

Bolsover District Council

**Meeting of the Employment and Personnel Committee on
Wednesday 6th July 2022**

Senior Urban Design Officer

Report of the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Governance

Classification	This report is Public
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PURPOSE/SUMMARY OF REPORT

- To inform the Council that Chesterfield Borough Council wish to end their current arrangement of a shared Senior Urban Design Officer post with Bolsover District Council (following the resignation of the current post holder) and;
- To seek approval from the Council to increase the hours of the Senior Urban Design Officer post currently in place from 0.4FTE to a Full Time Equivalent (FTE) post.

REPORT DETAILS

1. Background

- 1.1 In the Planning (Development Control) team there is an established post PLA024 – Senior Urban Design Officer which is a Full Time Equivalent (FTE) post which is current appointed and shared with Chesterfield Borough Council (CBC). The post holder splits their time 0.6FTE (3 days) at CBC and 0.4FTE (2 days) with Bolsover District Council (BDC).
- 1.2 Despite BDC taking the lesser share of the post resource, they are the employing Authority and the post holder is contracted to BDC. All of the post holders annual leave and expenses are managed by BDC. CBC pay BDC back on a re-charge basis for their 0.6FTE.

- 1.3 The current post holder has been appointed since February 2009 with the shared arrangement with CBC in place for the duration of their appointment, but the post holder has recently handed in their notice and will leave the post on the 27th July 2022.
- 1.4 CBC has now indicated that they wish to dissolve the shared working arrangement in place with BDC, following the departure of the current post holder as they intend to appoint their own FTE post holder instead. This has therefore forced the review of the current post arrangements.
- 1.5 Currently the established post is appointed at Grade 9 and costs £57,030 in total per annum. This charge is split between CBC 0.6FTE as a re-charge of £33,856 per annum and therefore the remaining 0.4FTE costs BDC £23,174 per annum.

2. Details of Proposal

- 2.1 The resignation of the current post holder has consequentially led to a review of the current working arrangement. Options have therefore been considered about how much urban design resource the Council needs to meet current service requirements, and whether there was already an excess in demand for how that resource is used. This has also been considered in the context of the Council's own growth ambitions (and whether the resource could feed into other departmental projects), and also the clear direction of national planning policy set out in the Planning White Paper September 2020 and the recent Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill 2022.
- 2.2 There is a clear ambition for better design and a greater emphasis on a master plan or design code led policy framework to steer local development, and these remain at the core of the governments' white paper reforms. Therefore dedicated local urban design resource appointed within the Council will place us at the forefront of reacting to these changes and delivering these ambitions.
- 2.3 Option 1 is to remain with the BDC proportion of the established post, and pursue re-appointment into the post to secure an urban design resource for 0.4FTE (2 days) at the same cost of £23,174 per annum. However part time (PT) posts are likely to be less desirable and are ultimately difficult to appoint to. Furthermore based upon the current levels of planning applications received by the department which have required an urban design input, the workload demand for this post exceeds the 0.4FTE resource available, which has limitations on the extent of advice each application can be afforded.
- 2.4 Option 2 is therefore to consider whether there is a case to consider increasing the urban design resource beyond 0.4FTE, and the costs associated therewith.
- 2.5 Currently the 0.4FTE urban design resource is centred solely around commenting on planning applications, however there are other planning related projects which would benefit from urban design input. These extend across both the Development Control and Planning Policy teams, where there are ongoing needs to prepare site specific design briefs / design codes, and assist in the preparation of master plans (such as Shirebrook and Creswell Growth Plans; and major follow up applications connected with Strategic Site Allocations such as Whitwell Colliery and Clowne Garden Village).

2.6 Developers in the district recognise the environmental improvements which can be made through the urban design expertise we can offer, and this to some degree is reflected in the popularity and scale of growth currently being seen across the district.

2.7 In addition the urban design resource could be utilised by both the Economic Development and Property Services teams to bolster grant bids, or assist where they are seeking pre-application design advice / input for Council led developments and projects (such as Bolsover Homes, Shirebrook Crematorium, and Pleasley Vale Mills). Currently the scope of advice which can be offered to other teams and departments is limited because the post holder is only available for 2 days a week, and is often only available as a reaction to a planning application being submitted. Many developments would often benefit from advice and input from the urban design officer at a much earlier stage of the design process.

