

Report of the Chief Executive

Chief Executive's Department Restructure – Deferred Posts

Summary

1. This report invites Members to decide whether to proceed with recruitment to three permanent officer posts that were created, but not filled, when proposals for restructuring the Chief Executive's department were considered by the Urgency Committee in August 2006.

Background

2. In August 2006 the Urgency Committee was asked to consider proposals for a restructure of the Chief Executive's department. As part of this Members agreed recurring savings of £150,000 from 2006/07 and a further £77,000 of recurring savings from 2007/08. In addition, savings were found to create a number of new posts to support key corporate work, including £103,700 fully to fund the following posts:

- Safe City Co-ordinator;
- Partnership Officer;
- Scrutiny Officer.

2.1 Safe City Co-ordinator

The restructure formally transferred to Neighbourhood Services responsibility for Safer City. This is one of the Council's priorities but at the time of the restructure there was no dedicated support for it. To address this the restructure report proposed the creation of a Safe City Co-ordinator post at PO1-4. This post was to be based in Neighbourhood Services and funded by savings of £35,000 in the Chief Executive's department.

2.2 Partnership Officer

The restructure also confirmed the transfer to City Strategy of responsibility for the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and Partnerships. Partnership working forms a significant part of the Council's 'Improving Organisational

Effectiveness' priority. Previously, partnership work was supported by a Partnership & Improvement Officer at PO1-4 in the Chief Executive's department. Part of the responsibilities of this post were to promote the development and oversight of the Council's partnership working as a whole and the restructure report recommended that this function should continue if the Council were to meet its commitment to improve partnership working. The restructure deleted the post in Chief Executive's department but sought to create a new Partnership Officer post, as part of a new Partnerships Team, in City Strategy. Savings of £35,000 from the Chief Executive's restructure were identified to fund the post.

2.3 Scrutiny Officer

The Urgency Committee accepted a recommendation to delete the post of scrutiny manager. This yielded an annual saving of £41,000. Management responsibility for the scrutiny function transferred to the Democratic Services Manager however, it was recognised that the previous scrutiny manager had also undertaken significant work in directly supporting scrutiny reviews. The Democratic Services Manager does not have capacity to take on more than a management role and for this reason it was proposed that an additional scrutiny officer post be established at SO1/2 to support the scrutiny function. Savings of £33,700 were identified to meet the cost of this post.

3. The Urgency Committee approved creation of the posts of Safe City Co-ordinator, Partnership Officer and Scrutiny Officer but, in view of the Council's current financial pressures, decided that appointment to these posts should be deferred pending further consideration of the Council's in-year financial position.

Consultation

4. The Directors of Neighbourhood Services and City Strategy and the Head of Civic, Democratic and Legal Services, as the chief officers with responsibility for Safer City, Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and Partnerships and Scrutiny Services respectively, have been consulted in preparing this report. The Resources Directorate has also been consulted on aspects of Council's partnership responsibilities.

Options

5. For the Safe City Co-ordinator and Partnership Officer, the options proposed for each post are:
 - to delete the post;
 - to authorise recruitment to the post.

If members were to decide to proceed with appointment to only one of these two posts, the Chief Executive and the Directors of Neighbourhood Services and City Strategy would recommend that this be the post of Partnership Officer.

6. For the Scrutiny Officer post the options proposed are:
- to delete the post;
 - to convert the post from Scrutiny Officer at SO1/2 to Scrutiny Assistant at Sc4/5 and authorise recruitment to it. The Head of Civic, Democratic & Legal Services has advised that this more junior post would create a more effective team structure and provide additional officer capacity. The difference in the scale of the posts would also generate a recurring saving of £8,700 from 2007/08.

