the likely full or phased retirement of its three officers.

**Background Papers:** none

**Wards affected:** (All Wards);

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## **Background Information**

### **1 Introduction and Background**

- 1.1 National changes in the rules for private sector landlords, and pressure on Horsham District housing, especially since the 2021 water neutrality direction, have led to accommodation buy to let landlords leaving the rented sector at a time where demand for cheaper rented accommodation is growing. This had led to a significant increase in number of licensing applications for Houses in Multiple Occupation in the last year. The approval process for Houses in Multiple Occupation is complex and involves extensive liaison with other regulatory partners including Planning and the Fire and Rescue Service.
- 1.2 Following the death of a small child in Rochdale due to damp in 2022, awareness of damp and mould risks has led to a doubling of housing complaints received by the Housing Team in Environmental Health in the last year.
- 1.3 New government guidance is to be issued on damp and mould growth in homes in summer 2023. This will impose additional burden on regulatory services.
- 1.4 These three changes due to matters outside our control led to an increased workload in the Housing Team in Environmental Health that can no longer be covered by the existing team.
- 1.5 The Economic Development team faces a key challenge over the next few years arising from the older age profile of three senior members of the team. The Head of Economic Development and the two Economic Development Officers are all approaching retirement age and are eligible for flexible retirement. Whilst no applications have yet been made, management have looked at succession planning now in anticipation of future requests. It is important the Council maintains the resources needed to continue the essential business support and ensure that the two major external funding programmes continue on track. At the same time the workload in the team has increased due to the projects arising from the Shared Prosperity Fund. The senior team members do not have time available to carry out these projects and train officers to replace them in the future.

### **2 Relevant Council policy**

- 2.1 Paragraph 3.1.4 of the 2019-23 Corporate Plan commits the Council, through the Local Plan, to *“Use regulatory powers to maintain the safety standards of premises.”*
- 2.2 Paragraph 5.4.3 of the 2019-2023 Corporate Plan sets out the principle that the Council will *“Develop a workforce plan to ensure we have the skills we need to deliver the services our residents need in the future.”*

### **3 Details**

#### **Environmental Health**

- 3.1 The increase in statutory work on Houses in Multiple Occupation and work arising from damp and mould reports requires the creation of an additional Environmental Health Officer post in the Housing Team. Increased income generated by the licences for the additional Houses in Multiple Occupation will only partially fund the

additional costs. The estimated increase in net expenditure is set out in the resources section of the report.

## **Economic Development**

- 3.2 To ensure a managed transition from the current senior officers in the team, it is necessary to create an extra role to bring in talent now and allow time to train up members of the Economic Development team to step up into more senior posts. The Head of Economic Development has highlighted that introducing specific outputs to demonstrate the acquisition of new skills and experience would allow the junior officers to progress to the senior positions in the period prior to the potential retirement of the more senior officers. Associated with this acquisition of skills an additional pay grade will be added to these officers' roles to be used as they progress with their development.
- 3.3 Management also proposes the creation of an additional temporary (two year) Assistant Economic Development Officer post to help deliver the Shared Prosperity Fund and also to potentially develop as part of the succession plan. This is aimed at those Year 2 and Year 3 projects that have been agreed in principle, but which do not have detailed project plans. This post will also need to liaise with and support external partners in bringing forward the projects. There is an opportunity for this post to gain experience of external funding programme, shadowing one of the Economic Development Officers who has a significant amount of expertise in seeking and administering external funding streams.
- 3.4 The estimated increase in net expenditure is set out in the resources section of the report.

## **4 Next Steps**

- 4.1 The proposals included in this report need to be discussed and approved by Cabinet who can then recommend to Full Council for approval.

## **5 Views of the Policy Development Advisory Group and outcome of consultations**

- 5.1 The Chief Executive, Director of Resources, Director of Place and Director of Communities were consulted and provided recommendations on how to proceed.
- 5.2 Legal Services and the Monitoring Officer are aware and advised this matter is put to Full Council for approval before the changes can be implemented.
- 5.3 Human Resources & Organisational Development Manager was consulted and provided advice on how to proceed.
- 5.4 Due to the change of Council it was not possible to take this report to a Policy Development Advisory Group however the report was circulated to the new members of the Recycling, Waste & Environment Health and Economy & Regeneration Policy Development Advisory Groups.

## **6 Other courses of action considered but rejected**

### **Environmental Health**

- 6.1 Reducing expenditure and or standards in other parts of the service to allow redeployment of resources. There are limited short-term and no long-term opportunities for this given the statutory obligations that the service operates under.
- 6.2 Increase fees e.g., charging of landlords where notices are issued. - In line with Government guidance, we serve notice (and charge a fee) only after engagement has failed to obtain compliance. To operate outside of guidance is not appropriate.
- 6.3 Reallocate resources. This has been implemented as a short-term solution but the impact on the department is not sustainable.

### **Economic Development**

- 6.4 To retain the structure as is. Should the three senior members of the team leave, then there would be a need to recruit. However, there would be a significant impact on the delivery of the service with the potential for three senior members to leave in a short time period and the market for Economic Development Officers without substantial regeneration opportunities is very tight. The current team does not have the resources to take forward the year 2 and year 3 of the Shared Prosperity Fund nor to support the implementation of agreed public realm improvements through business engagement.

## **7 Resource consequences**

- 7.1 The increase in staffing and the extension of the career grades will lead to an increase in the salaries budget for the organisation.

### **Environmental Health**

- 7.2 As the changes will not be implemented until late Summer 2023, the estimated impact on the 2023/24 financial year is a £25,000 increase in the Environmental Health & Licencing salaries budget. Up to a further £27,380 will be required in the 2024/25 revenue budget.

### **Economic Development**

- 7.3 The new two-year post would be implemented Summer 2023. The estimated impact on the 2023/24 financial year is a £16,200 increase in the Economic Development salaries budget. A further £8,000 will be required in the 2024/25 revenue budget. The two Assistant Economic Development Officer posts would also have the potential to move up the agreed career scales, with the full costs not incurred until 2024/25 at the earliest, dependant on the speed of career progression. The net annual increase in the budget for the 2 years is £24,200.

## **8 Legal considerations and implications**

- 8.1 To increase the salaries budget the approval of the Full Council is required to authorise the increase.

## **9 Risk assessment**

- 9.1 There is a danger that not implementing these changes could lead to a reputational risk to the Council and possibly litigation should there be a failure to discharge our statutory functions fully.
- 9.2 The key risk is the disruption to the Economic Development service and the delivery of support to our local businesses. There is a risk in relation to the delivery of the Shared Prosperity Fund, as all funding under this scheme has to be spent by March 2025.

## **10 Procurement implications**

- 10.1 There are no procurement implications associated with this proposal.

## **11. Equalities and Human Rights implications / Public Sector Equality Duty**

- 11.1 In Environmental Health the work is the same as currently undertaken so there is no change in policy requiring an Equalities Impact Assessment. Having this post in place may ensure a better quality of housing more quickly for some customers with protected characteristics.
- 11.2 In Economic Development the change has no direct impact on equalities or Human Rights.

## **12 Environmental implications**

- 12.1 There are no environmental implications associated with these proposals.

## **13 Other considerations**

- 13.1 Implementing price increases has no additional impact in relation to General Data Protection Regulation or Crime & Disorder.