

Report of: Planning Services Business Manager

To: Executive Board

Date: 19 June 2006

Item No:

Title of Report : Planning Delivery Grant 2006/07



Summary and Recommendations



Purpose of report: To suggest how the PDG performance award might be spent in Planning this year.



Key decision: No

Portfolio Holder: Councillor John Goddard

Scrutiny Responsibility: Environment



Area(s) affected: All

Report Approved by: Councillor John Goddard
Jeremy Thomas – Legal
Emma Burson - Finance



Policy Framework: Oxford Plan – Ensure more efficient and improved services



Recommendation(s):



That the Executive Board agrees:

1. To **RECOMMENDED** to Council that the Planning Delivery Grant (£402,000) for 2006/07 be accepted as a change to the budget framework approval be given for it to be spent wholly by the Planning Service and broadly in line with the Annex to this report



Background and context

1. On 30th March the Government announced the distribution of the Planning Delivery Grant settlement for 2006/07. It has been announced that the Council will receive £401,765 this financial year (2006/07). This compares to an award of £445,000 in 05/06 (although this was later abated to £395,000), £ 378,000 in 04/05 and the 1st grant (03/04) of £174,000.
2. It is a reward for the Council's continuing improvement in planning performance, the achievement of meeting all the national target for planning applications, having an excellent web site and making good progress with the Local Development Framework in line with its Local Development Scheme.
3. The report includes an Annex that recommends how the money will be spent in broad areas to achieve further improvements to the Planning Service for the people of Oxford.

Spending Proposals

4. **Meeting 06/07 Base Budget.** Earlier decisions to recruit a number of fixed-term budget posts mean that a small part of this year's grant has been pre-spent. In addition in order to balance the Planning Services budget the Council agreed to pre-allocate a more significant series of amounts from the then anticipated 06/07 PDG settlement. These two account for £214,000 of this year's grant. This leaves only £188,000 for consideration now.
5. **Audit Commission Report.** It is proposed that part of the remainder of the grant should be used to respond to this report as initiatives arise out of the suggested Improvement Team approach which may include both Member and officer training and further system improvements in development control.
6. **Corporate Geographic Information System.** There is a stipulation by the Government that 25% of the grant should be spent on capital projects. The proposal is to support the corporate Information Systems project to provide the Council with an authority-wide GIS. At present the Council has a number of limited business unit map-based information systems. However since such a high percentage of Council information is already about properties, land or buildings the opportunity to integrate this will greatly improve services to customers and assist cross-working between business units. Planning already takes a lead in such information and is willing to provide the core finance for this exciting corporate project.
7. **Consultancy Work.** A very effective use of PDG has been to employ consultants to carry out specific tasks. In previous years this has included a number of key supporting studies, such as Balance of Dwellings, Employment Land Review, Strategic Environmental

assessment (SEA) and work for the West End Area Action Plan. There remains a considerable amount of work as the Policy Section continues to prepare the new Local Development Framework. In particular there is extra expenditure flowing from the new approach to community consultation heralded in the Council's Statement of Community Involvement. Other projects include work to assist the review of the public realm strategy (street scene enhancement) and being prepared to defend the Council's affordable housing and Natural Resource Impact Analysis policies and new Supplementary Planning Documents.

8. **Staff.** Consideration has been be given to which of the fixed term contracts of the extra posts should be continued through to the end of the financial year. It is proposed that both the Conservation Appraisal and Urban design posts should continue. It is also considered important to use some of the PDG to maintain an adequate level of staff resource in development control to achieve national performance targets and provide sufficient capacity to further improve dialogue and consultation with members of the public and Members. This is to be achieved by seconding in keen trained support staff into junior planning posts (three) and employing a graduate student (to replace Rachel Stuart when she returns to New Zealand).

Financial implications

9. There is only one more year of PDG and this will have a substantially reduced pot to be distributed. It is not know whether the Government will find a way to maintain its investment in planning services in another way after that.

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Background papers: No unpublished papers relied upon



Planning Delivery Grant 2006/07

Item	Theme	Activity	Cost Guide £	How it will improve performance (Strategic Improvement Plan objective)
1	Staff recruited in 04/05	Fixed term posts in Urban design, Conservation appraisal, complaints, secondments into technician post, Uniform	61,000	Pre-allocation of PDG in the 06/07 budget. To retain and keep paying for these posts on existing 2 yr contracts.
2	Budget pressures	£30,000 added to income, (reduction in estimate) £60,000 re-instated to the Policy LDF budget, £63,000 taken out of budget called unidentified savings (D 3996 HK11)	153,000	Pre-allocation of PDG in the 06/07 budget.
3	Training	Members, Officers and Partners	10,000	Flowing from Audit Commission report. Greater understanding of new issues facing planning. Ability to help constituents through improved knowledge.
4	Members of the Public	GIS capital scheme (£60,000) , online 'do I need planning permission?' data capture and web improvements,	80,000	Major support to provision of corporate GIS system. Greater levels of self-help by the public, fewer calls to staff and officers. Effective time spent in pre-application discussions, Greater public awareness of service can expect
5	Staff recruitment,	Extension of urban designer and conservation appraisal posts to end of Mar 07, Additional dc planner.	30,000	Continuation with internal urban design advice and conservation appraisal programme. Extra capacity to meet member and customer pre-application expectations.
6	Consultancy / Challenge	Development Control Value for Money improvements Public Realm Strategy (Street Scene) Meeting anticipated appeals in Policy, esp. NRIA, affordable housing and consultation (About £20,000 each)	60,000	Flowing from audit commission report. Review of the public realm strategy. Appropriate consultation to accompany LDF documents
7	Staff retention and recruitment	Staff development and support	6,000	Develop and reward for performance and hard work. Improved staff morale. Retention of key staff.
8	Miscellaneous	Improvements to the office environment	2,000	To support the work identified above.
9	TOTAL		402,000	