Analysis

7. Comments from the relevant chief officers on the role that holders of each post would be expected to undertake, and the implications of deleting the posts, are shown below:

7.1 Safe City Co-ordinator (comments from Neighbourhood Services)

7.1.1 The Council has established a 'Safer City' priority to "reduce the actual and perceived impact of violent, aggressive and nuisance behaviour on people in York" In addition, it is anticipated that the recommendations of the Lyons Review and statutory change arising from the Crime Disorder Act Review (both to be published later this year) will give rise to significant short and long term issues that will need to be addressed.

7.1.2 Responsibility for leading on Safer City, including the Safer and Stronger Communities Block of the Local Area Agreement, rests with the Director of Neighbourhood Services. At the present time he has no dedicated resources to support him in managing this work. He has expressed concern that the absence of a dedicated resource will have a detrimental effect of his ability to manage and improve performance in this priority area.

7.1.3 If appointed, a Safe City Co-ordinator would support the Safer City agenda by:

- bringing forward detailed proposals to change the current CRDP, SYP Executive and Safer York structures in line with the statutory recommendations from the Lyons and Crime Disorder Act Review;
- proposing changes to the current arrangements for managing the York DAT to ensure that performance is maximised, which will help to reduce crime within York;
- working with the Director of Neighbourhood Services to co-ordinate Council Crime Prevention activities to ensure that they have maximum impact within the community. The result of this would be the achievement of targets included in the Local Area Agreement, Safer and Stronger Block;

- providing monthly updates to Council Members on Safer York activities and, with the Safer York team, detailing specific actions that have occurred during the month and proposed actions for the next month;
- providing an interface between the Council and its customers regarding Safer York activities by attending Ward meetings and working with community groups;
- providing a monthly performance report regarding Safer York activities linking this to the LAA;
- developing and then delivering a rolling programme of activities to reduce crime within York working with partners;
- providing monthly briefings to the Safer York portfolio holder on Safer York activities;
- developing media releases on at least four occasions each month regarding Safer York activities working with the Council's communications team;
- developing informative articles to be included in the Council's Ward updates so that our customers can be kept informed of developments in their neighbourhoods;
- working with the Neighbourhood Pride Team to ensure that Safer York activities are embedded as part of the York Neighbourhoods Pride initiative.

7.1.4 The Director of Neighbourhood Services will be presenting a paper to the CDRP Board on 22 November setting out proposals to integrate SYP into his Directorate. The purpose of this would be to strengthen management support to SYP and improve performance. The proposals have the potential to generate some efficiency savings however, in the absence of a Safe City Co-ordinator, such a reduction in resources could affect the Directorate's ability to manage the Safer City programme.

7.2 Partnership Officer (comments from City Strategy)

7.2.1 The Council is currently involved in over 250 partnerships and working groups. Partnership work is core to how the Council needs to work to deliver its corporate priorities and is the way we do much of our business. Quality partnership working can deliver greater impact for the public through the sharing of experience, knowledge and resources to deliver key outcomes, but only if it is properly developed and managed.

7.2.2 The Council's Improving Organisational Effectiveness priority includes the objective of "improving the way the Council and its partners work together to deliver better services for the people who live in York". Responsibility for the

Local Area Agreement, LSP and partnership working rests with the Director of City Strategy.

7.2.3 The Partnership Officer post would help to co-ordinate the Council's approach to partnership working across the city and would be expected to carry out a review of the Council's strengths and weaknesses in partnership working, with a view to improving relationships with partners across all service areas and facilitating effective partnership working between outside agencies and the Council. This work would start with the LSP and the associated strategic partnerships responsible for supporting and delivering the LAA, but would also encompass a review of the effectiveness of other partnerships. Specifically the post would enable us to:

- know how, where and why we are involved – by maintaining and developing our existing partnership database;
- assess whether partnerships are delivering – by developing simple but effective indicators of performance and reviewing performance against these so that we can demonstrate efficiency or decide to leave the partnership;
- help to ensure that we work effectively with partners – which means supporting officers, members and external partners in their roles through the continuance of the partnership training programme and the development of the draft competency framework;
- draw on best practice – through developing and regularly updating the existing draft Partnership Guidelines, researching and learning from others and recommending optimum ways of working to deliver best value;
- ensure we provide the best and most relevant advice to partnerships-drawing on a network of key contacts to provide expertise and capacity and deliver 'answers' on key topics.

