

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEVELOPMENT TO THE EXECUTIVE ON 24 AUGUST 2005

PROPOSED ALLOCATION OF THE GOVERNMENT'S PLANNING DELIVERY GRANT 2005/06

This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillors C Bishop and N Cavill.

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To seek the Executive's approval for the allocation of the Government's 2005/06 Planning Delivery Grant (PDG) of £545,353 to the Council.

Executive Summary

The Council has been awarded a Planning Delivery Grant (PDG) of £545,353 in recognition of planning performance over the year ending 30 September 2004. The grant is slightly in excess of last year's award of £533,068 and compares favourably with other authorities in the region.

Following discussions at CMT and with the Executive Councillors, it is proposed to combine this year's grant with the carried over funds from last year and to budget for service improvements over two years in three main areas – Development Control, Forward Planning and The Vision for Taunton. Members are recommended to approve the detailed allocation of the grant in accordance with the table in the attached Appendix.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 We are now in the third year of the Government's PDG awards. The grant is allocated on the basis of planning performance and it is hoped that this will provide an incentive for authorities to meet or exceed key performance targets for planning. The grant is intended to assist improvements in the planning service, but may also be used for other purposes.
- 2.2 The final award for 2005/06 is a grant of £545,353 to TDBC. This puts us in the top quartile of awards across all local authorities in the country and is £12,285 more than we received last year.
- 2.3 The 2005/06 grant is based on the following factors:-
- Achievement of Development Control Targets - £355,671
 - Improvement in Development Control Performance - £47,295
 - A fixed sum of £5,000 for each of our two Enterprise Areas - £10,000
 - E-Government award for online planning services - £50,000
 - Submission of Local Development Scheme within target date - £54,545
 - Post-allocation adjustments - £19,333
 - Cap recycling adjustment - £8,509

3.0 Priority Expenditure Bids

3.1 The allocation of the 2004/05 grant has been discussed with the Executive Councillors and agreed by CMT.

3.2 The intention is to spread the expenditure over two financial years with an annual review following each year's PDG announcement.

3.3 The Government has stipulated that 25% of PDG for 2005/06 be reserved for capital spending.

3.4 Including the reserve carried over from last year's PDG, the available budget for 2005/06 – 2006/07 (as of 1 May 2005) is as follows:-

Revenue	-	£811,955
Capital	-	£136,338

3.5 In respect of revenue funding it is proposed to enhance service delivery in the following areas:-

- Retention of existing temporary staff in Development Control, Conservation and Forward Planning - £194,000.
- The Commissioning of essential consultants' reports and advice to assist the Forward Planning Unit in achieving the Local Development Scheme "Milestones" (future PDG awards will in part depend upon this - £165,500.
- Funding of the Vision Delivery Team - £315,000.
- The appointment of a part time clerical support officer in Planning Enforcement - £18,000.
- Printing of Local Plan and Local Development Framework documents - £25,000
- Staff and Members' training - £25,000

3.6 These revenue bids amount to £742,500 over the two years , leaving £69,455 unallocated at the present time.

3.7 In respect of capital funding, it is proposed that:-

- £25,000 be contributed towards the cost of new office accommodation for the Vision Delivery Team; and
- £20,000 be allocated for social or economic development initiatives in our two Enterprise Areas at Halcon and Lyngford.

The remaining £91,338 of capital funding is unallocated at the present time.

3.8 A more detailed breakdown and explanation of the expenditure allocations is given in the Appendix.

4.0 Non-Priority Bids

4.1 The bids outlined above have the support of CMT. Whilst a number of other potential revenue bids were considered it was felt that these should not be progressed at the present time. Instead it was felt that thought should be given to other means of service improvement embracing "invest to save".

