



FOR PUBLICATION

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

Thursday, 22 February 2024

Report of the Executive Director - Place

Acceptance of Grant Funding Offer from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

(Cabinet Member for Infrastructure and Environment)

1. Divisions Affected

1.1 County-wide.

2. Key Decision

2.1 This is not a Key Decision.

3. Purpose

3.1 To seek Cabinet approval to accept grant funding of £100,000 from the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities from its Planning Skills Delivery Funding Stream.

4. Information and Analysis

4.1 The Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) Planning Skills Delivery Funding Stream (PSDF) is part of the Government's Capacity and Capability Programme (CCP) and will provide £24 million to local authorities over a two year period to help clear the backlog of planning applications and prepare for the implementation of proposed planning reforms set out in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023.

- 4.2 On 24 July 2023, DLUHC published details of its PSDF and invited bids for funding up to £100,000 from local planning authorities to assist in dealing with backlogs of planning applications or providing opportunities for filling skills gaps to deal with the new planning reforms.
- 4.3 In its invitation for bids, DLUHC recognised that many local planning authorities, as well as the wider planning sector, were facing capacity and capability challenges. To ensure that local authorities were well equipped and supported to deliver development now, as well as being ready to deliver the changes set out in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act, Government has developed a programme of support with partners across the planning sector through its CCP. The programme aims to provide the direct support to local authorities to tackle issues such as attracting more/new planners into local government, upskilling existing planners, and/or further developing the future pipeline into the profession.
- 4.4 To support bids for the PSDF, DLUHC required bidding authorities to provide detailed evidence setting out the nature of their resource and capacity difficulties, particularly in respect of the scale and nature of any backlogs of undetermined planning applications.
- 4.5 On behalf of the Council, the Assistant Director of Regulatory Services submitted a bid for £100,000 to deal with the processing of the backlog of minerals and waste applications. Detailed evidence provided in the bid highlighted that the vast majority of undetermined planning applications were for very large scale, complex applications, particularly for minerals developments. The bid also highlighted that issues around backlog related to both the number and complexity of applications and to ongoing staffing issues caused by a shortage of available/experienced planners. This skills gap has therefore been filled in recent times by the engagement of two senior and experienced development management agency workers. The main basis of the Council's funding bid, therefore, was to engage two senior and experienced agency workers for a further period (six months) to help deal with processing of the applications backlog.
- 4.6 On 19 December 2023, the Council was formally notified by DLUHC that its bid had been successful for the full amount of £100,000. DLUHC now requires the Council to formally accept the offer of funding. Cabinet is therefore asked to accept the offer of funding on behalf of the Council.

5. Consultation

5.1 None required as part of conditions of submission of bids.

6. Alternative Options Considered

6.1 Option 1: Do nothing – By doing nothing and not accepting the offer of grant funding, the Council would either have to fund the employment of two agency workers itself or not employ the agency workers at all. The latter would result in a worsening of the current position relating to the backlog of undetermined major minerals and waste planning applications.

6.2 Option 2: Do something different – No further funding routes are available to help address the backlog of work in the Planning Service. Taking front line staff from new/ current applications and re-directing them to tackling the backlog will only result in new applications becoming part of the problem in the medium term.

7. Implications

7.1 Appendix 1 sets out the relevant implications considered in the preparation of the report.

8. Background Papers

8.1 Papers and documentation relating to the DLUHC PSDF.

9. Appendices

9.1 Appendix 1 – Implications.

10. Recommendation

That Cabinet:

- a) Approves to accept the offer of grant funding of £100,000 from the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities from its Planning Skills Delivery Funding Stream.

11. Reason for Recommendation

11.1 The Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities has requested that the Council formally confirms in writing its acceptance of

the offer of funding as soon as possible and before the end of the current financial year.

12. Is it necessary to waive the call in period?

12.1 No.

Report Author: Steven Buffery

Contact details: Steven.Buffery@derbyshire.gov.uk

Implications

Financial

- 1.1 A bid of £100,000 was submitted to DLUHC to cover the Council's anticipated costs for processing a backlog of large-scale major complex planning applications for minerals and waste developments, due to an ongoing skills and staffing capacity difficulty within the Planning Service. The grant will provide one-off funding to the Service to cover staffing costs to deal with the backlog, that otherwise would not be available.

Legal

- 2.1 Section 35 of the Department of Place's Scheme of Delegation (as at 25 May 2023), provides that the Executive Director Place has delegated authority to accept grants of up to £50,000 in respect of projects undertaken by the Place Department. Acceptance of grants in excess of £50,000 requires authorisation from Cabinet.

Human Resources

- 3.1 The grant offer would provide one off funding to be used to employ two senior experienced agency workers for a further period of six months to deal primarily with the processing of the backlog of minerals and waste planning applications in the Planning Service. Such funding would not otherwise be available from with the existing Planning Services budget. Without the funding, permanent staff would need to be redeployed from within the Development Management Service to deal with the backlog, which would impact on the timely processing of newly submitted planning applications.

Information Technology

- 4.1 There are no IT issues associated with the Council accepting the offer of funding.

Equalities Impact

- 5.1 There are no equalities impact issues with regard to the Council accepting the offer of funding.

Corporate objectives and priorities for change

6.1 None directly associated with the Council accepting the offer of funding.

Other (for example, Health and Safety, Environmental Sustainability, Property and Asset Management, Risk Management and Safeguarding)

7.1 Acceptance of the grant offer would help meet a number of Council and Place Department corporate objectives and priorities, particularly relating to resilient, healthy and safe communities; and high performing, value for money and resident focussed services. Large-scale planning application proposals for complex minerals and waste developments can have wide ranging environmental, social and health and well-being impacts on local communities. The timely processing and determination of these planning applications will reduce uncertainty and anxiety within local communities concerned about the impacts of such developments and ensure that if approved, such proposals include appropriate environmental mitigation and safeguards for public health and well-being. The timely processing of planning applications is also a key requirement for a high performing planning service to ensure that the Council meets Government legal requirements for determining planning applications within statutory time limits.