7.2.4 One example of where the Partnership Officer would be involved would be in responding to the recent announcements on redundancies in York. These demonstrate the need for close working with business in the interests of the City's economy. The post holder would co-ordinate and facilitate work with the Chamber of Commerce and other business leaders, who have expressed a wish to promote closer working arrangements.

7.2.5 The Partnerships Officer would work closely with the Partnerships and Grants Accountant in Resources to continue the work suspended following the departure of the previous Partnership and Improvement Officer. This work offers a real opportunity for the Council to attract additional funding, either through pooling resources with partners or attracting grant income from other bodies. Examples of what this work has achieved in the past are:

- an excellent response to Partnership Guidelines. Initial consultation with external partners has confirmed that they would welcome wider dissemination of this guidance to assist all partners in improving performance, and encourage appropriate actions if a particular group is not delivering the desired outcomes;
- a partnership database that allows a rapid and effective response to accounting, audit, risk and control processes but more importantly ensures that we are able to implement a positive programme of improvement to ensure the most effective use of the significant resources applied;
- the partnership training programmes run to date have scored either 'Excellent' or 'Good' ratings from all participants. These sessions are integral to ensuring a greater practical understanding of: ways to improve partnership working; how and when to create new partnerships, and making best use of resources.

7.2.6 Members should also be aware of the importance of partnership in successfully implementing the requirements of the Local Government White Paper "Strong and Prosperous Communities (the White Paper). Partnership working is at the heart of the White Paper and will require local authorities to devolve much more influence to the community and voluntary sector through partnerships and encourage better engagement among the business sector. The Council is also encouraged to review strategic partnership governance and working arrangements across City Regions, and this would need to be included in the remit of the post.

7.2.7 The Council has a legal duty to ensure proper governance, accounting and record keeping for partnerships. This duty varies according to the Council's role in a particular partnership but, as is evident, with a current database of over 250, there is significant scope for difficulties to arise unless there is a proactive approach to managing and mitigating the potential problems.

7.2.8 There is a real risk here that unless this work continues the Council will fall foul of its duties both in relation to CPA and to statutory accounting requirements. Furthermore, the response and commitments we have made to several audits (both internal and by the Audit Commission) will not be delivered. This could lead to further critical audit reports unless we resource this area of work appropriately.

7.3 Scrutiny Assistant (comments from Civic, Democratic & Legal Services)

7.3.1 The present scrutiny team comprises two scrutiny officers and a half time administrator. Previously their capacity was enhanced by a dedicated Scrutiny Manager who also undertook specific scrutiny reviews. Transfer of responsibility for management of the scrutiny team to the Democratic Services Manager generated a significant budget saving but reduced resources available directly to undertake reviews.

7.3.2 Initially it was proposed that a new post of scrutiny officer at SO1/2 should be created to replace capacity. It is now proposed that the post of Scrutiny Officer at SO1/2 should be replaced with a Scrutiny Assistant at Scale 4/5. New streamlined work processes and procedures have recently been put in place, making it possible to provide an effective service with an Assistant post. This would have the added benefit of generating recurring savings of £8,700 from 2007/08.

7.3.3 The White Paper proposes extending scrutiny powers in two areas:

- Community Calls for Action;
- extended scrutiny powers over services external to the Council.

The LGiU briefing on the White Paper summarises these new powers as follows:

“The Community Call for Action will enable members of the public to raise local and neighbourhood matters with their ward councillor. The councillor will play a gatekeeping role in deciding how to resolve the matter, but where informal approaches do not work, there will be the option of reference to an overview and scrutiny committee. The committee will be able to investigate and make recommendations. The Community Call for Action will cover ‘those issues that local authorities are responsible for either alone or in partnership with others’. This will need to be defined more precisely in legislation, but will extend the powers of scrutiny committees to hold to account service providers, including some outside the Council.