- 4.2 CMT expressed concerns about the appointment of additional temporary staff (other than in Planning Enforcement) because of the future funding implications should PDG be withdrawn. If the staff are retained there will be implications for the Council Revenue budget. If they are not retained, performance is likely to decline. The Government has not decided if PDG will be retained for the longer term although it seems likely that it will continue at least for several years. The Government has said that it will consider whether the Development Control fee-earning service should be self-financing (costs balanced by fee income) and planning fees may be increased to this effect over the next few years. Should the latter apply, staff costs in future would need to be funded from fee income and this would determine staff numbers. In April 2005, planning fees were increased by an average of about 30%.
- 4.3 Further to the above, members need to be informed of a concern raised by the ODPM over the high caseload of planning applications per officer at Taunton Deane. In July 2004, Keith Hill, the Minister for Housing and Planning wrote to the Leader of the Council and referred to the excellent progress the Authority is making towards our specific performance standards. However he drew attention to a concern raised by his consultants over the high caseload of applications per officer which stood at 209 in 2003/04. This compares to the ODPM guidance of a sustainable caseload being around 150 applications per case officer. The consultants' report concluded that "the staff to workload ratio is currently unrealistic in terms of long term sustainability of performance" and that "officer caseloads should be reduced".
- 4.4 Since the Minister's letter, the number of case officers has increased by 1.5 FTEs (1 FTE on a permanent post and 0.5 FTE on a temporary contract funded by PDG) and the caseload of applications fell to 190 in 2004/05. This is still substantially above the ODPM guide and a case can be made for the appointment of an additional FTE case officer which would reduce the caseload of applications to 170 (based on 2004/05 figures). The cost of funding such a post for a two year period would amount to approximately £62,800 at the top of the scale. If this was to be funded from PDG a balance of £26,655 would remain unallocated at the present time.
- 4.5 A second non-priority bid relates to the appointment of a temporary part-time admin/clerical support officer (0.45 FTE) in Forward Planning. This post would assist in the preparation of the Local Development Framework which replaces the old local plan system. The new system requires much tighter timescales for plan delivery and greater community involvement. This in turn increases the need for admin/clerical support. The new planning system will give greater statutory weight to the Vision for Taunton and this post will assist in meeting deadlines. The post will release the professional officers from these additional clerical duties allowing more time to be devoted to plan delivery. The need for the post has been reconsidered by CMT who support the appointment on a one year contract, subject to review. The cost of the post will amount to £7,200 pa to be funded from the Planning Delivery Grant. If agreed the unallocated revenue reserve would reduce to £19,455.
- 5.0 Conclusion
- 5.1 The award of this year's grant should help us to maintain performance in Development Control and make substantial progress in delivering the Local Development Scheme "milestones". Performance in these two key areas will form the basis of future PDG awards. The grant will also enable us to meet the cost of the Vision Delivery Team over years one and two (including £50,000 pa in the Council's Revenue Budget).

- 5.2 While there is some uncertainty over the long term future of the PDG, the Planning Minister, Yvette Cooper has acknowledged the importance of adequately funding the planning system. In a recent statement she says:-

“We have increased resources for planning departments because they were under-resourced for many years. We were right to do that. Nobody should be in any doubt about how critical planners are to the aims of sustainable communities whether it involves small town regeneration, the development of the Thames Gateway or inner city retail developments. In every case, the work of planners is crucial.”

6.0 Recommendations

- 6.1 The Executive is requested to approve the priority bids for the allocation of the Planning Delivery Grant for 2005/06 as set out in the Appendix (Notes 1 to 16).
- 6.2 Members are asked to consider whether they would support the appointment of an additional Development Control case officer funded by PDG for two years as a “non priority bid” as set out in the Appendix (Note 17).
- 6.3 Members are asked to consider whether they would support the appointment of a 0.45 FTE clerical/admin support officer in Forward Planning funded by PDG on a one year contract (subject to review) as a “non-priority bid” as set out in the Appendix(Note 18).

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APPENDIX

PROPOSED PLANNING DELIVERY GRANT ALLOCATIONS **2005/06 – 2006/07**

<i>NOTES</i>	DESCRIPTION	2005/06
		£
	Carried forward (2004/05)	402,940
	Grant awarded (2005/06)	545,353
	Total available	948,293

	Reserve – available for Revenue	402,940
	New – available for Revenue	409,015
	New – available for Capital	136,338
	Total – available for Revenue	811,955
	Total – available for Capital	136,338
	Total available	948,293

PRIORITY BIDS **(supported by CMT)** **Revenue**

		<u>2005/06</u>	<u>2006/07</u>	
		£	£	
	<u>Retention of temporary staff:</u>			
1.	2 DC posts (1FTE)	25,000	25,000	
2.	1 Admin Support/Scanner (0.5 FTE)	10,000	10,000	
3.	1 Conservation Officer (1FTE)	25,000	30,000	
4.	1 Forward Planning Officer (1FTE)	34,000	35,000	
	Total	94,000	100,000	= 194,000

