

STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP BOARD MEETING – 5 FEBRUARY 2007

PLANNING SERVICE STAFF

AGENDA ITEM: 12

SUMMARY: Providing members with an update on the number of staff to remain within central government post RPA implementation.

ACTION REQUIRED: For information

Introduction

1. This short paper is a response to a request at the Strategic Leadership Board's meeting on 15 January for further details of the number of staff expected to remain in central government following implementation of the RPA recommendations in respect of planning.
2. As previously, it should be stressed at the outset that the current estimate of 160-170 is a very broad one prepared for financial forecasting and general illustrative purposes in the immediate aftermath of the RPA announcement. It is based on a broad assumption that since approximately 80% of the functions currently discharged by the Planning Service will transfer to the new Councils, an equivalent 80% of the current complement of 870 posts will also transfer. This will clearly need further refinement (see below).

Current Planning Service Complement

3. The Planning Service currently has a staff complement of 870. Of this, 530 posts are professional and technical (P&T) grades and 340 are administrative (Admin) grades.
4. Some 600 posts are in Divisional Offices and 270 in HQ. Of the 600 in Divisional Offices 390 are P&T and 210 are Admin. Within HQ, 145 posts are P&T and 125

are Admin.

5. This complement is tasked with carrying out the full range of the Agency's functions, which may be summarised as follows:
 - a. developing policy and preparing the relevant legislation to support modernisation and reform;
 - b. producing planning policy statements and development plans;
 - c. all aspects of development control and enforcement (including conservation consents, tree preservation orders, and so on);
 - d. processing strategic applications;
 - e. dealing with specialist planning issues and applications such as minerals, waste, retail and landscape;
 - f. planning audit;
 - g. performance management and collecting planning information;
 - h. setting planning fees; and
 - i. providing advice and guidance on planning matters.

6. These functions absorb most of the current complement of 870. The remainder, based at headquarters, covers the standard corporate services support functions of HR, accounts and finance, ICT and so on.

Impact of the RPA

7. The Review of Public Administration will see the bulk of the operational work of Planning Service transferring to the new District Councils. In line with TUPE arrangements, the posts (and staff) currently allocated to those functions will similarly transfer to the new Councils.

8. The specific functions transferring to Councils are:
 - a. the preparation of development plans;
 - b. all development control (except major applications);
 - c. all enforcement (including enforcement for major applications); and

- d. conservation issues (listed building consents, and so on).
9. Currently within Planning Service these functions are delivered by the Divisional network complement of 600 staff and by some staff at HQ (see paragraph 13 below). It has been recommended through the Local Government Task Force that post-RPA these HQ specialist functions should be provided on a “shared services” basis within the new local government arrangements.
10. Central government will be responsible for:
- a. setting the strategic context for the planning system;
 - b. reviewing the regional strategic framework and overseeing the development plan process;
 - c. developing planning policy and preparing legislation to support further modernisation and reform;
 - d. preparing regional planning policy statements;
 - e. processing regionally important “strategic” applications and other development control oversight functions;
 - f. fees and funding, planning audit, performance and standard setting;
 - g. supporting the planning system (capacity building, performance improvement, promoting good practice, managing relationships); and
 - h. providing guidance and advice to the new District Councils;
11. Most of these functions are currently carried out by a complement of staff (some 110) based in Planning Service HQ although one (h) is new and several (for example f and g) will take a different form and will almost certainly be more intensive in the initial period after the change as the new arrangements bed down.
12. A further complement of some 60 staff (Admin and specialist IT) carry out the corporate services support functions referred to in paragraph 6 above. Most of these posts will not be required after RPA implementation, partly because they support an organisation – the Planning Service – which will no longer exist and partly because they will have been affected by wider NICS reform and modernisation programmes including eHR, Workplace 2010, Accounts NI and

other proposed changes in advance of RPA implementation in 2009. It is anticipated that staff in these posts will have been re-deployed within the NICS, prior to RPA implementation.

13. Work is continuing on refining the balance of 100 HQ posts which currently provide a service that, after RPA implementation will be split between central and local government. We have engaged consultants for this purpose and more generally to advise on the HR consequences of moving to a 7-Council delivery model, supported by a shared-service unit and a central government Department. The consultants will also look at those areas where the model might create diseconomies of scale. We expect to have their report early in March.

Conclusion

14. This paper provides a further explanation of our early estimate of how the Planning Service's current complements of staff might be divided between central and local government following implementation of the RPA. None of the figures is set in stone. They will be further refined by:
 - a. a consultancy exercise that we currently have underway to identify what, if any, additional pressures or diseconomies of scale there might be in moving to the RPA arrangements;
 - b. emerging developments in relation to the RPA arrangements as we move forward with implementation;
 - c. issues that might affect Planning Service's manpower levels in advance of transfer, including workload pressures and NICS-wide initiatives in the areas of HR, ICT, estate and finance.
15. Our initial consideration of staffing is entirely based on current Planning Service staffing complements and proposals for a 7-Council model. If this changes then complements and service delivery models will of course have to be reviewed.