The White Paper also proposes a new duty on non-council services to co-operate in the development of Local Area Agreements. This will contribute to the work of Local Strategic Partnerships and the implementation of Sustainable Community Strategies. The agencies covered by this new duty will also be required to respond to local government scrutiny, taking part in meetings or providing information, and having regard to scrutiny recommendations.

The agencies to be covered by this duty are: Councils, Chief Officer of Police, Police Authorities, Local Probation Boards, Youth Offending Teams, Primary Care Trusts, NHS Foundation Trusts, the Learning and Skills Council in England, Jobcentre Plus, Health and Safety Executive, Fire and Rescue Authorities, Metropolitan Passenger Transport Authorities, the Highways Agency, the Environment Agency, Natural England, Regional Development Agencies, National Park Authorities, the Broads Authority, Joint Waste Disposal Authorities.

The response to scrutiny will cover their work ‘insofar as their actions relate to functions or service delivery connected with the Authority’”

7.3.4 The potential impact of these changes on the scrutiny function would be to increase the number of topics to be reviewed and to require more supporting

information to be gathered from a wider range of statutory bodies. It would also suggest a more comprehensive consultation process.

7.3.5 Although the new working procedures are expected to yield an improvement in existing service provision, they do not take account of the implications of the White Paper and it is envisaged that an existing team of two scrutiny officers would be unable effectively to meet these expectations.

7.3.6 The addition of a Scrutiny Assistant would support service improvement and the team's ability to respond to new demands arising from the White Paper. The postholder would provide direct support for scrutiny reviews and would:

- support the scrutiny function by undertaking research and collating information for reviews on behalf of the Scrutiny Officers and Scrutiny Members;
- make arrangements for consultation, meetings and site visits in relation to scrutiny reviews;
- directly support allocated topics in terms of undertaking and bringing to completion any agreed reviews;
- prepare feasibility reports for scrutiny reviews as instructed by Democratic Services Manager;
- compile information for the preparation of an Annual Scrutiny Plan;
- support the Democratic Services Manager in any organisational support arrangements for scrutiny meetings, formal or informal, including the Scrutiny Management Committee.

7.3.7 The scrutiny team's new work procedures and processes are designed to improve planning and efficiency and give greater focus to completion of reviews. The arrangements are too new to evaluate with confidence the effect that they will have on the capacity of the team, but it is estimated that, depending on the nature of the reviews to be carried out and the member scrutiny structure in place, that:

- existing resources could complete between 10 to 14 reviews per year, depending on their scope and complexity;
- with the addition of a scrutiny assistant, between 16 to 20 reviews per year could be completed, depending on their scope and complexity.

Corporate Priorities

8. Appointment to the posts of Safe City Co-ordinator and Partnerships Officer would contribute to the Council's Safer City and Improving Organisational Effectiveness priorities.

Implications

Financial

9. The Council is currently preparing for the 2007/08 budget and savings proposals will be considered by Members in January 2007. Decisions about whether or not to appoint to the three deferred posts will affect the level of savings that can be generated by the Chief Executive's department to contribute to the corporate savings target.

Full year costs

10. Savings of £103,700 were identified from savings within the Chief Executive's department to meet the full cost of these posts. If Members decide to appoint to the posts the full year cost for each (at the top of the scale) is:
 - Safe City Co-ordinator PO1-4: £35,000;
 - Partnership Officer PO1-4: £35,000;
 - Scrutiny Assistant Sc4/5: £25,000 (compared with £33,700 for the post of Scrutiny Officer initially proposed).
11. If Members decide not to appoint to any of the above posts the funds released will be available to contribute to the Council's savings target for 2007/08. This would be in addition to savings of £227,000 already offered from the Chief Executive's restructure.

