

North East Derbyshire District Council

Cabinet

17 December 2014

Medium Term Financial Plan

**Report No: PRK/36/14/BM of Councillor P R Kerry, Portfolio Holder with
Responsibility for Economy, Finance and Regeneration**

This report is public

Purpose of the Report

- To seek Cabinet's endorsement of a proposal to request the Chief Executive to use his delegated powers in order to amend the staffing establishment within the Revenues and Benefits team.

1 Report Details

Revenue and Benefits Team

- 1.1 The Council's Revenues and Benefits team is a key frontline service which deals with payment of Housing and related benefits and the collection of Council Tax and National Non Domestic Rates. The team comprises some 38.9 FTE's with the structure having been reduced over previous financial years in order to minimise costs. As part of this process funding has been moved from funding the staffing establishment into agency staff and overtime elements in the budget to allow the flexibility to meet peaks in workload which occur at certain periods of the year and to cover for staff sickness, maternity leave, etc.
- 1.2 Given the current levels of staffing performance is good with the time to process a new benefit claim being an average of 21 days, with 8 days for a change of circumstances and collection rates for both Council Tax and Non Domestic rates in excess of 97%. Although current performance levels are good these need to be maintained to provide an appropriate level of service to local residents. Revenues and Benefits is also a service where if performance 'dips' additional pressures arise from people chasing up outstanding claims which further hinders overall turnaround levels. There is therefore a clear risk that if performance were allowed to deteriorate that this could result in further deterioration as it became harder to operate the current automated processes.
- 1.3 The processing team within the Revenues section comprises 2 team leaders and 10.5 FTE processing assistants. Following a recent internal promotion there is a vacant processing assistant post of 0.5 FTE. Normally we would advertise this post to bring us back to full establishment. However in the next three months 3 of the processors (2.6 FTE) will begin periods of maternity leave. In the past to cover

maternity leave amongst the processing staff, due to the specialist nature and length of time it takes to train a new member of staff, we have used a combination overtime and external agency staff. To fill the 0.5 vacancy and to help reduce the reliance on overtime and external agency staff - which are relatively expensive - it is considered to be more appropriate to recruit an additional full time member of staff in the revenues processing team. Whilst there will be a training requirement associated with any new member of staff the time taken to get them to a productive level will be shorter and it is also considered that a full time post may be more likely to attract experienced people to apply. This approach is likely to represent a cost effective alternative and reduce the amount of overtime or agency staff required to maintain the level of service.

- 1.4 The costs of bringing an additional 0.5 FTE post onto the staffing establishment will be met from within the approved budget for the service although this will require a virement from agency staffing and overtime into permanent staff budgets. As such it is recommended that Cabinet endorse the proposal to request the Chief Executive to use his delegated powers in order to amend the staffing establishment within the Revenues and Benefits team

2 Conclusions and Reasons for Recommendation

- 2.1 To maintain the service that the Council offers to local residents while securing the financial efficiencies necessary to operate effectively against a background of ongoing reductions in the level of Central Government financial support for local authorities.
- 2.2 To ensure that the Revenues and Benefits team is adequately resourced and equipped to provide an effective service top local residents.

3 Consultation and Equality Impact

- 3.1 The proposals within this report are concerned with securing more efficient and effective Council services. Given the limited changes proposed a formal process of consultation is not considered to be appropriate.

4 Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

- 4.1 Alternative options (eg the use of Agency Staff and overtime) are considered throughout the report.

5 Implications

5.1 Finance and Risk Implications

- The maximum cost of a 0.5 FTE benefits processor role including overheads is £12,500 per annum.
- The proposals within this report are intended to mitigate the risk of a decline in the performance of the Revenues and Benefits service.

5.2 Legal Implications including Data Protection

- 5.2.1 There are no Legal or Data Protection issues arising directly from this report.

5.3 Human Resources Implications

5.3.1 These are covered throughout the report.

6 Recommendations

- 6.1 That Cabinet request that the Chief Executive utilise his delegated powers in order to action an increase in the Revenues and Benefits staffing establishment of one Benefits processor the costs of which will be funded from within current approved budgets.

7 Decision Information

Is the decision a Key Decision? (A Key Decision is one which results in income or expenditure to the Council of £50,000 or more or which has a significant impact on two or more District wards)	No
District Wards Affected	All indirectly.
Links to Corporate Plan priorities or Policy Framework	Customer Focussed Services – Providing Excellent customer focussed services. Strategic Organisational Development – Continually improving our organisation

8 Document Information

Appendix No	Title
N/A	
Background Papers (These are unpublished works which have been relied on to a material extent when preparing the report. They must be listed in the section below. If the report is going to Cabinet (NEDDC) or Executive (BDC) you must provide copies of the background papers)	
Report Author	Contact Number
Bryan Mason, Executive Director – Operations	(01246) 217154