2.8 It is therefore considered that there is sufficient workload and demand for urban design advice across the Council to justify appointing a FTE post holder. The cost associated with this would be £57,030 per annum, which is an increase of £33,856 against the current established arrangement.

2.9 It is recognised that this is a growth bid to the establishment, however the graphs included below demonstrate that with the exception of the year impacted upon by coronavirus (2020/21), the Planning Service always exceed their planning fee income budget of £400,000 per annum and the additional cost required for this new post does not impact significantly on the usual surplus generated by the Service.

Figure 1: Total Planning Fee Income (2019 – 2022 (mid June))

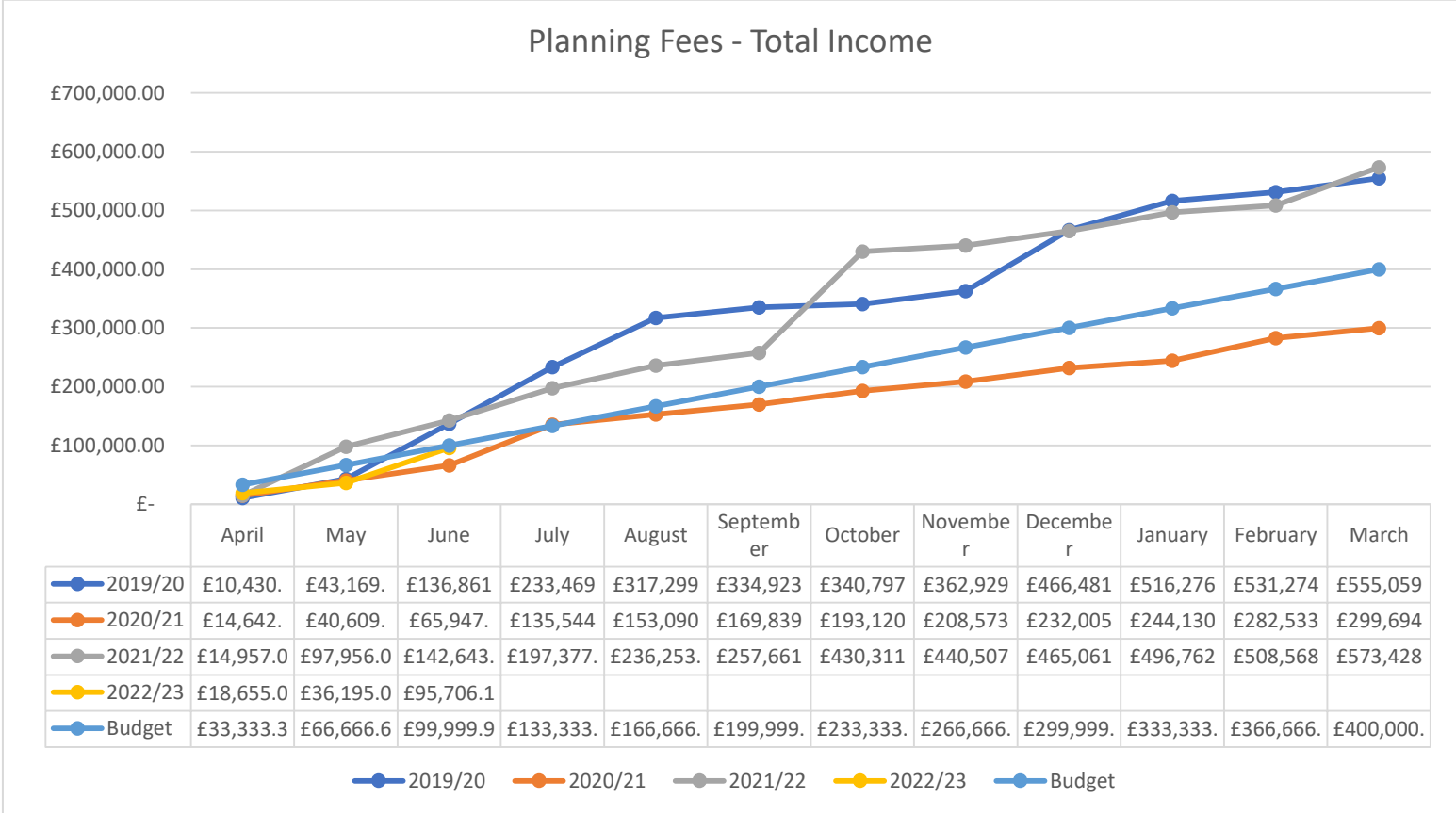
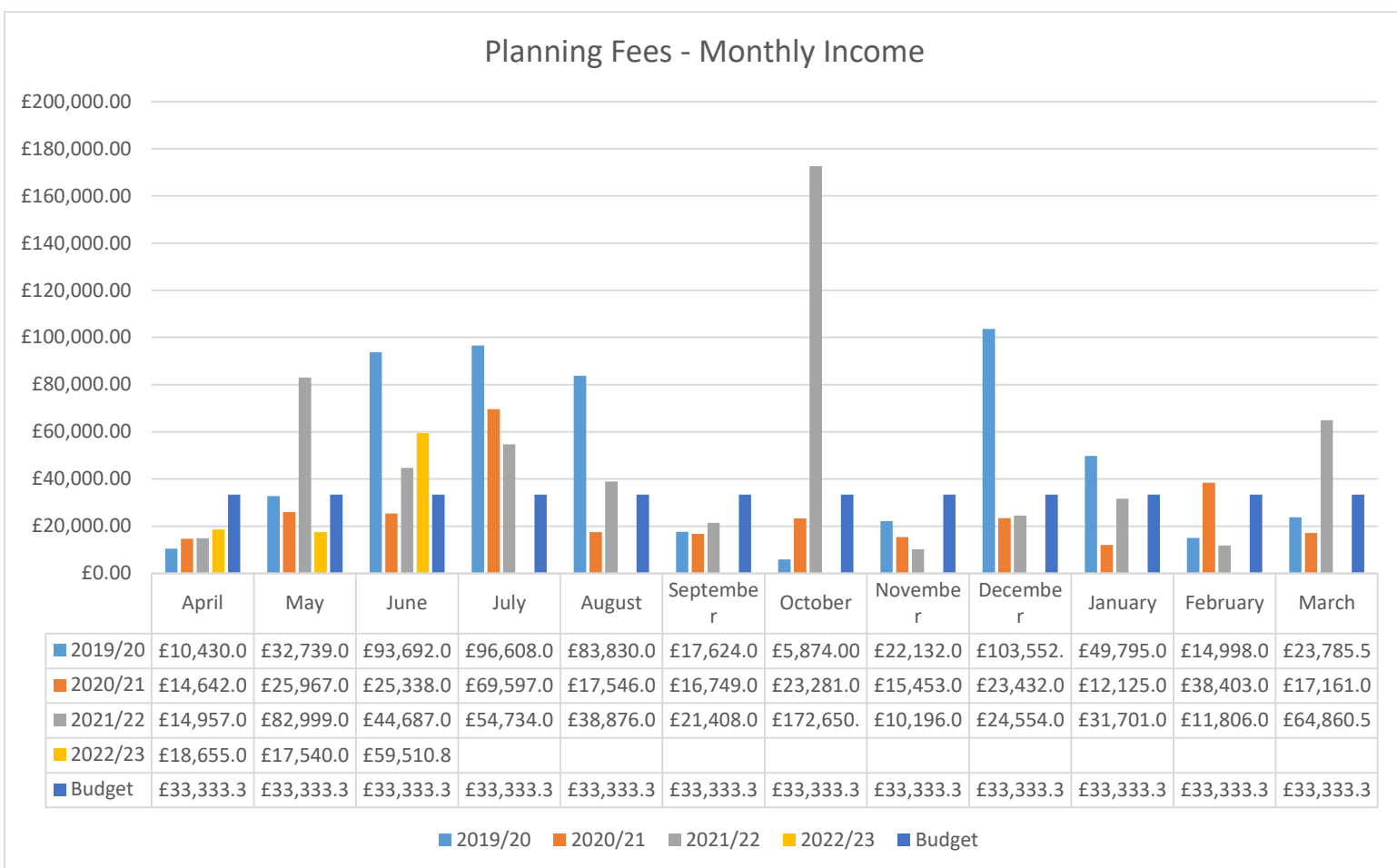


Figure 2: Monthly Planning Fee Income (2019 – 2022 (Mid June))



2.10 In addition, any unallocated monies from the planning fee reserve will be used to reduce the additional burden on the General Fund each year.