Appointing in 2006/07

12. Estimates of in-year savings for the Chief Executive's department have been based on the assumption that appointments would not be made to the deferred posts in 2006/07. The forecast underspend at Budget Monitor 1 for the Chief Executive's department was £33,000 and the Chief Executive is actively seeking to increase this underspend to assist the overall Council position (First Performance and Financial Monitor – 2006/07 Executive 20th October 2006). If Members recommend appointment to posts before 1 April 2007 this cannot be accommodated within the departmental budget and therefore a request would be made to fund the in-year costs from reserves. Assuming post holders were appointed from 1 January 2007, the costs would be:
 - Safe City Co-ordinator: £8,750;
 - Partnership Officer: £8,750;
 - Scrutiny Assistant: £6,250;
 - Estimated recruitment costs: £5,000 (for all three posts);

Total costs 2006/07 £28,750.

13. The Council has reserves that can be used to fund non-recurring expenditure, which will leave the contingency available to fund recurring items. CPA recommends that a minimum level of revenue reserves is held, and for 2006/07 the minimum recommended level is £4.95m. It is estimated that there will be approximately £1.91m of other revenue reserves available, thus the level of the general fund balance should not fall below £3.04m. The current level of the general fund balance, after deducting Member approvals to date, is £3.27m. The balance available, if this application is approved will be £3.24m.

Human Resources (HR)

14. The three deferred posts are newly created, vacant posts and as such no existing postholders will be directly affected by not filling the posts. However if the posts are not filled, the relevant managers would need to consider the capacity of the particular work area and prioritise accordingly. If approved for recruitment, the resulting vacancies would be filled in accordance with established Council policy. This would include consideration of whether the vacancies would constitute suitable alternative employment for an employee who is 'at risk', prior to the posts being released for open recruitment.

Equalities

15. There are no equalities implications.

Legal

16. There are no particular legal implications, but the Director of Neighbourhood Services will ensure that the Council's statutory crime and disorder reduction duties are carried out.

Crime and Disorder

17. Appointment to the post of Safe City Co-ordinator has implications for Crime and Disorder in that it would directly support the Council's Safer City priority.

Information Technology (IT)

18. There are no IT implications.

Property

19. There are no property implications.

Other

20. There are no other implications.

Risk Management

21. Non appointment to the posts of Safe City Co-ordinator and Partnership Officer may risk the ability of the responsible departments fully to meet the demands of the corporate priorities and may necessitate a review of targets and work programmes.
22. Non appointment to the post of Scrutiny Assistant would restrict the number of scrutiny reviews that could be undertaken each year and could compromise the ability of the service to respond to the anticipated demands of the White Paper.

Recommendations

23. Members are asked to:
 - 23.1 decide whether to proceed with recruitment to the post of Safe City Co-ordinator, or to delete the post and realise recurring budget savings of £35,000 from 2007/08.
Reason: To determine the level of resources available to support Safer City.
 - 23.2 decide whether to proceed with recruitment to the post of Partnership Officer, or to delete the post and realise recurring budget savings of £35,000 from 2007/08.
Reason: To determine the level of resources available to support Partnership working.
 - 23.3 decide whether to replace the post of Scrutiny Officer post at SO1/2 created by the Chief Executive's department restructure with a Scrutiny Assistant at Sc4/5 (generating a recurring saving of £8,700 from 2007/08) and proceed with recruitment to the post, or delete the post and realise recurring budget savings of £33,700 from 2007/08.
Reason: To determine the level of resources available to support Scrutiny and, if the lower graded post is approved, to create a more effective and efficient team structure at a net saving of £8,700.
 - 23.4 Subject to decisions at 23.1 – 23.3 above, to decide whether recruitment to any posts should take place before 1 April 2007 and, if so, to approve corresponding release of reserves to fund the part year cost of the posts in 2006/07.
Reason: The Executive needs to agree all requests from Reserves.

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Chief Executive

Report Approved



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Wards Affected: *List wards or tick box to indicate all*

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers:

Report to urgency Committee – 18 August 2006 “City of York Council organisational review – stage two”