	<u>Key Studies for Preparation of Local Development Framework (LDF)</u>			
5.	Consultants Studies for Core Strategy and Taunton Town Centre Action Area Plan (TTCAAP)	50,000	25,000	
6.	Urban Capacity Study	17,500		
7.	Retail Capacity Study	30,500		
8.	Landscape Appraisal	22,500		
9.	Consultants to facilitate community engagement on Core Strategy and TTCAAP	10,000	10,000	
	Total	130,500	35,000	= 165,000

	<u>Vision for Taunton</u>			
10.	Vision Delivery Team	145,000	170,000	= 315,000
	<u>Miscellaneous</u>			
11.	Appointment of temporary Clerical Support Officer in Planning Enforcement	9,000	9,000	
12.	Printing Local Plan (LDF)	20,000	5,000	
13.	Staff Training	10,000	10,000	
14.	Member Training	5,000		
	Total	403,500	319,000	

REMAINING REVENUE 89,455

CAPITAL

15.	Vision Delivery Team Office Accommodation	25,000		
16.	Enterprise Areas	20,000		
	Total	45,000		

UNALLOCATED CAPITAL 91,338

NON PRIORITY BIDS
(questioned by CMT)

Revenue

17.	Appointment of temporary DC Case Officer (1 FTE)	31,400	31,400	
18.	Appointment of temporary Clerical/ Admin Support Officer (0.45 FTE) in Forward Planning	7,200		

UNALLOCATED REVENUE 19,455

NOTES

1. Extend existing contracts by two years – part time Development Control Case Officer and part time Planning Support Officer.
2. Extend existing contract by two years – duties include electronic scanning, admin support and secretarial support to Development Control Manager.
3. Retain key post in preparing Conservation Area Character Appraisals (new BVPI) – extend by two years, currently vacant following recent resignation of potholder.
4. Extend existing contract by two years to assist with LDF preparation and S106 guidance.

5. To carry out essential work for Taunton Town Centre Action Area Plan and Core Strategy (giving statutory weight to Vision for Taunton) re:-
 - Town Centre Vitality and Viability Survey for Taunton and Wellington (£15,000)
 - Employment Sites Survey (£10,000)
 - Pendleton E-Government Assessment/Planning Portal (£4,600)
 - Housing Needs Assessment (£20,400)
6. Study authorised by Executive last year. Essential work in identifying brown field housing potential.
7. Study authorised by Executive last year. Cost of work less than £50K initially assumed. Draft final report now received from Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners.
8. Existing contract for analysis of Landscape Character Areas approved by Executive last year will be completed in August 2005. New one year contract will carry out a detailed appraisal of Green Wedges, Special Landscape Features and Potential "urban extensions" for Taunton and Wellington.
9. Consultants to facilitate meetings and advise/support consultation process, also cost of publicity materials/events.
10. The anticipated funding requirement for the Vision Delivery Team in each of years one and two is £220,000. The PDG revenue contribution of £145,000 (plus £25,000 PDG capital funding for office accommodation plus £50,000 in the approved Revenue Budget) will cover the full cost of the Vision Delivery Team in 2005/06. The PDG revenue contribution of £170,000 in 2006/07 (plus £50,000 in next year's Revenue Budget) will cover the full cost in year two.
11. Two year appointment of part time support post to release two Planning Enforcement Officers from admin/clerical duties.
12. Printing of TD Local Plan already committed. Will also cover some of the costs of printing Local Development Scheme documents (Core Strategy and TTCAAP).
13. To contribute towards education/training costs of existing trainee planners leading to full professional qualifications.
14. External training for Planning Committee Members.
15. Contribution towards new office accommodation for Vision Delivery Team at East Reach House (to be occupied from 1 August 2005).
16. Intended for Social/Economic initiatives at Lyngford and Halcon.
17. Two year appointment of additional Development Control Officer to reduce annual caseload of applications from 190 per officer in 2004/05 to 170 in 2005/06 (ODPM target – 150 applications per year).
18. One year appointment of part time clerical/admin support officer in Forward Planning to assist with increased work arising from the new development plan system (Local Development Framework) and thereby releasing professional officers from clerical/admin duties. To be reviewed after one year.