

Supplementary Questions to Cabinet 18 June 2024 from Cllr Ian Thorn to Cllr Nick Botterill

Question

Can you outline exactly where this money[Wiltshire Council invests an extra £1m into improving planning service] is being spent?

Response

The £1m investment is to deliver an improved planning service for Wiltshire providing more opportunity in terms of career progression routes, greater capacity at the senior level to support strategic planning and major applications and focus on delivering customer-focussed service improvements. This will allow improved speed of decision making and hopefully improved staff moral and retention, whilst ensuring effective staffing so as to be able to focus on delivering against both the Business Plan priorities and those set out in the Local Plan. As part of this the service has developed a campaign to recruit:

- 5 new Principal Planning Officer roles across Development Management and Strategic Planning – this will provide additional capacity for the most complex strategic applications, freeing up the Planning Manager to focus on Managing and developing staff and provide additional capacity at the most senior level;
- 2 new Principal Planning Officers to support strategic plan making and monitoring, and one Senior Planning Officer
- 2 Principal Enforcement Officers and 2 Senior Enforcement Officers to develop and implement improved Enforcement Policy, delivering more preventative measures and increasing enforcement action where required;
- 2 additional planning officers – one senior and one Level 2 Planning Officer- to support and strengthen the Neighbourhood Planning process;
- Strengthen Minerals & Waste Planning, with the introduction of a new team supported by a Principal Planning Officer, 2 Level 2 Planning Officers and a Level 1 Planning Officer;
- 1 Arboriculture Officer to provide a more robust service in protecting trees in Wiltshire; and finally,
- 2 new Graduates through our National Graduate Development Programme Scheme

I hope this additional detail helps.

Question

A really comprehensive answer. Presumably the investment in new staff will create costs going forward. Does the £1 million support these initiatives over more than one year? Or will we find an additional £1 million ever year?

Response

The answer is yes the overall planning budget has been increased to pay for these additional posts so there will be ongoing annual cost. That having been said the plan with the increased staffing is to develop additional income streams which will cover some of these costs – for example principal planners will be able to look at Planning Performance Agreements which hitherto we have not had the resources to offer as well as developing the suite of timely pre-app advice which not only brings in income but saves subsequent costs when considering applications. Also as you may remember, government finally agreed to an increase in planning fees. All in all and taking into account efficiencies arising from smarter working, the overall net cost in future is anticipated as significantly less than £1m pa.