3. Reasons for Recommendation

3.1 There is an ongoing need to ensure continuity in the provision of urban design advice and expertise within the Planning Service beyond the loss of the current post holder in July 2022. This is a skillset that extends beyond those in more general officer posts and the input of urban design expertise in planning application negotiations and the formulation of local policy adds value and environmental improvement to developments across the district.

3.2 To support the Council’s ongoing ambition for ‘growth’ the input of urban design advice and expertise is required across the Planning Service. This aligns with all three Council Plan aims by:

- focusing on Our Customers by providing an excellent and accessible Planning service;
- focusing on Our Economy by being a key driver of sustainable growth across the District and being business and visitor friendly;
- focusing on Our Environment by protecting the quality of life for the District’s residents and businesses, protecting and planning for the enhancement of our rich built and natural environment and its biodiversity.

4 Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

- 4.1 A 'do nothing' option was rejected as there is a continuing need to have urban design expertise and advice available within the Planning Service, to influence better design across the district and improve the quality of the development which are approved through the planning process. At the very minimum the established post of 0.4FTE needs to be advertised and the vacancy filled.
- 4.2 A 'do more' option would be to seek urban design advice on a consultancy basis, which would either take the form of an ad hoc appointment per planning application or project. But this will be dependent on procurement, availability and higher costs in the region of £100 per hour for the same expertise.
- 4.3 An alternative option would be to upskill an existing member of the team, but this would need an existing post holder to want to pursue training specifically in urban design and returning to university to study a Masters degree (on day release) which would take 2-3 years and incur course fees in the region of £15,000 per annum. That resource would then need to be backfilled as there isn't capacity in the current team structure and workloads to afford this.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

To recommend to Council to reappoint a dedicated Senior Urban Design Officer post for Bolsover District Council, increasing the hours of the Senior Urban Design Officer post currently in place from 0.4FTE to a Full Time Equivalent (FTE) post.

Approved by Councillor Duncan McGregor, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Governance

IMPLICATIONS:

Finance and Risk: Yes No

Details: An annual increase of £33,856 will be incurred if the post is increased from 0.4FTE up to FTE. This cost may be partly met from the planning fees reserve for as long as the Government allows 20% of planning fee income for this purpose.

Whilst this post will not directly generate income / revenue to the council, it will offer clear benefits to the Council by providing a dedicated resource and our own expertise.

On behalf of the Section 151 Officer

Legal (including Data Protection): Yes No

Details: There are no legal implication arising from this report.

On behalf of the Solicitor to the Council

Staffing: Yes No

Details:

The Council's policies and procedures will be followed for recruitment to this post.

On behalf of the Head of Paid Service

DECISION INFORMATION

<p>Is the decision a Key Decision? A Key Decision is an executive decision which has a significant impact on two or more District wards or which results in income or expenditure to the Council above the following thresholds:</p> <p>BDC: Revenue - £75,000 <input type="checkbox"/> Capital - £150,000 <input type="checkbox"/></p>	No
<p>Is the decision subject to Call-In? <i>(Only Key Decisions are subject to Call-In)</i></p>	No

<p>District Wards Significantly Affected</p>	All
<p>Consultation: Leader / Deputy Leader <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Executive <input type="checkbox"/> SLT <input type="checkbox"/> Relevant Service Manager <input type="checkbox"/> Members <input type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Details: Cllr Duncan McGregor, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Governance</p>

<p>Links to Council Ambitions: Customer, Economy and Environment</p>
<p>To support the Council’s ongoing ambition for ‘growth’ the input of urban design advice and expertise is required across the Planning Service. This aligns with all three Council Plan aims by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • focusing on Our Customers by providing an excellent and accessible Planning service; • focusing on Our Economy by being a key driver of sustainable growth across the District and being business and visitor friendly; • focusing on Our Environment by protecting the quality of life for the District’s residents and businesses, protecting and planning for the enhancement of our rich built and natural environment and its biodiversity.

<p>DOCUMENT INFORMATION</p>	
<p>Appendix No</p>	<p>Title</p>
<p>1</p>	<p>Job Description – PLA024 Updated June 2022</p>
<p>2</p>	<p>Personal Specification – PLA024 Updated June 2022</p>

<p>Background Papers</p>
<p><i>(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 Executive you must provide copies of the background papers).</i></p>
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